

Prevention of Sexual Harassment (SH) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) Strategy

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Table of Contents

Message from Grete Faremo, UNOPS Executive Director	2
Message from Marianne de la Touche, Chief Financial Officer and Director of Administration	2
Message from Tina Friis Hansen, Director, People and Change Group	2
The strategy at a glance	2
Background	3
2.1 Definitions	3
Strategy	4
3.1 Vision	4
3.2 Objectives	4
3.3 Guiding principles	4
3.4 Areas of intervention	5
Delivery	6

Message from Grete Faremo, UNOPS Executive Director

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

We have a zero-tolerance policy. This means that every possible report or allegation of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment by UNOPS personnel is thoroughly assessed and if substantiated leads to disciplinary action, including the option of dismissal.

Vigilance is key. I expect a speak-up culture at UNOPS, and encourage personnel to report any exploitation or abuse that comes to their attention or any harassment they experience. I encourage all colleagues to intervene to stop such behaviour and make managers accountable to promote a safe environment which upholds values of mutual respect. This strategy outlines the required actions to address these critically important areas, and eradicate any instances of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment at UNOPS.

Message from Marianne de la Touche, Chief Financial Officer and Director of Administration

As a member of the Senior Leadership Team, I advise on decisions across the organization. My role ensures that the way we allocate resources across the organization reflect our priorities, and we take effective actions to deliver on the commitment to eradicate sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. I pledge to act as a role model for colleagues and leaders across the organization, to ensure we foster a safe working environment for everyone who works at UNOPS.

Message from Tina Friis Hansen, Director, People and Change Group

Under my leadership, the People and Change Group has established UNOPS competency framework where ethical behaviour and values are central. Integrity and inclusion are at the heart of our competency framework, defined as “treating all individuals with respect, responding sensitively to differences, upholding ethical norms and maintaining high standards of trustworthiness, acting as a role model for diversity and inclusion”.

At UNOPS we understand that these competencies play an important role in ensuring that UNOPS continues to be an attractive place to work, with a safe and harmonious work environment. This, in turn, allows the organization to deliver excellent results for our partners and the beneficiaries of the projects that we implement. The framework is based on UN values, such as zero-tolerance for SH and SEA and allows us to create a safe work environment for both UNOPS personnel and the beneficiaries of UNOPS project activities. The framework drives how we recruit and select new talent, manage performance, and design leadership development and learning programmes, and select UNOPS personnel for taking leadership positions.

1. The strategy at a glance

To eradicate Sexual Harassment (SH) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), we will create and maintain safe environments and take appropriate action when concerns arise. We will coordinate, engage, prevent, and respond effectively to achieve these objectives. We have six guiding principles: Zero-Tolerance, Dignity and Respect, Leadership, Manager’s conversations, Manager as a role model, and Keeping abreast of changes. The key areas of intervention are Awareness-raising, Evidence-based interventions, Review and data analysis, and Building capabilities. The delivery of the strategy is overseen by an internal Task Force team.

2. Background

UNOPS is determined to be the employer-of-choice for its personnel, and offer all personnel an enabling work environment to reach their full potential. An engaged and empowered workforce is critical for the organization to deliver on its mission to help people build better lives and countries achieve peace and sustainable development.

Sexual harassment (SH) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are practices that bring negative consequences for the organization, its personnel, and the beneficiaries. These types of conduct violate human rights, go against the United Nations' values, and conflict with the UNOPS competency framework. They constitute misconduct and UNOPS is determined to ensure that appropriate action is taken to prevent them, and, if they occur, to vigorously address them.

Over the years, UNOPS has put in motion different internal initiatives to prevent and address SH and SEA. UNOPS has also actively joined a number of United Nations system common efforts in this area. The present SH and SEA Prevention Strategy constitutes a new step towards the eradication of SH and SEA in UNOPS. This strategy takes into consideration the international community's focus on the matter as well as the public opinion's demands for strong actions to prevent and fight SH and SEA. It also acknowledges that the expectations of all relevant stakeholders are not static, and reflects the commitment of the organization to be aligned with the most up-to-date perspectives of the international community on these important topics.

2.1 Definitions

Both SH and SEA constitute misconduct. However, the victims in each case are different. In the case of SEA, beneficiaries or vulnerable members of the community are the victims. In the case of SH, the victims are other UNOPS personnel, UN personnel, or a third party contributing or participating in a UNOPS project or corporate activity in a form other than being the beneficiary of such activity.

Sexual exploitation is defined by the UN 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. As such, sexual exploitation is a broad term, which includes a number of acts described below, including transactional sex, solicitation of transactional sex and exploitative relationships.

Sexual abuse is defined as the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. All sexual activity with a child is sexual abuse. Physical intrusion is understood to mean sexual activity. Sexual abuse is a broad term, which includes a number of acts described below, including rape, sexual assault, sex with a minor, and sexual activity with a minor under the age of 18.

Sexual Harassment (SH) is defined as 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 offence 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 subjects of complaints.

3. Strategy

We are committed to the eradication of SH and SEA in UNOPS. UNOPS mandate and business model makes us a key partner to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Our workforce is composed of agile, results-oriented, engaged, honest, and trustworthy personnel. They are instrumental in UNOPS ability to deliver projects that help millions of beneficiaries build better lives and countries achieve peace and sustainable development.

3.1 Vision

UNOPS personnel are equipped with effective tools to create and maintain safe environments and address any concerns related to SH and SEA, including any third parties, especially beneficiaries.

3.2 Objectives

The impact of SH in the work environment is minimized; and if it occurs, it is mitigated by swift victim-centered corrective action ensuring appropriate accountability of the perpetrator. Consequently, personnel enjoy the safest possible work environment.

The incidence of SEA actions by UNOPS personnel is minimised, and if it occurs it is mitigated by swift victim-centered corrective action, normally followed by disciplinary action ensuring appropriate accountability of the perpetrator. Consequently, beneficiaries and vulnerable members of the community in contact with UNOPS personnel feel safe, valued, and respected.

Preventive actions are regularly put in practice, monitored for efficacy, and improved in order to remain relevant.

Corrective actions in the case of SH would focus on management interventions.

The organization monitors its performance on preventing and providing adequate and timely responses to SH and SEA occurrences.

3.3 Guiding principles

This strategy is supported by six guiding principles:

3.3.1 Zero-tolerance: UNOPS does not tolerate sexual exploitation and abuse or sexual harassment. Sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment by anyone working for UNOPS is unacceptable and inexcusable. Sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse are all considered serious misconduct. Even one case is one too many, and of extreme concern.

3.3.2 All individuals are treated with dignity and respect. This requires a victim-centric approach focusing on providing victims support in an expeditious and appropriate manner while respecting the alleged perpetrator's due process rights. When allegations are corroborated, the organization will take robust and prompt corrective action.

3.3.3 The organization relies on its leadership approach, its competency framework, and the integrity of its personnel to prevent and combat SH and SEA.

3.3.4 Managers and personnel have authentic conversations about SH and SEA.

3.3.5 Senior-most managers act as role models, discussing the topic often, and taking recurrent preventive actions as well as, when required, timely corrective victim-centered actions.

3.3.6 The organization keeps abreast of the changes on expectations by the world community.

3.4 Areas of intervention

3.4.1 Awareness-raising

This area of intervention includes actions to raise awareness, motivate action, and provide practical support to UNOPS personnel (including managers), as well as third parties (including beneficiaries) facing questions or issues related to SH or SEA. The activities to be implemented would cover the following:

- Website information
- Intranet information
- Mandatory training
- Workplace communications campaigns
- Project communications campaigns
- Centralized reporting channel

3.4.2 Evidence-backed interventions

This area of intervention covers actions to address specific needs. The activities to be implemented would cover the following:

- Focused training
- Peer support
- Victim support
- Management interventions
- Investigations and disciplinary process

3.4.3 Review and data analytics

This area of intervention covers actions allowing the organization to determine its readiness to address SH and SEA risks. The activities to be implemented will cover the following:

- Action plans
- People survey
- Ad-hoc surveys (corporate or targeted)
- Data analytics
- Reporting

3.4.4 Building the organization's capability

This area of intervention will focus on building UNOPS capability by interacting with UN system partners, donors, and subject matter experts. The activities will include:

- Actively joining UN System initiatives
- Exchanging knowledge and information (as appropriate) with UN Partners, donor governments, and partners
- Exchanging information with subject-matter experts, including on self-assessment or training

4. Delivery

The Task Force (comprising the Directors of Internal Audit and Investigations Group, Legal Group, People and Change Group, and the Ethics Office) will meet regularly to oversee the implementation of the strategy and agree on key implementation milestones.

A distribution of work for subject matter experts in from groups in the Task Force will be established, with areas of work assigned to other units when required (Health, Safety, Security & Environment or Communications, for example).

The General Counsel will provide regular updates on the implementation of this strategy to the Senior Leadership Team. The other Task Force members will provide updates on their respective areas of work as required.