



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
19 April 2024

Original: English

---

## Seventy-eighth session

Agenda items 128 and 146

### **Sexual exploitation and abuse: implementing a zero-tolerance policy**

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

## **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/78/774](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 12 April 2024.

2. The report of the Secretary-General is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions [71/278](#), [71/297](#), [72/312](#), [73/302](#), [75/321](#), [76/274](#) and [77/333](#) 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/77/748](#)).

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

3. In his report, the Secretary-General reflects on the process of addressing the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse within the United Nations, and the promulgation of the Secretary-General's bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse ([ST/SGB/2003/13](#)) in 2003; progress, lessons learned and challenges ([A/78/774](#), sect. II); prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and protection of victims (*ibid.*, sects. III and IV); system-wide accountability (*ibid.*, sect. V); prioritizing victims' rights and paternity issues (*ibid.*, sects. VI and VII); engagement with Member States and civil society (*ibid.*,



sect. VIII); communications and data on allegations (ibid., sects. IX and X); and resourcing and recommendations for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (ibid., sects. XI and XII). **The Advisory Committee notes that the report of the Secretary-General entails no additional budgetary implications.**

## Background

4. In his report, the Secretary-General provides the background of the current policy framework. The Secretary-General's bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse ([ST/SGB/2003/13](#)) established standards of conduct applicable to all staff members of the United Nations, including staff members of separately administered organs and programmes of the United Nations system organizations. In 2005, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations of the General Assembly recommended that the Assembly endorse the standards of conduct and behaviour in [ST/SGB/2003/13](#) "for all categories of United Nations peacekeeping personnel". The Assembly endorsed that recommendation in its resolution [59/300](#). Since then, the standards set forth in the bulletin have been incorporated into the legal instruments applicable to the other categories of United Nations personnel ([A/78/774](#), para. 2).

5. A "new approach" was launched in 2017 to improve the Organization's system-wide approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse ([A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)), with the subsequent establishment of frameworks, policies and procedures. The Secretary-General notes that sexual exploitation and abuse continue to occur across the United Nations system in peacekeeping, humanitarian and development contexts, and indicates the need for a cultural transformation within the United Nations, with a move from a prevention-based approach as a prerequisite for success to a transformation across all aspects of the Organization's operations and resource allocations, with a focus on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and promoting a "speak-up culture" within the organization ([A/78/774](#), paras. 3–6).

6. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, according to the Secretary-General's bulletin, the definition of sexual exploitation related to "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", thereby including several acts, such as "transactional sex" "solicitation of transactional sex" and "exploitative relationships". Sexual abuse, however, was an "actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions", whereby "physical intrusion" was understood to mean "sexual activity". The Committee was informed that "sexual abuse" was a broad term and included the acts of "rape", "sexual assault," "sex with a minor" and "sexual activity with a minor". The Committee was also informed that manifestations of sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations duty stations might take various forms, including but not limited to the above acts. With the growing use of and access to technology, sexual exploitation and abuse committed through online and digital forums had also become a growing area of concern.

## Progress, challenges and system-wide approach

7. In terms of lessons learned and persistent challenges represented by sexual exploitation and abuse, the Secretary-General indicates in his report that a system-wide response to the issue is required that includes improvements in reporting, harmonization of standards, enhancement of transparency, collective accountability and strengthening of the conduct of investigations, as substantiated by the results of the eighth annual survey to assess the understanding of United Nations staff regarding

protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, conducted in 2023. Challenges include the lack of predictable and sustainable funding for work in that regard and the inconsistent approach to protection efforts across operations and programmes. Other systemic challenges include the need for safe and confidential reporting channels, for enhanced technical capacity among staff, such as the focal points for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and for strengthened training for personnel, in particular on “how to report sexual exploitation and abuse” (ibid., paras. 7–9).

8. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that United Nations personnel had a mandatory obligation to report instances of sexual exploitation and abuse and could be punished if they failed to do so. Nevertheless, many still did not report them. The Committee was also informed that various reports suggested that only 1 in 10 instances of sexual abuse was reported in situations of conflict and that, while 6,400 out of 40,412 respondents to the 2023 annual survey on facts and perceptions of United Nations personnel related to the prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse indicated having knowledge of instances in which United Nations staff and related personnel had or might have engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse during the preceding year, only 1,105 of those respondents (17.3 per cent) had reported them (see also *ibid.*, para. 30), a rate of underreporting of 82.7 per cent among respondents who were aware of such allegations.

9. The Advisory Committee was informed that the underreporting might be due to a number of reasons, including lack of awareness of the standards of conduct and obligation to report and fear of retaliation. In that regard, approximately 14 per cent staff who had participated in the survey indicated that they feared retaliation for reporting sexual exploitation and abuse allegations. The Committee was furthermore informed that, in the contexts in which the United Nations operated, communities were often dealing with situations of conflict and humanitarian crises and that access to safe and confidential reporting channels was a challenge. In addition, due to the nature of the acts, victims and survivors were stigmatized and ostracized from their communities, which acted as an additional obstacle to reporting.

10. The Advisory Committee was informed that the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse was addressing such concerns by strengthening outreach to communities on many fronts and enhancing reporting channels. In that regard, the strengthened environment for reporting included the emergence of a greater understanding of the importance of victim-centred reporting pathways, including community-based complaint networks, and the creation of context-specific and non-stigmatizing reporting mechanisms. The Committee was provided with information on reporting mechanisms in local communities and best practices for community reporting models currently employed in field missions, resident coordinator offices and agencies, funds and programmes, and informed that additional outreach was required to raise awareness among troop- and police-contributing countries, United Nations personnel and communities served on the reporting mechanisms that existed and to instil trust, including by addressing fear of and actual retaliation.

11. As regards the electronic incident reporting form, the Advisory Committee was informed that the initiative was aimed at standardizing the complaint intake process, streamlining reporting and minimizing retraumatization for victims and witnesses by reducing the need for multiple interviews. However, the implementation had faced setbacks and delays due to a variety of factors, primarily related to addressing concerns raised by various entities with regard to confidentiality and the protection of victims. The Committee was informed that the Office of the Special Coordinator had revised the standard operating procedure by prioritizing confidentiality and the principle of “do no harm”, while ensuring that actionable information was available to the investigative bodies. Currently, negotiations with various United Nations

entities were in the final stages, with the review of the revised guidance and the launching of a pilot of the electronic incident reporting form in the field by the third quarter of 2024, following the implementation of training and the availability of appropriate capacity.

**12. The Advisory Committee reiterates once more that a zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation and abuse necessitates 100 per cent awareness of the relevant standards and prohibitions among staff and all other personnel and emphasizes the importance of ensuring a safe environment for reporting cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, free from fear of retaliation, and of attaining full awareness among United Nations staff and all other personnel as to the available reporting mechanisms. The Committee trusts that strengthened efforts to ensure the harmonized reporting of sexual exploitation and abuse cases will be implemented. The Committee also encourages the Special Coordinator to continue his efforts to raise awareness among staff and all other personnel, including by increasing participation in the annual survey of the Office of the Special Coordinator and disseminating information on a significantly wider scale through the use of applicable examples and cases to increase awareness of the existing mechanisms for reporting cases and protections afforded to victims as well as to whistle-blowers.**

13. In his report, the Secretary-General also notes the requirement of accountability and shared responsibility across the system from all stakeholders (the United Nations system, Member States, civil society and implementing partners). All entities must have clear and robust policies, processes and procedures in place to respond swiftly to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. They must ensure transparency by making information on allegations and actions taken against perpetrators accessible (*ibid.*, para. 22). Three levels of accountability are indicated in the report, namely the responsibility of leadership (*ibid.*, paras. 23–28), the commitment by the Organization to ending impunity at all levels (*ibid.*, paras. 29–35) and the facilitation of accountability at the national level (*ibid.*, paras. 36–42). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that leaders at all levels must hold perpetrators accountable and protect those who reported instances and/or were victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. In addition to the senior managers' compacts, the Office of the Special Coordinator was exploring the option of having a compact with all United Nations personnel that specifically focused on sexual exploitation and abuse, and was also creating a senior managers' toolkit aimed at senior leaders at the field level, such as resident and humanitarian coordinators, Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, heads of agencies, heads of resident coordinator offices and chiefs of staff, to provide practical guidance to enable them to fulfil their leadership role and responsibilities with regard to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Key elements included advocacy and awareness-raising regarding such protection, ensuring that the required systems were in place, allocating resources and overseeing the proper management of cases.

14. As regards engagement with Member States and civil society, the Secretary-General indicates the importance of sharing best practices and coordinating efforts and initiatives, highlighting the following: the harmonization by the inter-agency working group on the operationalization of the 2018 United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners of its guidance on using the common assessment tool and building partner capacity; community support and inter-agency initiatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO); and the launch by the Secretariat of the United Nations in 2023 of the Member State module, a dedicated online platform that provides detailed information on misconduct complaints against

each Member State's uniformed personnel, based on the Case Management Tracking System, to expedite the handling of conduct and discipline cases and contribute to risk management and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Secretariat has informed Member States about this tool and provided information on its use (*ibid.*, paras. 56–62).

15. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that a multifaceted approach and different interventions were required to strengthen prevention and accountability within the United Nations system and with system partners, including by working with communities to raise awareness, changing the organizational culture and addressing the underlying drivers of sexual exploitation and abuse. In that regard, the role of the Special Coordinator was to ensure a system-wide harmonized and unified approach to the implementation of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. The Office of the Special Coordinator led and oversaw operational efforts to align policies and approaches, enhance coordination, strengthen cooperation, promote coherence and provide support across the humanitarian, development, peacekeeping and human rights operational pillars of the United Nations. The Committee was also informed that although the Special Coordinator had fostered an environment of trust conducive to collaboration in tackling sexual exploitation and abuse as “One United Nations”, managing such a broad mandate, across all contexts, with limited resources was challenging. In that regard, the Committee noted that the Special Coordinator had commissioned a comprehensive assessment to determine how to better integrate protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in all United Nations activities and programmes (*ibid.*, para. 85; see also paras. 16–17 and 22–24 below).

16. The Advisory Committee was provided with additional information regarding the mandates of the Office of the Special Coordinator and the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate, as well as information on the High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and the system-wide working group on sexual exploitation and abuse, and noted the system-wide composition of both groups. The Committee was also informed that to ensure that services were in place to support the victims and survivors, it was necessary to build on existing referral pathways for gender-based violence and child-protection mechanisms to integrate protection from sexual exploitation and abuse into the ongoing work, but that in many places the funding for such services was shrinking and services were lacking or indeed absent altogether. **In this regard, the Advisory Committee notes the availability of mechanisms in such system-wide entities as the resident coordinator system, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and is of the view that available mechanisms may be used for coordinating sexual exploitation and abuse efforts and resources across the United Nations system and in field locations. The Committee encourages the greater use of these available systems of coordination (see also paras. 24 and 36 below).**

17. **The Advisory Committee notes the efforts of the Office of the Special Coordinator, the use of best practices and the extensive system-wide collaboration on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Committee recalls its recommendation that the Secretary-General, in his role as the Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, further strive to ensure synergy of efforts and a clear delineation of the roles of each entity involved, so as to avoid the duplication of functions, streamline coordination and harmonize the implementation of his strategy. The Committee stresses the importance of a holistic approach which includes the use of existing coordination mechanisms to attain efficient and effective collaboration and coordination. The Committee therefore remains of the view that greater clarity is required regarding the system-wide resources addressing sexual exploitation**

and abuse and those available to the Office of the Special Coordinator in his capacity of ensuring a system-wide harmonized and unified approach to the implementation of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and trusts that the comprehensive assessment will provide this baseline information (see also para. 24 below and [A/77/831](#), para. 9).

18. The Advisory Committee was informed that the Special Coordinator worked in a complex landscape, one in which United Nations entities operated in environments with varying political sensitivities, cultural norms and resource availability, leading to situations in which efforts related to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse received unequal attention, potentially leaving some communities more vulnerable. On a related matter, the Committee was provided with information regarding conflict, post-conflict and humanitarian contexts in which communities experienced extreme deprivation, lack of socioeconomic opportunities and dire living conditions, thereby placing certain segments of the population, especially women and girls, at a high risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. To prevent the exploitation of vulnerable communities who were driven to “survival sex”, the Organization had adopted a standard for its staff and related personnel that prohibited United Nations staff members and related personnel from soliciting prostitution or engaging in transactional sex, even while off-duty and irrespective of the national law. That was as an integral part of the Organization’s protection mandate and duty of care to vulnerable populations. The Committee was also informed that the regulation of sex work was governed by national legislation and, where appropriate, the United Nations had requested local authorities to remove brothels from the vicinity of its military camps, albeit with mixed success, and would continue to do so. **The Advisory Committee underscores the importance of the conduct of United Nations staff members and related personnel and stresses both the required collaboration with Member States in the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse, and the role of troop- and police-contributing countries as regards their obligations relating to the appropriate conduct of the uniformed personnel under their jurisdiction (see also para. 39 below).**

#### **System-wide staff and financial resources, and institutionalizing protection from sexual exploitation and abuse**

19. In his report, the Secretary-General describes resourcing and funding issues, including the lack of adequate and sustained resources for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, which continues to impede the effective implementation of such protection across the United Nations system, in particular at the field level. This is illustrated by a two-thirds budget shortfall in a two-year appeal to fund critical protection from sexual exploitation and abuse coordination posts in the 15 highest-risk countries ([A/78/774](#), paras. 21 and 80–88). The Secretary-General also indicates that the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse has increased significantly during the past year, in proportion to an unprecedented rise in humanitarian crises around the world, and that the institutionalization of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is occurring by means of the following: the Special Coordinator and his interactions with stakeholders; updated strategies on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and strengthened policies, procedures and monitoring frameworks by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes; ongoing development of inter-agency planning, guidance and coordination tools to promote the integration of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in refugee response plans in emergencies and development contexts; and the deployment of personnel to dedicated posts related to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including progress towards appointing coordinators for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in 13 of the 15 highest-risk locations, which integrates protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in the Organization and enables a targeted response

appropriate to localized contexts (*ibid.*, paras. 16–21). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed of the elevation of the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse to critical in the new Secretariat-wide risk dashboard and that the breach of trust caused by sexual exploitation and abuse undermined the ability of the Organization to deliver on its mandates (see [A/78/678](#), paras. 69, 72, 74 and 75; and [A/78/743](#), paras. 38–39).

20. The Advisory Committee was informed of the unified strategy for institutionalizing protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in terms of a comprehensive reform within the United Nations system to address systemic issues, with a focus on cultural and behavioural change and on mainstreaming and institutionalizing safeguarding approaches, which necessitated an evaluation of the current agency-specific approach to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and the adoption of a more sustainable unified approach with a focus on delivery in the field. The Committee was informed of the following: that inter-agency coordinators for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse were currently generally deployed to countries with active humanitarian response plans, and that they supported the work of the resident and humanitarian coordinators; that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee represented only a segment of countries where deploying a coordinator for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse might be necessary; that those deployments were funded by United Nations country team cost-sharing mechanisms or the financial contributions of individual agencies, including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF; that securing funding in that manner and an absence of predictable and sustainable funding mechanisms had led to serious challenges in maintaining the continuity of those critical functions at the field level; and that this had led to periods when there had been no coordinator for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse on the ground in a particular country.

21. The Advisory Committee was also informed that the inter-agency protection from sexual exploitation and abuse capacity project (PSEACap) had been established as a funding and deployment mechanism to address that challenge and currently prioritized the 15 most at-risk countries, according to the inter-agency Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Risk Overview. As regards the recruitment of the positions, 15 of them had been filled, 13 were vacant and 4 were under recruitment, while acting coordinators managed protection from sexual exploitation and abuse networks in some countries with vacant positions. Out of the filled positions, five had been deployed through the new inter-agency protection from sexual exploitation and abuse capacity project; the remaining positions in countries covered by the humanitarian response plan were filled by agencies such as UNFPA, WFP and UNICEF, and, in some countries, through local cost-sharing arrangements by different agencies. The Committee notes the use of resources from United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and an inter-agency cost-sharing mechanism for the funding and deployment coordinators for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. As regards cost-sharing arrangements, the Committee was informed that protection from sexual exploitation and abuse was currently funded in an ad hoc and fragmented manner, with a possible solution similar to the cost-sharing model currently used for funding safety and security services (Department of Safety and Security) through a jointly funded account.

22. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the comprehensive assessment of the United Nations system launched by the Office of the Special Coordinator was aimed at the following: examining how to streamline and institutionalize protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; examining the current framework and architecture for addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and the work of various United Nations offices at United Nations Headquarters and field locations

across the humanitarian, development and peacekeeping contexts; identifying the resources required for work related to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system; and proposing a resourcing strategy or strategies, staffing arrangements and models, for different contexts, for the effective integration and alignment of efforts related to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system. The Committee was also informed that a review of both the Office of the Special Coordinator and the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate was timely given the significant period of time that had elapsed since their establishment in 2016 and 2017, respectively, with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of their mandates and also ensuring the efficient allocation and utilization of resources,

23. As regards staffing, the Advisory Committee was informed that it was recommended to have at least one focal point for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for each entity at the country level (and in each military and formed police unit in peacekeeping missions), as well as a dedicated inter-agency coordinator for such protection in all relevant settings. The Committee was also provided with an organizational chart (see annex I) and information on posts in the Secretariat dedicated to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and informed that information on the resources of system-wide entities was not available, as they were largely voluntarily funded. The Committee notes that it was informed that comprehensive staff and other costs related to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse were difficult to accurately calculate, as the functions were often attributed to a larger set of programmes or operations, many staff were performing more than one function ("double-hatted") and some staff were lent to inter-agency or coordination initiatives (see also para. 36 below).

24. **The Advisory Committee notes the need to address its recommendations and that comprehensive information regarding the resources and staffing available in the field and system-wide resources has not been forthcoming (see [A/77/831](#), para. 9; and [A/76/774](#), para. 10). The Committee further notes the need for the comprehensive assessment to provide baseline information relating to system-wide resources and staffing, and a common understanding of such factors as prevention and assistance, in order to determine issues regarding future strategy, division of functions, distribution of resources and inter-agency cost-sharing mechanisms. In this regard, the Committee recalls that there is an insufficient overview of the system-wide staff resources dedicated to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and 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 a comprehensive overview of system-wide resources in his next report, so as to optimize administrative and financial arrangements for the continued and coordinated implementation of his strategy (see [A/77/831](#), para. 9; and [A/76/774](#), para. 10). In terms of the extensive system-wide collaboration on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, the Committee notes the continued need for synergy of efforts and a clear delineation of the roles of each entity involved, including greater clarity as to the standing of the Special Coordinator in the overall sexual exploitation and abuse prevention architecture and any changes that resulted from the shift to a full-time position modality funded by the regular budget, so as to avoid the duplication of functions, streamline coordination and harmonize the implementation of his strategy (see [A/77/831](#), para. 6).**

25. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the transition of the Office of the Special Coordinator to the regular budget has provided predictability and signifies the commitment of the Organization to advancing the institutionalization of

protection from sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system. Coherent standards and policies, consistent enforcement, dedicated and sustained resources and the integration of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse measures throughout United Nations operations are also required ([A/78/774](#), paras. 16 and 80). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that performance measures included monitoring the number of heads of entities and resident coordinators with strategic plans, action plans and management certification letters demonstrating commitment to addressing gaps in policies and operations. The focus for the Office also involved identifying and reducing operational, policy and procedural gaps across the United Nations system. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that, as a regular budget-funded entity, clear indicators of achievement within a results-based framework should form the basis of the strategy and work of the Office of the Special Coordinator.**

26. The Advisory Committee notes that a review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations system organizations is planned in 2024 by the Joint Inspection Unit and that the results of the review will inform how revised policies and procedures are working in practice, lessons learned and good practices from within and outside the United Nations system, as well as the results of system-wide efforts to harmonize an approach ([A/78/34](#), paras. 87–90).

27. As regards the ongoing revision of the Secretary-General’s bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse ([ST/SGB/2003/13](#)), the Advisory Committee was informed that the focus was on retaining the existing core intent of the bulletin, while addressing concerns and ambiguities, and updating it to reflect emerging issues, including “online sexual exploitation and abuse”. The revision would rectify inconsistencies resulting from recent updates in related documents and clarify the scope of the bulletin, which currently applied only to United Nations staff, while subsequent documents extended its application to other categories of personnel. The Committee was also informed that the revision would be conducted in a consultative and inclusive manner and offered the opportunity to reassess key concepts and definitions and ensure alignment with contemporary best practices. **The Advisory Committee looks forward to the update of the Secretary-General’s bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and trusts that input from all relevant offices, departments and system entities will be incorporated into the consideration of the revised policies.**

#### **Accountability, training and risk management**

28. In section III of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse is anchored in screening, training, awareness-raising and risk assessments. As regards screening, UNHCR has strengthened its recruitment screening by piloting its participation in the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, as a complement to its use of ClearCheck, and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) will pilot its participation in the Scheme in early 2024. The Scheme is currently used by more than 230 organizations, with 65 of those joining in 2023. The majority of participants are non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations and, increasingly, private sector organizations. More than 86,000 checks have been conducted through the Scheme since 2019, resulting in 230 applications being rejected. The Scheme is also being promoted at the country level in emergency and refugee settings. As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution [77/278](#), the Secretariat is exploring “whether the ClearCheck database and the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme can complement each other”, as well as screening and information exchange with other mechanisms to improve screening and deter the recruitment of past sexual exploitation and abuse offenders ([A/78/774](#), paras. 10–11).

29. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with additional information regarding the differing mechanisms of ClearCheck and the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme; the former was a secure database of allegations data about individuals, while the latter was a network containing no data but facilitating systematic bilateral hiring referrals between recruiting organizations and previous employers, namely a network with a registry of signatory contact points. The Committee was informed that the majority of participants in the Scheme were NGO or civil society organizations and, increasingly, private sector organizations, and that, unlike ClearCheck, the Scheme held no misconduct or case data. The Committee was further informed that the Secretariat was assessing the feasibility of adopting the Scheme to complement ClearCheck and that, on the basis of the positive experience of UNHCR, which had been piloting the utilization of the Scheme in collaboration with the United Nations Global Centre for Human Resources Services (“OneHR”) in Bonn, Germany, the Office of Human Resources and the Office of the Special Coordinator had consulted the Office of Legal Affairs regarding the adoption of the Scheme across the United Nations system and the exchange of information among participating organizations. UNOPS and UNFPA had also indicated a desire to pilot the system.

30. The Advisory Committee recalls that it was informed that two United Nations system entities that were not part of ClearCheck, namely the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, had been expected to join in 2023 and that efforts were under way to optimize “OneHR” as a central hub for use of the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme (see [A/77/831](#), para. 13). The Committee also recalls that the ClearCheck database, operational since 2018, is used by 33 United Nations entities (*ibid.*). The Committee notes from the fact sheet on ClearCheck provided in a weblink in the report of the Secretary-General that, as at 4 March 2024, ClearCheck was available to all 31 member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and that there were 37 United Nations entities (30 CEB members and 7 non-CEB members) participating in ClearCheck, which is also available to the other entities of the United Nations system. When United Nations entities agree to join the ClearCheck community, they agree to abide by the two sets of ClearCheck guidelines, namely the guidelines for the sexual exploitation and abuse component and those for the sexual harassment component, which instruct entities to enter their subjects of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment cases in the database and to screen the candidates that they are considering hiring. The Committee notes that the World Bank Group is a member and that 436,817 screening requests had been received since 2018 ([A/78/774](#), para. 10 and <https://unsceb.org/screening-database-clearcheck>). The Committee further notes that ClearCheck is a stand-alone screening mechanism for participating entities of the United Nations system, while the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme has a wider membership and holds no misconduct or case data. **The Advisory Committee trusts that further information regarding the complementarity of the two systems and their adoption across the United Nations system to ensure the effective prevention of employment within the United Nations system of the perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse and other types of grave misconduct, as well as the status of those organizations that have to date not joined the mechanism, will be provided in the next report (see also para. 34 below).**

31. In his report, the Secretary-General outlines improvements to risk management tools, including the following: guidance for peace operations; enhancements to current training programmes on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; an updated version of the mandatory e-learning course for all Secretariat personnel, launched in 2016, translated into all United Nations languages and released in February 2023; improvements in training and advocacy concerning protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by a number of agencies, including the United Nations

Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and WFP; strengthened engagement with communities through such tools as the “Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse at the Frontline – Together We Say No” tool, aimed at raising awareness among drivers, contractors, financial service providers, small NGO partners and others and available in 22 languages; and the piloting of the reinforcement training package for uniformed commanders by the Secretariat in 2023, in cooperation with several Member States, to provide targeted training support for commanders on conduct and discipline, with a focus on the prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse, to be rolled out in 2024 in all six official languages of the United Nations ([A/78/774](#), paras. 12–15).

32. In his report, the Secretary-General also indicates that around 90 per cent of over 50,000 staff from 94 entities and 168 countries or territories who responded to the eighth annual survey to assess the understanding of United Nations staff regarding protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, which was conducted in 2023, had completed predeployment training during the preceding year, 40 per cent had received induction training and 61 per cent had received refresher training (*ibid.*, para. 8). Furthermore, a system-wide scenario-based training module on the victims’ rights-based and victim-centred approach to sexual misconduct was launched in early 2023 (*ibid.*, para. 47). Upon enquiry, the Advisory committee was provided with additional information regarding the training programmes and awareness campaigns, as well as victim support models for the training of community members and the capacity-building of United Nations staff, local partners and stakeholders. **The Advisory Committee trusts that increased use of the Organization’s website will be made to raise further awareness, enhance risk management efforts and act as a deterrent for future perpetrators, including through the use of a dashboard containing the information relating to cases and outcomes for individuals, organizations and countries.**

### Implementing partners

33. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the inter-agency working group on the operationalization of the 2018 United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners harmonized its guidance on using the common assessment tool and building partner capacity. In May 2023, the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse module, which includes a resource library on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse to share guidance and provide a repository of resources to strengthen partner capacity, was officially launched in the United Nations Partner Portal. Webinars and in-person training sessions, reaching more than 3,000 personnel from United Nations agencies and partner organizations, were held to promote use of the Portal (*ibid.*, para. 57). The Advisory Committee recalls that it was informed that the United Nations was required to ensure that partners had minimum standards in place to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. Implementing partners were contractually obligated to report allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse related to their personnel promptly to the United Nations partner entity. The implementing partner had the responsibility of ensuring that appropriate actions were taken in the event of a credible sexual exploitation and abuse allegation made against any of its employees or associated personnel, including termination of the staff contract, referral for criminal accountability, if appropriate, and referral of the victim, as appropriate ([A/77/831](#), para. 17).

34. **The Advisory Committee recalls its previous recommendation regarding the need for reliable data on trends and progress in monitoring and addressing allegations involving implementing partners (see [A/77/831](#), para. 18) and trusts that more analytical information will be provided in the context of the next**

progress report, including on the processes for verifying implementing partner employees. The Committee is concerned about the increased number of sexual exploitation and abuse allegations involving implementing partners in 2023 and stresses that further efforts should be undertaken to monitor and counter such increases, including on ways to address, where applicable, cases of non-cooperation with investigative organs and non-compliance with the United Nations policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, and suspend or terminate cooperation with implementing partners as necessary (see paras. 42 and 44 below).

### **Prioritizing victims' rights and dignity**

35. In section VI of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that victims' rights and dignity will be prioritized through empowering victims by raising awareness of their rights to be treated with respect, to receive assistance and support, to protection, to privacy and confidentiality, and to justice and accountability, by means of dedicated web pages in a number of local languages, and a social media campaign launched by the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate. Other efforts include the deployment of Senior Victims' Rights Officers as the main point of contact for sexual exploitation and abuse victims, and the recruitment by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR, UNOPS and WHO of staff dedicated to supporting victims, thereby complementing the work of the four Senior Victims' Rights Officers and six Victims' Rights Focal Points in the field; and the launch of a system-wide scenario-based training module on the victims' rights-based and victim-centred approach to sexual misconduct in early 2023 ([A/78/774](#), paras. 43–48).

36. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with information relating to the Victims' Rights Officers who served as contact points for victims, and who were located in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan. The Committee was informed that while no new posts had been established, victims' rights focal points who took on that role along with their existing duties had been designated in six countries with a United Nations presence and that the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, IOM, UNHCR, UNOPS and WHO had created positions for dedicated staff to promote the interests of victims. The Committee was also provided with information relating to the functions of Senior Victims' Rights Officers as the main point of contact for sexual exploitation and abuse victims, and informed that their skills had been developed over many years, were distinct from those of other staff and could not be gained by training alone, and that requiring other staff to take on such functions would compromise the implementation of the Secretary-General's strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. The Committee was also informed that a mapping exercise of victim services and assistance across 13 countries representing diverse United Nations affiliations had been undertaken in 2020 by the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate. **The Advisory Committee recalls its prior observations regarding the deployment of additional capacities relating to sexual exploitation and abuse and the need for an updated benchmarking exercise in order to determine the specific parameters and conditions for the deployment of additional capacities (see [A/77/831](#), para. 10). The Committee expects that information relating to the deployment of Victims' Rights Officers will be included in the comprehensive assessment of the system-wide resources for and approach to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (see also paras. 17 and 24 above).**

37. The trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, established in 2016 by the Secretary-General, has received \$4.8 million since its inception, including contributions from 24 Member States and payments withheld from United Nations personnel following substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and

abuse. Approximately \$1.3 million is earmarked for approved projects in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Haiti and South Sudan, with additional projects to start in 2024. The trust fund remains a vital mechanism for filling gaps in services and strengthening victims' rights and safe access to assistance. WHO allocated \$2 million to establish a Survivor Assistance Fund to facilitate quicker provision of support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by WHO personnel, which has been used mainly in support of victims in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the two years since the establishment of the Fund ([A/78/774](#), para. 45). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as at 31 March 2023, a total of \$824,774 had been withheld in connection with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by uniformed personnel that had ultimately been substantiated and diverted to the trust fund. As the reconciliation was done annually at the end of March, there would have been additional funds withheld during the past year which were not yet included in the above figure. The trust fund supported eight projects totalling approximately \$1,377,900 in 2023, which included use of the withheld funds. With contributions of the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate of about \$20,000, the estimated total expenditure on victim assistance and support was around \$1.4 million. **The Advisory Committee welcomes the contributions made to the trust fund and encourages additional contributions, including in the context of the latest appeal (see annex II).**

38. In section VII of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that only a fraction of paternity and child support claims involving United Nations peace operations personnel have been resolved and that 527 children are reported to have been born of sexual exploitation and abuse since 2010, with 72 of those claims received in 2023. The United Nations is strengthening its facilitation of paternity claims to promote individual accountability, and also strengthening national structures, laws and related institutions of Member States. Emphasis is being placed on Member States' responsibility to facilitate paternity claims at the national level, including by designating paternity focal points and encouraging individual accountability. In the report, the Secretary-General details the roles of the Secretariat, resolution efforts by some Member States and the enhancement of public reporting of paternity claims data on the Conduct in United Nations field missions web page in 2024 ([A/78/774](#), paras. 49–55).

39. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as regards paternity claims and children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse, the perpetrator was deemed to be responsible for providing child support. However, the resolution of paternity claims often took many years, leaving the affected children without the support that they required. The Committee was informed that the incurrence of greater financial sanctions might increase the resolve to implement stronger measures to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse and that additional measures to ensure responsiveness by Member States might include the following: withholding payments for the entire unit pending the outcome of investigations into allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse based on the principle of collective responsibility of the unit; and withholding reimbursements due to the respective troop- and police-contributing countries and allocating them towards interim assistance for victims and their children until the pending paternity claims were resolved and the father assumed his parental responsibilities. **The Advisory Committee trusts that further measures to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse will be implemented by the Secretary-General and that greater efforts will be made to address pending paternity cases with Member States.**

### III. Overview of data on allegations and investigations

#### Reported allegations

40. The Secretary-General provides an overview of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system in 2023 as follows:

(a) In peacekeeping and special political missions, 100 allegations were reported, an increase from the 79 reported in 2022, which is only the second time in the past 10 years that 100 or more allegations have been recorded in one year. The increase is attributable mainly to allegations of incidents which took place more than two years before being reported, with 68 such reports in 2023 (*ibid.*, para. 65);

(b) There were 284 allegations relating to personnel of agencies, funds and programmes reported, compared with 164 in 2022 (*ibid.*, para. 76);

(c) There were 374 allegations relating to personnel of implementing partners not under the authority of the United Nations reported, compared with 291 in 2022 (*ibid.*, para. 77);

(d) No allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against members of non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate were received in 2023 (*ibid.*, para. 78).

Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that 284 allegations involved United Nations staff and related personnel of agencies, funds and programmes, compared with 166 reported in 2022, and was provided with the following table, which provides a summary of allegations by year and category of personnel:

<i>Category</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>	<i>Total</i>
United Nations entities other than peacekeeping operations and special political missions	101	114	113	115	166	284	893
Peacekeeping operations and special political missions, excluding uniformed personnel	13	25	18	14	16	25	111
Implementing partners	113	177	250	263	291	374	1 468

41. The Secretary-General indicates that it is essential to interpret data on progress in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in the light of the local context. Such progress must be measured by efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse through enforcing values, respect, standards of conduct, training, vetting, risk mitigation, effective response, and upholding the rights of victims (*ibid.*, para. 64). The Advisory Committee notes that 166 allegations concerning United Nations staff and related personnel of agencies, funds and programmes were reported in 2022 (see [A/77/831](#), para. 22). The Committee requested and was not provided with information regarding the number of allegations reported in 2023 concerning this group of personnel. The Committee was nevertheless informed that there were 75 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse implicating uniformed personnel in 2023.

42. The Advisory Committee once again reiterates its concern regarding the increased number of allegations (see [A/77/831](#), para. 23; and [A/76/774](#), para. 17) 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 resolutions [77/333](#), para. 5; and [76/274](#), para. 88).

## Investigations and implementation of accountability measures

43. 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) Supplementary information provided to the Advisory Committee shows that, of the 384 allegations received in 2023 involving United Nations staff and related personnel as at 31 December 2023, 9 were found to be substantiated, 19 were found to be unsubstantiated, 18 were determined to be unrelated to sexual exploitation and abuse, 112 were closed under other circumstances, 138 investigations were ongoing and 88 were undergoing a preliminary assessment;

(b) In 2023, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) opened 130 investigations into complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse (compared with 85 investigations opened in 2022), 30 of which were being investigated jointly with national investigation officers from the respective troop- and police-contributing countries. The 39 investigations into 40 allegations involving WHO staff members and associated personnel were completed (A/78/774, para. 31). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with information on the average time taken to complete investigations from 2017 to 2023, as shown in the table below, and on best practices shared between investigative authorities, including training courses delivered by OIOS on sexual exploitation and abuse-related investigations. As regards the time taken for investigations, the Committee was informed that, from 2017 to 2023, 45 disciplinary cases on sexual exploitation and abuse had been closed, with an average disposal time of 10.5 months, while 8 of the 45 cases had been pursued post-separation and closed in the 2020–2023 period, with an average disposal time of 16.3 months;

### Average time taken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services to complete investigations into cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, 2017–2023

(Months)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Investigation by OIOS only (non-troop-contributing country)	10.05	7.56	6.85	9.18	9.89	6.26	11.0
Investigation by OIOS only (troop-contributing country)	8.50	7.45	7.18	11.96	11.4	11.69	16.82
Investigation by national investigation office in collaboration with OIOS	10.79	7.50	9.79	8.58	12.83	15.06	19.42
<b>All investigations (average)</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>7.53</b>	<b>7.22</b>	<b>9.89</b>	<b>10.56</b>	<b>8.56</b>	<b>12.81</b>

(c) Between 1 July 2018 and 30 June 2023, 28 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against United Nations officials and experts on mission were referred to their States of nationality. The Organization is committed to cooperating with national authorities in this regard (ibid., paras. 37–38);

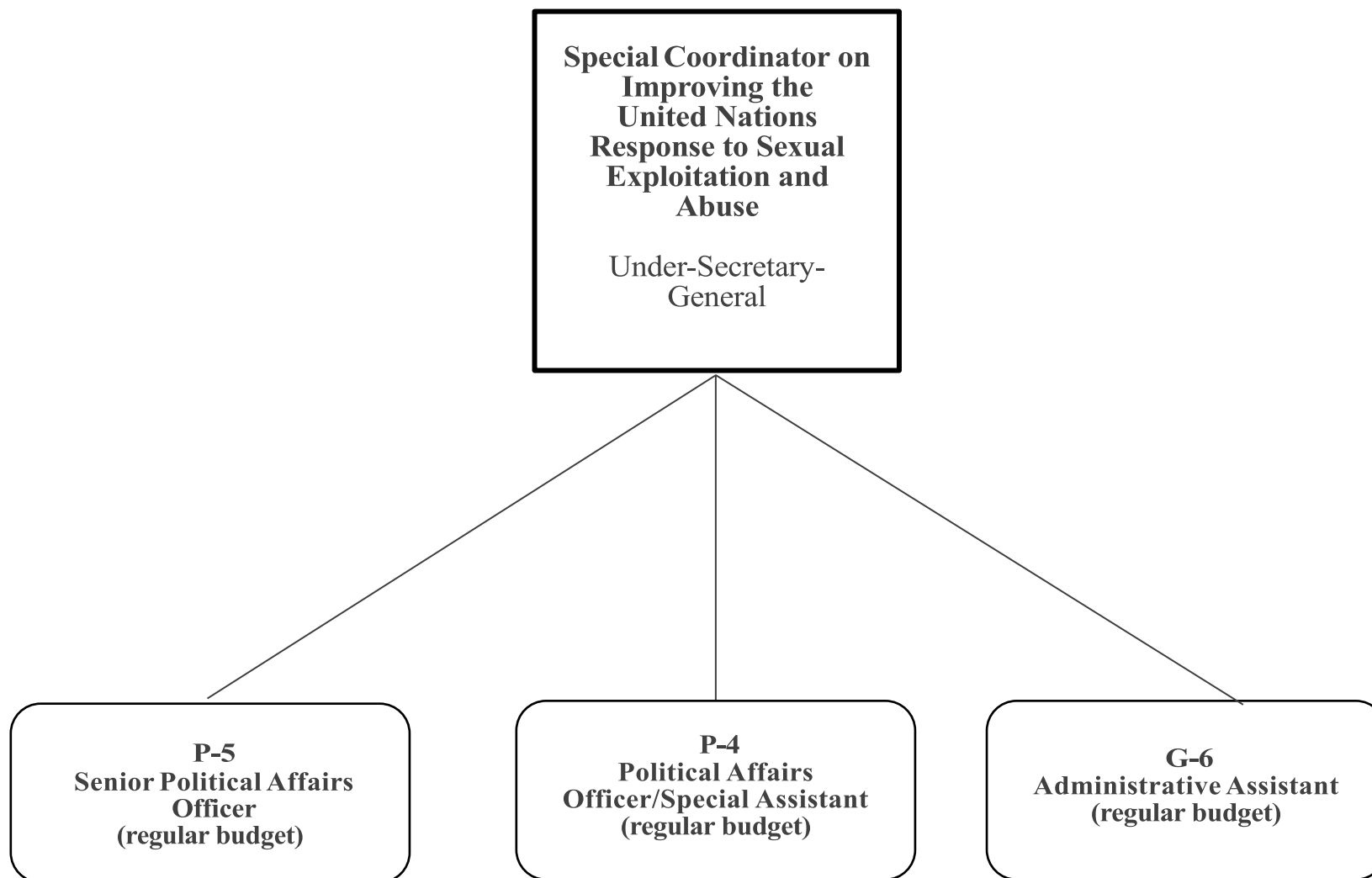
(d) Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate are referred by OHCHR to the Member State concerned for investigation, prosecution and provision of remedies for victims. Despite regular exchanges with States of nationality of alleged perpetrators, limited information has been provided to the Organization. OHCHR has not received information on national proceedings leading to sanctions for perpetrators or remedies for victims (ibid., para. 40). The Secretary-General indicates that troop-contributing

countries retain the primary authority to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against their military personnel and the exclusive authority to hold their personnel accountable. In 2024, Member States contributing uniformed personnel to peace operations will be asked to certify that their national legislation ensures the imposition of such sanctions. This will be an additional element to the existing certification that troop- and police-contributing countries provide to the Secretariat on conduct and discipline, including sexual exploitation and abuse. The Secretariat will continue to work with Member States to identify and disseminate good practices in national legislation and strengthen mechanisms to hold perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse crimes to account (*ibid.*, paras. 39 and 41).

**44. The Advisory Committee stresses once more the importance of timely provision of supplementary information and encourages Member States to provide the required information to the Organization. The Committee also encourages the Secretary-General once more to further enhance the collection and analysis of data on actions taken and the root causes of allegations against non-United Nations personnel. The Committee also underscores the importance of providing justice and closure to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and in that regard stresses the centrality of effective engagement and follow-up with Member States with respect to pending cases and the obligation of Member States to expeditiously investigate allegations.**

## **IV. Conclusion**

**45. The Advisory Committee notes that the report of the Secretary-General does not contain a request for action by the General Assembly (see para. 3 above).** 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 I****Organizational structure of the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse**

## Annex II

### Contributions to the trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse (as of March 2024)

(United States dollars)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Amount received</i>
Albania	2 000
Australia	150 954
Bangladesh	148 182
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
Nepal	15 000
Nigeria	100 000
Norway	387 698
Pakistan	10 000
Philippines	25 000
Portugal	82 671
Slovakia	46 222
Sri Lanka	10 000
Switzerland	91 975
Uganda	10 000
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1 099 520
United States of America	620 000