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Annual Report on Corporate Policy, Processes and Measures on the Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Executive summary

This document provides an update on the corporate policy, processes and measures on the prevention of sexual harassment and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. It presents the current status of actions and next steps related to the areas of governance and policy, prevention and outreach, reporting channels, investigations, and accountability.

Suggested action by the Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees, and the Council

The Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees and the Council are invited to take note of the updates and information provided in the Annual Report, and progress made in corporate measures to continually strengthen and enhance FAO's approach in the prevention of harassment, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, and to provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

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I. Context

1. FAO continues in its commitment to apply a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, and is further committed to an enabling and supportive environment where such matters can be raised with the confidence that timely and proper action will be taken, without fear of retaliation or reprisal. This forms the bedrock of the Organization's victim-centred approach, as fully supported by the Director-General, who has initiated an organizational reform and culture change which relies on a new people-centred, transparent, accountable, dynamic, engaged and ethical work culture.
2. Since the last report to the Joint Meeting and the Council in 2020¹, efforts have been ongoing to continue to strengthen a "speak up" culture through continued awareness-raising activities, reinforcement of the culture of prevention, and focus on ensuring that necessary resources are available for investigations. These continuing efforts involve measures put in place to guarantee a victim-centred approach and ensures protection of those who report, whilst observing principles of confidentiality and discretion.
3. The *2020 Annual Report of the Inspector General* showed an increase in the number of harassment and sexual harassment allegations compared with the previous year.² Whilst there has been an upward trend over the last two years, it is considered that the increase in complaints is largely due to FAO leadership's approach to combating sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, and an increased awareness of rights and accountability mechanisms. The Organization has consistently emphasized the importance of fair, ethical and proper workplace conduct, including ensuring employees' awareness through improved communication and training. The upward trend further indicates an enhanced trust in FAO's ability and willingness to tackle these issues.
4. Nevertheless, FAO recognizes the need for further progress and improvement to empower employees at all levels. Managers, supervisees and peers are to exercise their individual and collective role in preventing or reducing the possibility of misconduct, including cases of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. Indeed, the *2020 Annual Report of the Ethics Office 2020* concluded that there is a strong need amongst personnel for enhanced knowledge of ethical standards and that further advocacy and outreach work is needed, policies require regular review and revision, and additional efforts should be made in the implementation of the Organization's policy on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse with dedicated resources to be allocated to this end.³
5. Beyond ensuring an environment with an established culture of speaking up, the Organization is putting in place tools for prevention, undertaking continuous awareness raising and deploying additional training to all individuals to make this an integral part of their everyday lives. FAO is committed to this ongoing work and to sharing and adopting best practices and lessons learned at the UN level.
6. This report reflects actions between September 2020 and September 2021.

II. Progress in alignment with UN System-wide initiatives

A. Prevention of sexual harassment

7. FAO continues to engage actively in various UN System-wide fora, in particular the work of the [Chief Executive Board \(CEB\)/High Level Committee for Management \(HLCM\) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System](http://www.fao.org/3/nd597en/nd597en.pdf). The CEB Task Force meets on a quarterly basis in order for its members to exchange ideas and mutually update the status

¹ CL 165/INF/6 Rev. 1 – 129th Session of the Programme Committee and 183rd Session of the Finance Committee, and 165th Session of the Council (<http://www.fao.org/3/nd597en/nd597en.pdf>).

² FC 185/13.1 - 2020 Annual Report of the Inspector General (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne682en/ne682en.pdf>).

³ FC 185/14 - 2020 Annual Report of the Ethics Office (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne684en/ne684en.pdf>).

of implementation of agreed activities, such as the UN System Model Policy on Sexual Harassment, the use of the *ClearCheck* Database, and a guide for managers, all of which FAO adopted.

8. The priorities for the CEB Task Force in 2021 are as follows:
- a) ***Strengthening a victim-centred approach to addressing sexual harassment.*** In March 2021 the HLCM approved and disseminated the *Investigator’s Manual on Investigation of Sexual Harassment Complaints in the United Nations (Investigator’s Manual)* as a tool to bolster investigative capacity, harmonize victim-centred investigations of sexual harassment complaints and improve communications with victims and stakeholders.⁴ As part of the victim-centred approach, the group is also working on the reassessment of the annual survey on reporting sexual harassment, in order to refine the questionnaire and improve how the results could lead to action, as well as on the development of a new voluntary and anonymous survey designed to capture victims’ experiences. In September 2021, the HLCM approved the final document “*Advancing a Common Understanding of a Victim-Centred Approach to Sexual Harassment*” with the objective of bringing a victim/survivor centred approach into mainstream practices and policies of the participating UN organizations.⁵
 - b) ***Learning and Communication.*** FAO has been raising awareness of the UN System approach to addressing sexual harassment. The CEB Task Force has focused on developing an effective and proactive communications strategy targeted at a broad internal audience and on developing training and awareness raising material on prevention and responses to sexual harassment. In November 2020, FAO issued guidance on sexual harassment in a virtual world, based on examples from other organizations.
 - c) ***Outreach and knowledge sharing.*** The Organization has been cooperating and coordinating with actors and mechanisms inside and outside the UN System to share knowledge and material to end sexual harassment. In February 2021, a dialogue with UN Member States took place, with an update on the work of the CEB Taskforce and progress made in the UN System.
 - d) ***Leadership and Culture.*** The Organization is addressing the underlying issues of values, attitudes and culture to tackle the root causes of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. Under the [Human Resources Strategic Action Plan](#),⁶ FAO activities are part of a broader exercise with the aim of creating a diverse, respectful and inclusive work environment.⁷

B. Investigations

9. The FAO Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is a member of the United Nations Representatives of Investigative Services (UNRIS) established for the purpose of strengthening investigation practices and professionalism by, among other activities, developing and adopting common principles to guide the investigative process on matters of specific and common interest for the UN investigative functions. The UNRIS drafted the Investigator’s Manual and is currently working on best practice and benchmarking of sexual harassment investigations

C. Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)

10. The Organization continues to share experiences and good practices through the participation in several networks, such as the meetings on PSEA of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and the UN SEA working group meetings. This includes collaboration by Rome-based Agencies in a global webinar regarding the role of ethics in working together to enhance prevention and responses to SEA, and development of shared training materials for SEA focal points.

⁴ <https://unsceb.org/investigators-manual-investigation-sexual-harassment-complaints>

⁵ <https://unsceb.org/victim-centred-approach-sexual-harassment-united-nations>

⁶ FC 183/4 HR Strategic Action Plan (<http://www.fao.org/3/nd471en/nd471en.pdf>)

⁷ FC 185/10 Human Resources Annual Report (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne679en/ne679en.pdf>).

11. In line with the UN report on “*Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse*”, in July 2021, the Organization submitted to the UN Secretariat the annual action plan to prevent and respond to SEA and distributed the annual survey to gather information on perceptions of all categories of personnel related to standards of conduct with respect to PSEA in field locations.

III. Progress in FAO

A. Governance and Policy

Governance

12. Through the internal Taskforce on Workplace conduct and PSEA, chaired by Deputy Director-General Laurent Thomas, FAO continues to ensure an active exchange of ideas, information sharing and enhanced coordination of activities. The Taskforce meets on a regular basis and benefits from the diverse experience and knowledge of its members. It has two informal working groups: one on workplace conduct coordinated by the Human Resources Division (CSH), the Legal Counsel, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) (investigations and reporting), the Ethics Office (ETH) and the Office of the Ombudsman (OMB); and another on PSEA coordinated by ETH and the Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER) (emergency and humanitarian response). Given the crosscutting nature of PSEA accountability within FAO, beyond personnel matters, the PSEA Working Group has also representatives from Procurement Services (CSLP) (agreements with service providers and implementing partners) and Project Support Division (PSS) (partnerships and projects). Other units such as Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equity Division (ESP) (Gender) and Decentralized Offices have also been identified as key stakeholders under the PSEA framework.

13. The Oversight Advisory Committee (OAC), in its 2020 Annual Report, presented to the 2021 Finance Committee Spring Session,⁸ noted FAO’s efforts to reinforce a culture of prevention, improve awareness-raising activities and guarantee a victim-centred approach. OAC welcomed the establishment of an internal Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse chaired at the Deputy Director-General level. OAC, however, also considered that an appropriate Organizational locus within FAO for placing the coordination of activities and accountability needed further reflection. Accordingly, FAO is in the process of developing a Director-General’s Bulletin with terms of reference, membership and observer-ship for the Task Force, and clarifying the Organization’s operational approach for the coordination of activities and accountability for implementation within FAO.

Policy

14. The Organization is in the process of revising both the PSEA and Prevention of Sexual Harassment policies. They will be updated and expanded to more explicitly promote a victim-centred approach with key focus on prevention and accountability and specifically articulate key processes and roles.

15. With regard to implementing partners, FAO has continued to update its agreements with implementing partners to include specific clauses covering prevention of, and responses to sexual harassment and SEA. These clauses are aimed at ensuring that implementing partners be informed of their contractual obligations with regard to sexual harassment and SEA, as well as notifying FAO in the event of any SEA incidents occurring so that the Organization can ensure actions for appropriate response are underway and monitor the situation.

B. Prevention and outreach

16. In 2020 and 2021, prevention and outreach have been strengthened to support and ensure the necessary measures for a respectful and inclusive workplace:

⁸ FC 185/12 – 185th Session, FAO Oversight Advisory Committee – 2020 Annual Report (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne681en/ne681en.pdf>).

- a) **Communication** with all employees was improved through targeted and regular news items, updates and webinars, focused on a wide variety of subjects including ethical matters and investigations. Examples include: an Organization-wide message on the importance of preventing sexual harassment, with special attention to the new remote work context; OIG preparation of a series of webinars; Article “*PSEA is Everybody’s business*” published on the Intranet in March 2021 and an associated webinar; Ombudsman’s presentations to audiences across FAO - at regional and country level - on the role of the Ombudsman in helping to resolve harassment-related matters including sexual harassment, as well as providing guidance on the formal mechanisms available to address them.
- b) **A new Code of Ethical Conduct** was issued in 2021 reiterating individual and collective responsibility of FAO personnel, including the prevention of sexual harassment and SEA. A webinar will be delivered in October 2021 on the Code of Ethical Conduct.
- c) **Mandatory training and briefing sessions** for managers and personnel have been added, including the release of the e-learning “*Sexual Harassment: the Role of Managers*” launched in April 2021. The training recalls the principles that every FAO manager must follow in relation to sexual harassment and describes the actions that managers should take when dealing with issues involving sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace. It supports the implementation of FAO’s policy on sexual harassment and the CEB “*Guide for Managers: Prevention of, and Response to, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace*”.
- d) **A revised version of the mandatory online training “Ethics and Integrity in the UN”** was launched in August 2020. The Ethics Office also facilitated the training ‘*leading ethically*’ and ‘*working ethically*’, three-hour sessions on ethical dilemmas, held between October 2020 and June 2021.

17. With regards to recruitment, in May 2021, the vacancy announcement templates for positions of the affiliate workforce (non-staff human resources - NSHR) were updated to align to those for staff and now include reference to FAO’s zero-tolerance policy on conduct that is incompatible with the aims and objectives of the UN and FAO, including SEA, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination, in addition to the existing rigorous background and reference checks.

18. The Organization is continuing to develop capacity and strengthen knowledge in Decentralized Offices around the PSEA policy framework, standards of conduct and reporting mechanisms, particularly focusing on high risk and fragile contexts. These activities include:

- a) **Developed guidelines** covering different aspects of the SEA incident response process, which have been shared with Decentralized Offices via PSEA focal points and posted on a dedicated PSEA Teams platform. These include guidance on prevention, risk assessments for vulnerable cohorts, complaint intake, response/referral mechanisms and processes, and standard communication guides for different cohorts including beneficiaries, implementing partners and personnel.
- b) **PSEA focal points in Country Offices** have been trained to facilitate transmission and sharing of training materials and resources with their country teams, implementing partners, beneficiaries and local communities.
- c) **A compendium of Accountability to Affected Populations good practices** including on PSEA is under development to facilitate learning and knowledge sharing across countries and regions.
- d) **An Accountability and Inclusion Community of Practice** has been established, bringing together FAO personnel from across the regions to share experiences and seek peer support.
- e) **The Ethics Office delivered PSEA specific webinars** to country teams in the Regional Offices for Latin America and the Caribbean (RLC), Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) and FAO Representatives (FAOR) in the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP).

C. Reporting channels and investigations

19. “From concern to Clarity – FAO’s Roadmap on where to go when in need” provides personnel with all necessary information about the various offices, functions and mechanisms available to those who wish to report, among other things, sexual harassment or PSEA, and need guidance or have concerns. The recently separated functions of Ombudsman and Ethics Office have also strengthened the capacity to address issues. Information has been disseminated and webinars have been held to clarify their respective roles and responsibilities.
20. Regarding the OIG hotline for submitting all types of complaints, including for sexual harassment and SEA, OIG has had a confidential reporting system in place for a number of years. This includes a web-based complaint form, as well as dedicated email and telephone channels. The telephone hotline is available 24 hours a day, and includes the possibility to leave messages out of working hours. OIG is in the process of upgrading the systems by integrating them through an external provider.
21. The Organization has also taken steps towards improving community-based complaint mechanisms to ensure accountability for affected populations. It has conducted a global analysis of annual reports from country offices to identify gaps and trends with regard to existing reporting mechanisms. As referred to above, a dedicated needs assessment was also conducted in RAP and RLC, as well as tailored training and tools prepared to promote, support and facilitate the establishment and strengthening of reporting mechanisms.
22. In the area of PSEA, specific additional questions have now been regularly included within the country annual reporting requirements regarding the availability, location, inclusiveness and accessibility of reporting mechanisms at country level. A PSEA Scorecard is being developed following analysis of the responses to those additional questions.
23. The Organization participates in the iReport SEA Tracker, which the UN developed starting from 2018. The iReport SEA Tracker presents detailed information on allegations received, updated in real time on, *inter alia*, the date of incident and date of reporting, the type of victim (adult or child), the nature of the allegation, the support provided to the victim, the status of the investigation, the final action, and any referral to national authorities for criminal accountability.
24. With regard to investigations, FAO has introduced new Investigation Guidelines (Administrative Circular 2021/06, April 2021) for OIG’s investigative function. These guidelines ensure the effectiveness and independence of the investigation process, as well as fairness to all parties involved in that process. The revisions introduced in the new Guidelines include principles and key aspects of the victim-centred approach, in line with the CEB’s Investigator’s Manual on Investigation of Sexual Harassment Complaints in the United Nations.
25. A revised Whistleblower Protection Policy was issued (Administrative Circular 2021/10), contributing towards the protection of those reporting sexual harassment and PSEA. It was the result of wide stakeholder engagement with inputs from OIG, the Legal Office (LEG), CSH, Staff Representative Bodies and OAC.
26. Yearly statistical data of SEA and sexual harassment related cases has also been maintained. In particular, OIG maintains a database of the complaints received by personnel who wish to pursue the formal process. This data is part of the Annual Report of the Inspector General presented to the Finance Committee in the Spring Session, which also reports on disciplinary measures.⁹ The Ethics Office has further maintained a record of complaints, including complaints of sexual harassment.¹⁰

⁹ FC 185/13.1 - 2020 Annual Report of the Inspector General (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne682en/ne682en.pdf>).

¹⁰ FC 185/14 - 2020 Annual Report of the Ethics Office (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne684en/ne684en.pdf>).

D. Accountability

27. The *Administrative Circular on the Practice of the Organization in Disciplinary Matters*, 2021/03 was issued on 11 March 2021 in all official languages. This Administrative Circular, which will now be issued with an increased frequency, i.e. on an annual basis, provides information on disciplinary action taken in respect of personnel, as well as administrative action taken against other personnel who are found to have engaged in misconduct during the previous year. It includes a specific section on harassment and sexual harassment. Whilst the identities of the individuals concerned are not disclosed, sufficient factual information is provided to allow the Administrative Circular to serve as an awareness-raising instrument. It includes examples of unsatisfactory conduct, as well as the consequences of such actions. The Administrative Circular also serves as a reminder of the obligations of staff members and other personnel, as it lists the relevant rules and policies covering the conduct of FAO personnel.

28. The UN “ClearCheck” Database ensures further accountability and prevention. FAO finalized its *Procedures for the use of ClearCheck screening Database* (published in Administrative Circular 2021/04, March 2021). The Database is used by all UN Secretariat entities, as well as over 25 UN agencies, funds and programmes, to share information on former staff and affiliated personnel who were either dismissed for substantiated sexual harassment or SEA allegations, or who resigned whilst under investigation for such allegations or refused to participate in further investigation. Other checks have been added to prevent the re-hiring of perpetrators in the UN, that is, individuals listed in the INTERPOL Red Notice database, and the Security Council Sanctions List.

29. Considerations relating to sexual harassment and SEA are integrated in the Organization’s risk management framework. The Corporate Risk Log covers the risk of inadequate policies or procedures for preventing and managing harassment, sexual harassment or SEA. Country offices further receive specific guidance on the importance of considering potential SEA in their analysis of risks at country level and the definition of appropriate mitigating measures.

30. The Internal Control Framework and Accountability Policy include definition of the accountability for integrity and ethical behaviour in the Organization, with specific reference to the policies on sexual harassment and SEA. Since 2019, managers throughout the Organization are required to confirm the application of these policies within their areas of responsibility as part of the formal internal control reporting.

31. Performance appraisals for all senior management now include adherence to creating and maintaining a respectful working environment free from sexual harassment. This is to be further updated to include protection from SEA.

32. Since January 2018, the UN Secretary-General requests all leaders at every level to certify annually to their governing bodies through a management letter, that they have: (i) fully and accurately reported all credible allegations of SEA related to their staff and affiliated personnel serving in the organization; and (ii) made training on the PSEA available to their staff and affiliated personnel. In this regard, the End of Year Management Letter on PSEA from the FAO Director-General to the UN Secretary-General, dated 19 January 2021, was posted on the FAO Members Gateway.

E. Next Steps: Action 2021-2022

33. Building on this important work and to further ensure prevention of sexual harassment and PSEA, the Organization will focus on the actions listed below. The overarching objective will be to further change the organizational culture by increasing the knowledge of employees about these crucial topics and the awareness of the structures in place to ensure that concerns are handled in line with best practice, policies and procedures. The Organization also aims to increase awareness of partners and vendors in relation to their SEA obligations.

34. The results of the 2019 Employee Satisfaction Survey provide a baseline against which to measure change and to work on developing future initiatives, and will be adapted taking into account the need to protect the most vulnerable categories of personnel.¹¹

35. In 2022, FAO will continue implementing actions to strengthen its four focus areas in close coordination with, and building on UN-system wide initiatives to ensure best practice and leverage resources.¹²

- i. **Governance and policy.** Through strengthened policies on PSEA and Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination and Abuse of Authority, ensuring a victim-centred approach and clarity of roles and responsibilities, effective internal capacities, adequate resources, and coordination through the FAO internal Taskforce.
- ii. **Prevention and outreach.** Through enhanced learning, communication and building capacity of focal points in the field to ensure awareness of employees, managers, implementing partners and beneficiaries, as well as further training.
- iii. **Reporting channels and investigations.** Through continued communication and trust building, nurture a speak-up culture that addresses fears of retaliation and ensures adequate capacity in offices dealing with reports, in a victim-centred manner.
- iv. **Accountability.** Through strengthened risk management and internal controls.

¹¹ See HR Strategic Plan - An additional KPI will be measured and reported on the HR Annual Report for 2022: Employee Satisfaction Survey 2022 result for agreement to statement “FAO has effective policies, processes and procedures to address harassment and other unacceptable behaviours”, (target 2021/2 70 percent of personnel, from baseline 2019/20 64 percent).

¹² <https://unsceb.org/topics/addressing-sexual-harassment>; <https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Workplan%20Sexual%20Harassment%20Task%20Force%202020-2021.pdf>.
<https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/>