

Joint statement on prevention of SEA and SH

First regular session 2022 - UNICEF
To be presented after the EB in writing

We are submitting this statement on behalf of the following cross-regional group of Member States: Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, the EU as a donor, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, the Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay.

We extend our gratitude and appreciation to UNICEF for its leadership and strong commitment on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as preventing and tackling workplace gender-discrimination, sexual harassment, and harassment and abuse of authority. We commend the efforts of UNICEF and welcome the updates provided. We recognise the progress made – locally, nationally, regionally and globally – but acknowledge that there is still more to be done: there are collective challenges we need to address, risks we must manage and lessons we must all learn. This ongoing constructive dialogue on our joint ambition to create adequate prevention and response systems and procedures, in the spirit of zero tolerance for inaction, is much appreciated.

Strong leadership; effective inter-agency collaboration and building on lessons learned across the UN; responsibility for implementing partners; transparent, safe and accountable reporting; and support to victims and survivors are critical elements we deem at the core of each agency's efforts in preventing SEAH.

First, leadership. We recognise the importance of continued proactive and visible UN leadership. We welcome UNICEF's implementation of the recommendations from the independent review of UNICEF's response to PSEA and encourage the completion of any outstanding recommendations. We also welcome the commitments made by senior leadership on organisational culture. We are encouraged to hear PSEA and organizational culture indicators have been included in the 2022 – 2025 Strategic Plan and we applaud UNICEF for the Pulse Check initiative.

We welcome UNICEF's commitment to ensure that SEA action plans are prepared at all levels, at headquarter, regional *and* country levels, and ask that headquarter action plans are shared with the Board. There is a significant gap between the overall strategies and policies on PSEA and the impact at the local level which must be addressed. We look forward to receiving more information from the collation of country level data on progress made. We would also like to hear how UNICEF ensures that *all* Country Offices give sufficient attention to PSEA and that there are no significant differences between offices. How does UNICEF ensure that PSEA is not deprioritized in emergency contexts?

We stress the importance of ensuring sufficient resources are allocated for implementation. This is for example needed to fill the capacity gaps identified at country level and with implementing partners, as identified by the 2020 MOPAN assessment.

We note that the UNDP ASG/Directors report on specific SEA indicators as part of their annual performance compact. How does UNICEF measure leadership performance on protection from SEAH in terms of indicators? We encourage continued efforts to ensure all staff and leadership understand their PSEAH responsibilities, and that UNICEF embeds measures across all its systems to hold staff and leadership accountable to these responsibilities. Staff need to be provided with appropriate role specific training as well as regular mandatory training to support culture change.

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We also welcome UNICEF's commitment to further improve the organizational culture and diversity and to strengthen internal communications. We encourage UNICEF to implement the recommendations from the Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination.

The second area regards inter-agency collaboration, including sharing and building on lessons learned. We note with appreciation UNICEF's commitment to inter-agency cooperation in this matter. We raise this point in the spirit of United Nations Development System Reform, and also because we firmly believe UN organisations benefit from continued strengthening of inter-agency collaboration, particularly at the country level. Implementing and operationalising inter-agency guidance and products is key, including those that address collective challenges such as the sharing of information at the country level. We also recommend close collaboration with the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (OVRA) and the Office of the Special Coordinator on improving the UN response to sexual exploitation and abuse (OSCSEA) in these efforts.

We recognise the important role of PSEA Networks, Coordinators and Focal Points. We welcome UNICEF's support to over 50 PSEA Coordinators. How do these coordinators engage across the UN system at country level? We note the importance of ensuring sufficient and sustainable resources are available to ensure all Country Offices will have PSEA Focal Points who participate in inter-agency coordination mechanisms.

Third, we would like to touch upon implementing partners. We recognise the steps taken by UNICEF to operationalise the UN Protocol on Allegations of SEA Involving Implementing Partners. Has UNICEF now fully operationalised the protocol?

The UN Implementing Partner PSEA Capacity Assessment is an important tool and provides the necessary assurance of partners' organisational capacities on PSEA. We are pleased to note almost all of UNICEF's civil society partners have been assessed. Are there any obstacles experienced by UNICEF in doing these assessments? To what extent do the agencies pool their knowledge and experiences to aid one another in this process? Analysis shows a lack of organizational capacity of a majority of implementing partners to respond to potential incidents, including gaps in reporting systems, ensuring assistance to and referrals for victims, as well as investigations. We appreciate UNICEF's efforts on improving the capacities of partners, including carrying out pilot initiatives, and we encourage UNICEF to further strengthen these efforts.

Furthermore, we would welcome an update on how agencies deal with implementing partners and organisations who have repeatedly seen substantiated cases of SEA and SH.

Fourth and finally, a few remarks on reporting and support to survivors and victims. We welcome UNICEF's commitment to transparency and ensuring that support to survivors and victims remains a priority. We reiterate the importance of prompt and detailed reporting of all allegations of SEA through the UNSG's reporting mechanism and to Member States, and annual SH reporting through existing mechanisms, as information that would allow to assess trends and evolutions remains scarce. We further highlight the need for timely and thorough survivor and victim-centered investigations, with updates provided to Member States on the outcomes. We are pleased to see that UNICEF is taking forward work to support the roll out of the Victims Assistance Protocol, including the development of a technical guidance note. This is an important step in the protection of victims and survivors and we encourage UNICEF to continue the operationalisation of this Protocol internally. We encourage UNICEF and other UN agencies to focus

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on a system-wide coordinated approach. A joint report or common template for use by UN agencies would be welcome to improve analysis and comparability.

We note UNICEF data from 2020 which estimated 44 million children and adults had access to safe channels to report SEA systems. We would welcome further information on the data collected, including gaps in access to safe channels for reporting, as part of the 2021 exercise, including how this information will be used and if this will be undertaken annually. In previous surveys across the UN system, SEA risk analysis and mitigation approaches, and community-based complaints mechanisms were identified as areas requiring improvement. The 2020 MOPAN assessment also highlighted the need to ensure all UNICEF country offices have robust reporting mechanisms. We would welcome an update on how this work has been prioritised, including planned next steps.

Overall, let us reiterate our shared commitment to tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. We look forward to updates from UNICEF and to our continuing cooperation on this important topic.

Thank you.