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Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations

Sexual exploitation and abuse: implementing a zero-tolerance policy

Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the advance version of the report of the Secretary-General on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse ([A/76/702](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Committee received additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 3 March 2022.

2. The report of the Secretary-General is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions [71/278](#), [71/297](#), [72/312](#), [73/302](#) and [75/321](#) and contains updated information on measures to strengthen the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, since the issuance of his previous report ([A/75/754](#)).

II. Status of implementation of the strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel

3. In his report, the Secretary-General provides an update on efforts to implement the strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel ([A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)) in the following areas: progress in the implementation of the strategy over the past five years ([A/76/702](#), sect. II); leadership aspects of accountability (ibid., sect. III); risk management (ibid., sect. IV); prioritizing the rights and dignity of victims (ibid., sect. V); progress in complaint mechanisms and investigations (ibid., sect. VI); facilitating accountability at the national level (ibid., sect. VII); engaging with Member States and civil society (ibid., sect. VIII); and improving transparency through strengthened communications



(ibid., sect. IX). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the report presented ideas for further progress and contained no recommendations or decisions that would have financial implications for the programme budget for 2022. **The Advisory Committee notes that the report of the Secretary-General entails no additional budgetary implications.**

Senior leadership and system-wide approach

4. In his report, as in previous progress reports on the implementation of his strategy, the Secretary-General emphasizes that the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse requires system-wide action (ibid., para. 24), to bolster which the Secretary-General intends, inter alia, to appoint a full-time Special Coordinator at the Under-Secretary-General level. The Secretary-General indicates that the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse would provide a dedicated support capacity for high-level vigilance and would initiate timely action in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (ibid., para. 73). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the Special Coordinator is currently employed under a “when-actually-employed” contract modality and that, owing to the increased number of allegations, a more aggressive approach would be required to align policies and actions throughout the system by providing for a full-time post, with funding to be provided from extrabudgetary resources and reviewed as appropriate in future periods.

5. The Secretary-General further indicates that the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security will be entrusted, alongside the Special Coordinator, to work with appropriate entities to address the security dimension of the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in environments in which the United Nations operates (ibid., para. 75). The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the engagement of the Department of Safety and Security constitutes a new initiative of the Secretary-General, whereby it is envisaged that through close coordination with the Office of the Special Coordinator and other entities and departments, security analyses of countries in which the United Nations operates would include risks associated with sexual exploitation and abuse. **The Advisory Committee takes note of the intention of the Secretary-General to appoint a full-time Special Coordinator on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, the role of the Special Coordinator in initiating timely action (see para. 4 above) and the planned collaboration between the Special Coordinator and the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security. Noting, however, that coordination functions typically do not involve elements of operational responsibility, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to further clarify and provide expanded information on the role and responsibilities of the post of Special Coordinator in his next progress report.**

6. The Advisory Committee was also informed, upon enquiry, that it is envisaged that, in future, the Special Coordinator would introduce, for consideration by the General Assembly, the report of the Secretary-General on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, as compared with the present approach whereby the report is introduced by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources. The Committee recalls that the current approach stems from the fact that the report of the Secretary-General on special measures had historically been linked to the agenda item entitled “Human resources management”, either singularly or with other agenda items, from the fifty-eighth to the seventy-first sessions of the General Assembly. The Committee notes that the scope of the report has widened significantly over time, and recalls that it has also been assigned under the agenda item entitled “Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations

peacekeeping operations”, to be taken up during the first part of the resumed session of the General Assembly (see [A/75/847](#), para. 4). **The Advisory Committee reiterates its recommendations in previous reports (see [A/75/847](#), para. 4, and [A/74/788](#), para. 5) that the cross-cutting and system-wide nature of the subject matter would merit the introduction of the report of the Secretary-General on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse during the main part of the session of the General Assembly. The Committee is of the view that this could further underscore the holistic efforts required to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and would contribute to the acceleration of efforts to promote more robust systemic coordination and response regarding the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse across the full spectrum of the Organization’s activities.**

Measuring and assessing progress

7. In his report, the Secretary-General provides an overview of progress made, lessons learned and challenges encountered in the implementation of the system-wide strategy on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse ([A/76/702](#), paras. 5–9). It is indicated that, in 2021, performance indicators on sexual exploitation and abuse were aligned across the humanitarian, development and peace and security pillars, and that a review of United Nations system entities’ strategic plans revealed that all entities had developed standards and policies on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. Examples of agency action and inter-agency coordination are also provided, such as the following: the external review of Inter-Agency Standing Committee progress in the humanitarian arena over the past decade, commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the continued use of the Clear Check database for the screening of potential candidates by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); and UNHCR piloting its participation in the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that of the 32 United Nations system entities currently committed to participation in the Clear Check database, 24 have been active users; of 31 organizations that are members of the United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB), 28 have accepted and 22 are active users of the database; 4 entities that are not CEB members (International Trade Centre, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and United Nations University) have also agreed to use the database, with 2 of them currently being active users; 3 CEB member organizations (International Civil Aviation Organization, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) have not yet committed to participating in Clear Check; and the World Bank is considering starting to use the database at some point in 2022. The Advisory Committee was also informed, upon enquiry, that, whereas the Clear Check database is limited to United Nations personnel, the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response was launched in 2019 to address the specific problem of sexual abusers moving within and between different non-governmental humanitarian and development organizations. In an effort to bridge this gap, and subject to an applicant’s written consent, UNHCR would provide sexual misconduct disclosure information on applicants listing it as a former employer to any potential employer participating in the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response. The Advisory Committee was further informed, upon enquiry, that there were no system-wide plans for the United Nations to integrate the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme as part of the Organization’s vetting process.

8. **While acknowledging the examples of inter-agency coordination, the Advisory Committee considers that a more comprehensive overview could be**

provided of all policy instruments and tools related to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse among United Nations system entities, and looks forward to further information on the application of these tools and efforts in future reports of the Secretary-General. The Committee also considers that, in order to avoid duplication of efforts and strengthen a coordinated approach to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, United Nations system entities should endeavour to work within one background verification system, in which information is connected, integrated and collectively shared among users to the fullest extent possible. The Advisory Committee therefore recommends that the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, ensure the universal adoption of the Clear Check database and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response Misconduct Disclosure Scheme by United Nations system entities.

9. In his report, the Secretary-General also highlights that a sixth annual staff survey of 25,000 United Nations personnel across 188 duty stations indicated that 98 per cent of respondents had knowledge of the standards and prohibitions relating to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that this level had increased from 90 per cent of respondents in 2017 and that, in addition to a mandatory e-learning package, all United Nations staff and related personnel were required to complete mandatory induction training upon arrival at a new duty station, as well as an annual refresher course on standards and prohibitions relating to sexual exploitation and abuse. **The Advisory Committee, noting the progress made since 2017, is of the view that a zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation and abuse would necessitate a 100 per cent awareness of standards and prohibitions relating to sexual exploitation and abuse among staff and all other personnel, and trusts that the Secretary-General will ensure that this level is met as soon as possible, including through improved training, onboarding procedures and organizational communication.**

System-wide staff and financial resources

10. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that 16 staff in the Secretariat continue to be fully dedicated to handling the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse (see also [A/74/705](#), footnote 4). The Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the resources of the agencies, funds and programmes that address protection from sexual exploitation and abuse matters were mainstreamed through programmes and a range of functional roles and responsibilities, and that all personnel were expected to incorporate awareness and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in their duties. The Committee was further informed, upon enquiry, that following the investigation of the independent commission into allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the Ebola crisis, WHO had established a dedicated capacity in the Office of the Director General, comprising a full-time director and 18 full-time staff, to strengthen its capabilities in the prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, as well as an investigation unit consisting of 15 experts trained in sexual misconduct investigations. **While noting the information provided on staff engaged in the prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse within the United Nations system, including the planned appointment of a full-time Special Coordinator (see paras. 4–6 above), the Advisory Committee is of the view that the report of the Secretary-General, as well as the additional information provided to the Committee, do not contain sufficiently detailed and complete information on staff resources dedicated to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse system-wide. The Committee therefore reiterates its recommendation that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives**

Board for Coordination, to include in his upcoming report a comprehensive overview of such resources so as to put in place appropriate administrative and financial arrangements for the continued and coordinated implementation of his strategy (see A/75/847, para. 7). The Committee provides its observations and recommendations in respect of proposals for staff resources to address the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse contained in the proposed budgets of peacekeeping operations for the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023 in the context of its related reports (A/76/760 and addenda).

Accountability and risk management

11. In his report, the Secretary-General refers to the central role of leadership in accountability for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (A/76/702, paras. 10–16). It is indicated that United Nations leadership must emphasize reporting and action against sexual exploitation and abuse, including through performance agreements and evaluations. The Secretary-General also notes that high turnover in leadership positions requires constant reinforcement, which the Special Coordinator may consider addressing through routine trips to field presences. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, in line with the sexual exploitation and abuse accountability framework,¹ resident coordinators, who are typically the most senior leaders representing the Secretary-General in-country, were responsible for the prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse at the country level.

12. In his report, the Secretary-General also provides examples of progress made in 2021 in the area of risk management (ibid., paras. 17–21), including the potential development of an impact statement to ensure the identification of and planning for foreseeable risks in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations field-based activities. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the impact statement would be developed prior to the start-up of a field-based mission or operation in a given country, and would contain an analysis of risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as mitigation strategies tailored to the context in which the Organization planned to operate. **The Advisory Committee looks forward to receiving the related proposals of the Secretary-General and trusts that the methodology employed in the development of any such impact statement will take into account the wide range of factors and drivers contributing to the risk profile in the establishment of a United Nations field presence.**

Implementing partners

13. The report of the Secretary-General highlights efforts by entities to encourage implementing partners, whose personnel are not under the authority of the Organization, to implement measures on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. For instance, the United Nations implementing partner prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse capacity assessment tool² was piloted in 2021 by the World Food Programme, UNHCR, UNFPA and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), allowing for the screening of common partners. The Secretary-General indicates that guidance was also provided by the entities on the operationalization of the 2018 United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners and that UNHCR had also developed an e-learning course on sexual exploitation and abuse for implementing partners (ibid., para. 21). With regard to the pilot of the capacity assessment tool, the Advisory Committee was

¹ Available at www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/sites/www.un.org.preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/files/accountability_chart.pdf.

² Available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-accountability-affected-populations-and-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/un-implementing-partner-psea-capacity-assessment>.

informed, upon enquiry, that the pilot working group had been expanded to include WHO, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), with the goal of taking a coordinated inter-agency approach and reducing the duplication of effort in the assessment of shared partners, and that, based on the piloted guidance, requirements had been identified for the development of a module on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse for the United Nations Partner Portal. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, take a leading role in the development of this initiative and its application not only to inter-agency coordination, but also to the work of the United Nations Secretariat.**

14. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that reporting on sexual exploitation and abuse allegations involving implementing partners started in 2017, but that the information collected did not indicate whether the allegations involved humanitarian or development programmes, nor did it allow for the easy identification of trends to manage risk in a prioritized way. Moreover, despite the implementation of the above-mentioned tools to improve the accountability of implementing partners in cases of allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse, there were no comprehensive and disaggregated statistics available to evaluate progress made in recent years. **The Advisory Committee expresses its concern that reliable data on trends and progress in monitoring and addressing allegations involving implementing partners are as yet not available and recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to prioritize and strengthen efforts to monitor, address and report on allegations involving implementing partners and to include the related information in his next progress report.**

Prioritizing a victim-centred approach

15. In section V of his report, the Secretary-General discusses the activities of the Victims' Rights Advocate and other efforts to promote a victim-centred approach into system-wide efforts on sexual exploitation and abuse (*ibid.*, paras. 22–32). Of note among the examples of related efforts by entities in 2021 is the approval by the High-level Committee on Management of core principles on advancing a common understanding of a victim-centred approach to sexual harassment within the United Nations system. In his report, the Secretary-General also indicates the progress made in the engagement of Senior Victims' Rights Officers in carrying out the strategy of the Secretary-General, with four officers deployed in 2021 to the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan; it is the intention of the Secretary-General to encourage the establishment of additional such positions, as necessary. Upon enquiry as to the impact of the Senior Victims' Rights Officers thus deployed, the Advisory Committee was informed that the officers gained the trust of victims and coordinated urgent medical, psychosocial, legal and livelihood support, thereby enabling the creation of an environment that encourages victims to come forward, sometimes leading to the disclosure of unreported cases that had occurred years earlier. **The Advisory Committee notes the progress made in the deployment of Senior Victims' Rights Officer posts, as well as their positive impact in addressing the needs of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.**

16. The Secretary-General indicates that, as at 14 February 2022, the trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse was financed by contributions from 24 Member States, with four new contributions received in 2021 (*ibid.*, para. 31). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, in February 2022, the level of contributions made to the trust fund amounted to \$3,657,236 (see annex); payments withheld from United Nations personnel with

substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse amounted to \$547,714. The Committee was also informed that \$3,229,638 was disbursed or committed from the trust fund for 17 projects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Liberia, Haiti and South Sudan, the details of which are provided in the annual report on the trust fund.³ **The Advisory Committee welcomes the contributions made to the trust fund and encourages additional contributions, including in the context of the latest appeal.**

III. Overview of data on allegations and investigations

Reported allegations

17. The Secretary-General provides an overview of the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system in 2021. In peacekeeping operations and special political missions, 75 allegations involving civilian, military and police or other government-provided personnel were reported, compared with 66 allegations reported in 2020; 115 allegations involved United Nations staff and related personnel of agencies, funds and programmes, compared with 109 reported in 2020; and 251 allegations related to personnel of implementing partners, compared with 244 reported in 2020 (ibid., paras. 59, 68 and 69). In addition, the United Nations received four allegations of sexual exploitation involving three members of non-United Nations security forces in the Central African Republic (ibid., para. 70). **The Advisory Committee once again expresses its concern regarding the overall increased number of allegations and recalls the collective and unanimous position of the General Assembly that one substantiated case of sexual exploitation and abuse is one case too many and the Assembly's commitment to the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse throughout the United Nations system (see resolution 75/321, para. 1, A/75/847, para. 20 and resolution 71/297, para. 4).**

Investigations and implementation of accountability measures

18. Regarding the status of investigation of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and the implementation of accountability measures, the Advisory Committee notes the following:

(a) Information provided to the Committee shows that, of 190 allegations received in 2021 involving United Nations staff and related personnel as at 31 December 2021, 14 were found to be substantiated, 19 were found to be unsubstantiated, 2 were determined to be unrelated to sexual exploitation and abuse, and 100 investigations were ongoing;

(b) Between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2021, 24 credible allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against United Nations officials and experts on mission that may amount to crimes were referred to their States of nationality. In all cases, the United Nations provided cooperation when requested by the relevant national authorities (A/76/702, para. 40);

(c) As the lead entity regarding allegations against non-United Nations security forces operating under a Security Council mandate, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to follow up with relevant Member States and was unaware of national proceedings leading to sanctions against perpetrators in cases documented in reports of the Secretary-General (ibid., para. 45). **The Advisory Committee encourages the Secretary-General to**

³ Available at <https://www.un.org/en/content/psea-trust-fund-report-2021/>.

enhance the collection and analysis of data on actions taken and the root causes of allegations against non-United Nations personnel with the aim of accelerating the system-wide and comprehensive implementation of his strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse.

19. In his report, the Secretary-General also provides information on a victim-sensitive approach to investigations (*ibid.*, paras. 33–37), noting, *inter alia*, that the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) has personnel trained to carry out sexual misconduct investigations and that OIOS, UNICEF, UNHCR and WHO have increased the number of specialized investigators. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with information on the average time taken to complete investigations over the period from 2017 to 2021, as indicated in the table below.

Average time taken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services to complete investigations into cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, 2017–2021

(months)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Investigation by Office of Internal Oversight Services only (non-troop-contributing country)	10.05	7.56	6.85	9.18	9.89
Investigation by Office of Internal Oversight Services only (troop-contributing country)	8.50	7.45	7.18	11.96	11.4
Investigation by national investigation office in collaboration with Office of Internal Oversight Services	10.79	7.50	9.79	8.58	12.83
All investigations (average)	10.0	7.53	7.22	9.89	10.56

20. **The Advisory Committee notes the overall upward trend in the time required for OIOS to complete its investigations over the last five years and encourages the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts to reduce the average time taken and to ensure the timely completion of investigations into cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.** The Committee discusses related matters in its report on the practice of the Secretary-General in disciplinary matters and cases of possible criminal behaviour from 1 January to 31 December 2020 ([A/76/724](#), paras. 5–7).

IV. Conclusion

21. The Advisory Committee notes that the report of the Secretary-General does not contain a request for action by the General Assembly. Upon enquiry, it was confirmed to the Committee that the Assembly is requested to take note of the report. **Subject to its observations and recommendations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General.**

Annex

Contributions to the trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse (as at February 2022)

(in United States dollars)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Amount received</i>
Albania	2 000
Australia	150 954
Bangladesh	100 000
Bhutan	10 000
Canada	232 132
Cyprus	17 900
Ecuador	1 000
Finland	60 045
Germany	120 000
India	100 000
Italy	578 816
Japan	200 000
Luxembourg	50 000
Nigeria	100 000
Norway	123 337
Pakistan	10 000
Philippines	7 500
Portugal	66 680
Slovakia	35 352
Sri Lanka	10 000
Switzerland	52 000
Uganda	10 000
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1 099 520
United States of America	170 000
Total	3 657 236