

# UNHCR Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment

Strategy, Structure  
and Key Actions

May 2018

## CONTEXT

UNHCR has been at the forefront of the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse against the people served by the organization and its partners, together with sexual harassment in the workplace, for many years. This commitment has been reflected in a series of measures to address these two forms of serious misconduct, including prevention, awareness-raising, effective investigation, survivor and whistle blower protection, and robust action against those found to have engaged in them.

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are a grave breach of trust, and a betrayal of UNHCR's mandate for protecting displaced and stateless people. Sexual Harassment (SH) is a manifestation of a culture of discrimination and privilege based on unequal gender relations. Both undermine the fundamental rights of all those whom the Office serves and everyone who works for UNHCR to be treated with dignity and respect.

Our position is clear, and has been reiterated on a number of occasions by the High Commissioner and by UNHCR's senior leadership: sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment are unjustifiable and must be eradicated from UNHCR operations. There is no place in UNHCR for anyone who does not share and respect our core values. We are committed to ensuring a safe, supportive working environment for women and men alike, and do not tolerate behaviour that undermines this aim, or runs counter to fundamental principles of equality.

We are also conscious that translating this into practice requires strong leadership and continuous investments. With some 15,000 staff and affiliated workforce working primarily in the field, in permanent and direct contact with vulnerable people, UNHCR is one of the biggest and most operational UN agencies. Our programmes last year aimed to benefit more than 67 million people, implemented together with more than 1,000 partners. We work in an environment shaped by significant power differentials and deep-rooted inequality, in which the conditions that can give rise to sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment, are pervasive.

The overwhelming majority of our colleagues are deeply committed professionals, many of whom are working in difficult environments, sometimes risking their own safety and well-being. But our organization is not immune, and - like others - we have seen instances in which our own colleagues or partner staff have used their positions of power to exploit others. These actions inflict intolerable harm on the victims and their families, run counter to the values for which UNHCR stands, and undermine the work and credibility of our organization.

Sexual harassment in the workplace has rightfully received a great deal of attention, and a strong call for change is resonating across the globe, including through the #metoo campaign. UNHCR's leadership is committed to do what it can to find safe spaces to discuss the challenges and find ways to address them through the behavioural changes needed to embrace an inclusive workforce. This strategy sets out concrete and specific measures which UNHCR will take. We are already working intensively on the key actions set out in this strategy, and we recognise that many of these outcomes will require sustained commitment and ongoing action. Our vision and goals are rightly ambitious, and this strategy sets out the steps we intend to take collectively to drive real change.

## VISION

UNHCR provides a trusted, respectful and inclusive environment where the people we serve and those who work for the organization feel safe, heard, equipped and empowered to speak up for themselves and others and to take robust and visible action, as appropriate, to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and sexual harassment (SH).

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

In order to lead and coordinate UNHCR's work on SEA and SH, the High Commissioner has appointed in March 2018 a Senior Coordinator. The Senior Coordinator is reporting to the Deputy High Commissioner who is chairing an Emergency Task Force on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment with Director-level membership across the Organization, and receives support from a working group (hereafter the Working Group on SEA and SH). The membership of the Working Group is without prejudice to the independence of offices to which some members belong.

Key entities across the organization are involved, as indicated in the graph hereafter.

This strategy is not exhaustive on all measures being undertaken to prevent and respond to SEA and SH, but highlights targeted action to be taken from 1 May 2018 onwards.

Graph 1: Organizational structure



## STRATEGIC GOALS

- Strengthening **prevention** of SEA and SH by nurturing an organizational culture, leadership and workplace practices that uphold UNHCR's values and ensure that each colleague understands his or her roles and responsibilities to prevent and respond to SEA and SH.
- Providing, through robust internal systems, a diligent, appropriate and sensitive **response** to all incidents of SEA and SH that places the **rights and protection** of victims, survivors and persons directly affected at the centre of our actions.

These are translated into the following organizational objectives:

### 1. ENSURING REPORTING MECHANISMS ARE KNOWN ACCESSIBLE AND TRUSTED

- Simplify the reporting process for SH and ensure that affected staff can make an informed decision as to how to proceed, with a clear ladder of steps to be taken to seek redress and escalate where needed.
- Strengthen and systematize mechanisms to ensure that all cases of SEA are reported, including complaints mechanisms and community based feedback tools using a wide range of channels including face to face engagement, mobile phone technology and call centres.

### 2. ENSURING PEOPLE WHO REPORT SEA AND SH WILL BE SAFE AND PROTECTED

- Bearing in mind the difficulties and challenges – personal and professional – which people face in reporting, improve the experience of recourse, strengthen our policy framework, build confidence in our practices, and develop additional protective measures for those who have experienced or witnessed SEA or SH.

### 3. CONTINUED STRENGTHENING OF OUR INVESTIGATION CAPACITY AND DISCIPLINARY PROCESSES

► Strengthen the capacity and expertise of relevant entities to ensure timely, sensitive and effective handling of SEA and SH investigations and related disciplinary processes.

### 4. ENSURING EMPOWERMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE WORKFORCE, AND MANAGERS IN PARTICULAR

► Reinforce targeted awareness raising and training, as (i) playing a critical role in ensuring that all the workforce, including managers, understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to SEA and SH prevention and response and (ii) building confidence to come forward and report or provide immediate responses at field level.

### 5. ENSURING ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

► Strengthen the overall organizational capacity to assess SEA and SH-related risks; deliver quickly on priority actions to address these, including through an evaluative review of SEA policies and procedures; and increase communications, transparency and accountability towards internal and external stakeholders.

Graph 2: Key actions

