

UNHCR Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment

2024 Year in Review

Since 2018, UNHCR has had a dedicated team to coordinate and guide the Agency's approach to tackling sexual misconduct, bringing together both Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH) under a single coordinated effort. This is in recognition of the similarities between the root causes of both forms of sexual misconduct and the need for a strong and unified victim-centred framework to guide the nuanced response to each. Under the direction of this dedicated PSEA/SH team, UNHCR has continued to provide support and expertise in coordination, policy development and implementation, field support, training and learning development and delivery, victim support, and external and interagency engagement.

In the second year of implementation of the [2023-2025 Strategy and Action Plan](#), progress has been made in key areas, particularly in strengthening the Agency's policy framework on accountability and ensuring a Victim-Centred Approach, building capacity across the organization, strengthening operational efforts, and maintaining a strong and leading role in interagency efforts on addressing sexual misconduct.

ADOPTION OF UNHCR'S POLICY ON ADDRESSING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

A significant milestone in UNHCR's progress towards tackling SEA and SH, has been in strengthening the Organization's policy and accountability framework. In May 2024, UNHCR's [Policy on Addressing Sexual Misconduct](#) was adopted, codifying a common standard of conduct for all Agency personnel and outlining the available and appropriate measures in place for addressing sexual misconduct. Building on the achievements made since the adoption of the [2020 Policy on a Victim-Centred Approach in Response to Sexual Misconduct](#), the Policy was a result of a coordinated and consultative effort led by

the Office of the Principal Adviser on PSEA/SH, in close collaboration with the Office of the Inspector General, and the Legal Affairs Service, and other stakeholders.

The Policy outlines individual roles and responsibilities for all personnel, including for managers, Representatives, Regional Bureau Directors, and the over 400 PSEA focal points in UNHCR operations across the world. The Policy also defines the differences in response as it concerns sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, highlighting the obligation to report instances of SEA committed against forcibly displaced and stateless persons and members of the host communities and clarifying the different resolution processes available to personnel who are victims of sexual harassment, including by highlighting the victim's choice of resolution pathway and in elucidating the function of UNHCR's Victim Care Officer.

ENHANCING VICTIM SUPPORT

UNHCR's effort to tackle sexual misconduct rests on the principle of a victim-centred approach, where the needs, wellbeing, and expressed wishes of victims is central to all prevention and response efforts. In 2024, UNHCR's Victim Care Team, a team of two clinical psychologists who provide psychosocial support, guidance and accompaniment to victims of sexual harassment, as well as advice and guidance to managers on situations of sexual misconduct, provided support in over 70 situations of sexual harassment.

UNHCR's [NotOnlyMe](#) platform is a confidential mechanism for victims to record their experience of sexual harassment and allows them to submit the incident into a secure and encrypted online matching escrow system to anonymously be alerted if someone else has recorded their harasser. The tool also allows the user to anonymously chat with a UNHCR Victim

Care Officer for support and guidance. Since the establishment of the tool in 2023, UNHCR has seen promising use among its personnel, with 173 accounts created and over 50 incident forms submitted for matching, 21 of which were in 2024. With more than 10 matches involving 6 unique perpetrators of sexual harassment, the tool continues to provide an additional space for victims to come forward for support and information. Users engage with UNHCR's victim care team through the platform to explore the options and resources in place to support them through the resolution process of their choice.

Since 2020, UNHCR has had a victim reference group for personnel who have experienced sexual harassment. Through the reference group, victims are consulted on key internal initiatives, tools and products. This is an important component of implementing a victim-centred approach and an effective way of partnering with victims in addressing sexual misconduct. UNHCR will use this experience to inform the development of an inter-agency victim reference group under the UN Executive Group Area of Work on Victim Support, which is led by ICT and UNHCR.

REDOUBLING EFFORTS AROUND CAPACITY BUILDING AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

Based on identified risk areas and in response to requests for operational support, UNHCR intensified efforts to deliver impactful capacity building opportunities. As of June 2024, UNHCR transitioned from a once in a lifetime requirement to complete the online UN mandatory learning on PSEA to a requirement for all personnel to complete the training every three years. In addition to the mandatory online learning, the Office of the Principal Advisor on PSEA/SH delivered training and learning activities to over 2,000 UNHCR personnel across all seven regions in the last year.

The Office continued to support the global roll out of the 1.5 day in-person UNHCR internal Learning Package on PSEA/SH, which has now reached over 24% of all UNHCR personnel in over 50 operations. This package provides standardized and professional materials in 5 languages for interactive and engaging training, containing a full day in-person course on PSEA and a half-day course on addressing SH. UNHCR has also worked to develop the skills and competencies of over 120 in-country facilitators through in-person Training of Trainers (TOT) workshops and ongoing coaching

in the Middle East and North Africa and Western and Central Africa regions (covering 13 operations), and national level TOTs in Poland, Chad, and the Central African Republic. To strengthen capacity at management level, the package was also delivered to more than 60 personnel at the P4-D1 level.

Efforts to integrate PSEA/SH learning into other organizational learning programmes have continued to expand, reaching around 1,000 personnel through seven different thematic programmes in 2024, including 165 emergency deployees through four rounds of the Workshop on Emergency Management, 234 Peer Advisors who were trained on sexual harassment and safe referral, and 78 field security personnel trained on a victim-centered approach.

In 2024, UNHCR developed a PSEA Focal Points online learning programme to strengthen PSEA focal point capacity in field operations. The programme consists of seven, self-paced modules focusing on key areas of internal and interagency responsibilities for PSEA focal points. The programme, which features content from field-based scenarios and best practices, along with useful resources from beyond UNHCR, is set to be launched in early 2025. This learning programme is intended to complement the direct support and existing resources made available through UNHCR's PSEA Community of Practice, an online space for focal points to exchange resources and good practices across all regions.

5th ROUND OF THE ICVA/UNHCR COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS FUND

In 2024, the [Joint ICVA/UNHCR PSEA Community Outreach and Communications Fund](#), an initiative established under the [High Commissioner's 2020 IASC Championship on PSEA and SH](#), entered its fifth year of implementation with grants awarded to nine project across all regions. With financial support from the Office of the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse (OSCSEA) and managed by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the Fund invests in community-led efforts to ensure that communities and SEA survivors know how and where to safely report allegations of SEA, in line with established IASC priorities.

Projects funded under this initiative specifically address SEA risks and challenges exacerbated by conflict, health crises, climate change, and forced displacement, whilst also targeting groups at heightened risk of SEA such as women and girls with disabilities, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) diverse individuals, and geographically isolated communities. The Fund has become a key inter-agency project supporting the localization agenda and has so far supported [65 projects](#) in 39 countries, reaching over 2 million people with awareness raising activities.

The Fund has also established a [Resource Database](#) of over 60 types of outreach and communication products in over 60 languages, tailored to reach over 20 different Age, Gender, Diversity (AGD) profiles for access and adaptation by PSEA actors in other contexts.

An external review of the Fund's work conducted in 2023 found that 87% of the projects resulted in a significant increase in awareness of SEA and 85% reported an increase in reporting following the awareness campaigns. As a positive effect, 86% of organizations that received support reported that their PSEA capacity was strengthened.

PARTICIPATION IN THE MISCONDUCT DISCLOSURE SCHEME

In addition to being an active member of the UN system's ClearCheck, which prevents the re-hire of perpetrators within the UN system through vetting and reference checking, UNHCR has expanded its implementation of the [Misconduct Disclosure Scheme](#), a similar tool used among NGO partners for vetting and reference checking to prevent the rehire of perpetrators of sexual misconduct.

In 2024, UNHCR expanded the number of participating operations who carry out screenings of selected national recruitments and affiliate work force to 16. The Scheme also ensures the screening of all UNHCR international recruitments (staff and affiliate) in participating countries. In parallel, UNHCR continues to advocate for greater engagement and participation in the Scheme by partners and other UN Agencies.

INTERAGENCY ENGAGEMENT

UNHCR continued to actively engage in relevant inter-agency fora on sexual misconduct, in particular the IASC, the Office of the Special Coordinator on improving the UN response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSCSEA), the Office of the Victim's Rights Advocate, and the UN Executive Group to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment, contributing to the development of various inter-agency policies, guidance and tools and supporting interagency missions.

Since January 2024, UNHCR has been co-leading the IASC's workstream on interagency SEA referral procedures together with IOM, namely the development and finalization of related tools, organizing online consultations with PSEA, accountability to affected populations (AAP), gender based violence (GBV) and other practitioners in some 25 countries to gather feedback on challenges and good practices, and supporting revision of country-level [inter-agency SOPs on SEA referrals](#) in line with global guidance.

Since handing over the chair of the [UN System Chief Executive Board for Coordination \(CEB\) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment](#) to the newly established [UN Executive Group to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment](#), UNHCR's Deputy High Commissioner (DHC) has maintained strong engagement with the Executive Group, leading the work on Area of Work 3 focusing on Victim/Survivor Support and supporting three other Areas of Work led by other UN agencies.

UNHCR has also contributed to interagency efforts around learning and capacity development, particularly in the joint UNHCR/IOM/Interpol 'Partnership for Protection' project, resulting in the delivery of a 1-day PSEA training to national law enforcement and border officials in Uganda and Kenya; the OSCSEA PSEA(H) Learning workstream; and the Executives Board Areas of Work on SH Learning. The Office worked to adapt the UNHCR SH half-day learning programme to offer an external version for other UN organisations to use.

