



Prevention and Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), and Sexual Harassment (SH) Strategy

Updated 2023

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Message from Jorge Moreira da Silva UNOPS Executive Director

Our principles at UNOPS are clear. Sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment by anyone working for and on behalf of UNOPS is unacceptable and inexcusable. It is considered serious misconduct. Even one case is one too many, and of extreme concern.

This updated strategy builds upon our previous PSEA+SH Strategy from 2020, and strengthens our commitment to ensuring personnel and those communities impacted by UNOPS work can live free from harm and abuse. The strategy underscores our policy of zero tolerance of inaction in regards to misconduct, meaning that UNOPS will take all reasonable steps to prevent SEAH and respond appropriately when reports arise.

Rebuilding trust in our systems of responding to misconduct is of crucial importance. We understand that underreporting of allegations is a significant barrier for this organization and others, and the strategy aims to understand and respond to barriers that individuals may face when considering to report allegations. We must continue to foster an inclusive and respectful organizational culture where all personnel are empowered and encouraged to report sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

Vigilance is key. I expect every single one of you to speak out for our shared values and report when you experience or witness any type of misconduct.

We also understand that misconduct of sexual nature is rooted in a culture of discrimination and privilege based on unequal gender relations and other power dynamics. UNOPS continues to promote gender equality and social inclusion to support the creation of conditions for people to live a life they value, where their needs are met, and their human rights are protected. This strategy should therefore be read and implemented in coordination with the [Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Mainstreaming in Projects Strategy 2022-2025](#) and [Gender, diversity and inclusion in our workforce Strategy 2022-2025](#).

1. Introduction

UNOPS is committed to human rights for all. As stated in the UNOPS strategic plan 2022-2025, this commitment includes the prevention and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH). We acknowledge that in order to prevent SEA and SH, we have to ensure full application of our vision, objectives and interventions throughout our implementation activities and operations.

This strategy takes into consideration the international aid community's focus on the matter, as well as public demands for strong actions to prevent and respond to SEA and SH. It also acknowledges the expectations of the Secretary-General and the '*Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach*' (*Report of the Secretary-General A/71/818*)¹ and seeks to be aligned with the most current perspectives of the international community on these important topics, including broadening our scope to include our external stakeholders, such as Implementing Partners and other entities we work with. It seeks to further strengthen a victim centered approach when we respond to allegations and provide protection for those who report.

Over the years, UNOPS has put in motion a number of internal initiatives to prevent and respond to SEA and SH, and effectively manage the associated risks. UNOPS has actively joined a number of United Nations system common efforts in this area. The present Prevention and Protection against SEA and SH Strategy constitutes a renewed commitment to undertake all necessary efforts towards the reduction of SEA and SH in UNOPS.

¹UN Secretariat (2017), 'Report of the Secretary-General: Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: a new approach (A/71/818). To be found at: <https://undocs.org/A/71/818>.

2. Purpose and Scope

This strategy presents UNOPS framework for preventing and responding to all forms of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH). The strategy sets out what interventions we aim to implement in order to prevent misconduct from occurring, and further, how the organization will respond in the event that misconduct does occur.

The strategy applies to all personnel working for UNOPS, independent of contract type or contract duration, including staff, individual contractors, retainers, interns, and volunteers; it also applies to all entities, their respective employees and individuals providing services to UNOPS.

2.1 Definitions

This strategy addresses both SEA and SH. Our approach to preventing and responding to this misconduct will be based on the following UN standard definitions²:

Victim-centered approach places the rights, wishes, needs, safety, dignity and well-being of the victim/survivor at the centre of all prevention and response measures concerning sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH).

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) is defined as a breach of the provisions contained within the Secretary-General's bulletin on *Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse* (ST/SGB/2003/13), 9 October 2003³. Within which, the term **sexual exploitation** is defined as any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Whereas, **sexual abuse** is defined as the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Sexual Harassment (SH) is prohibited conduct in the workplace or in connection with work. UNOPS has incorporated the definition of sexual harassment set out in ST/SGB/2008/5⁴: *Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offense or humiliation to another, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. While typically involving a pattern of behaviour, it can take the form of a single incident. Sexual harassment may occur between persons of the opposite or same sex. Both males and females can be either the aggrieved individuals or the offenders.*

²UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Second Edition – 2017). To be found at: <https://hr.un.org/materials/un-glossary-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-english>

³Secretary General's bulletin (9 October 2003) – Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13). To be found at: <https://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2003/13>

⁴United Nations Secretariat (11 February 2008), Secretary General's bulletin – Prohibition of discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority, ST/SGB/2008/5. The language from this bulletin has been incorporated into UNOPS regulatory framework (see section 8.6.3 of OI.PCG.2017/01)

3. Vision

All people and entities working for and with UNOPS, and the communities impacted by our work are protected from sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment.

3.1 Objectives

UNOPS aims to build an organizational culture of zero tolerance for inaction for all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment. It is committed to do so by undertaking targeted interventions and investments towards three key objectives:

3.1.1 Capacity Building to Strengthen Accountability and Responsibility

Individuals working for and with UNOPS, and communities impacted by our work understand what constitutes sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment; why it is not acceptable; and what the consequences are of committing such misconduct.

3.1.2 Integrated management of risks

The responsibility and capacity to prevent and respond to cases of SEA and SH is continuously reinforced and integrated within all areas of UNOPS operations. This includes targeted efforts to identify and mitigate risks across the organization's activities and projects, including with external entities. It also includes UNOPS' role in inter-agency coordination mechanisms.

3.1.3 Victim-centered response

Every allegation will receive appropriate and timely follow-up that is centered on the victim's rights and dignity. This involves creating reporting systems that are trusted and safe, and encouraging individuals to report misconduct.

3.2 Interventions

3.2.1 Capacity Building to Strengthen Accountability and Responsibility

- **Accountability of Senior Management is strengthened** so they can actively promote and reinforce a culture of speaking out against misconduct and actively engage in understanding and addressing the attitudes, cultures and power dynamics that lay at the root of misconduct.
- **Build the awareness and role-specific capacity of our workforce** to identify and report all forms of SEA and SH. This includes capacitated management, HQ and regional Focal Points/ Coordinators, as well as PSEA+SH Focal Points at the country level that actively support the implementation of PSEA+SH Action Plans.
- **Build awareness and capacity of external stakeholders** including procurement, grant support, project and programme practitioners to identify and mitigate the risks of SEA+SH in our projects, procedures and operations; and awareness of how to proceed when allegations arise.
- **Build awareness of beneficiaries and communities** impacted by our projects that ensures community buy-in, empowerment and awareness of their rights, standards of conduct, how to report, and the availability of victim assistance to them.
- **Engage within Inter-Agency Coordination** with continuous and quality contributions aimed at strengthening system-wide coherence by interacting with UN system partners, donors, and subject matter experts.

3.2.2. Integrated Management of Risks

- **Ensure that SEA and SH risks** are integrated into existing risk mitigation and management frameworks with a particular focus on risks presented by implementing partners, contractors, vendors and suppliers. This includes the implementation of the UN Protocol on Allegations of SEA Involving Implementing Partners.
- **Include appropriate language on PSEA and SH accountability in all our contracts and agreements** to ensure effective integration and clarity on roles and responsibility of SEA and SH risk management in UNOPS engagements.
- **Develop safe, confidential, accessible and transparent reporting mechanisms** that are known, trusted and accessible to beneficiaries, communities, and UNOPS personnel.
- **Use enhanced reference checks** for all successful applicants, including the use of Clear Check for all UN candidates.

3.2.3 Victim-centered response

- **Victim-centered support** in the immediate and long-term as required by those that need it. UNOPS will ensure that victim assistance referral pathways are mapped at the country level and that medical care, psychosocial support, protection, legal assistance, dignity kits, basic material assistance and support for children born of SEA or SH is provided.
- **Strengthened investigations and subsequent disciplinary and administrative procedures** that are victim-centered and procedurally fair, with the learnings from such processes being used to strengthen our SEA and SH risk management framework.
- **Align Whistleblowing and Reporting Procedures** with the wider United Nations frameworks to ensure these are increasingly victim-centered.

4. Implementation

This strategy will be implemented over three years. For this purpose, UNOPS will develop:

- Action plans at [corporate](#), regional and country levels
- A results monitoring framework
- [Guidance](#) document to support implementation of this strategy

It is envisioned that the action plans will be adjusted as required, informed by management conversations and progress against indicators.

The implementation of this strategy is led by the PSEAH Corporate Coordinator and the PSEAH Task Force. The Task Force is composed of representatives of IAIG, Legal, IPMG, PCG, Regional PSEAH Focal Points; and other relevant Business Units.

The PSEAH Corporate Coordinator, with inputs from Task Force Members, will provide regular updates to the Executive Board.

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FOR ALL**



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OR OTHER BENEFITS**