
Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

Report by the Director-General

1. This report provides an update of the actions taken by the Secretariat in response to decision EB148(4) (2021) on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, adopted by the Executive Board at its 148th session, as well as the broader steps taken to strengthen the Organization's efforts to address this matter during the period June 2021 to February 2022. An earlier version of this report was considered by the Executive Board at its 150th session in January 2022.¹ At that session, the Board adopted decision EB150(23), in which it decided to suspend Financial Rule XII, 112.1 in order to support investigations of sexual exploitation and abuse or abusive conduct.

2. Two significant events influenced the progress of WHO's work in this area during the period under review: the establishment by the Director-General of dedicated core capacity in the Secretariat to coordinate the work on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment; and the publication of the management response to the report of the Independent Commission to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse during the tenth outbreak of Ebola virus disease in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.²

3. On 1 July, 2021, the Director-General initiated steps to build capacity to urgently implement the institutional changes needed to strengthen effective prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment across the Organization by appointing a Director ad interim for the matter, reporting directly to him. He also established an Organization-wide task team currently comprising 38 senior officials from all accountability and enabling functions, the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, the Senior Advisor on Gender, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Global Polio Eradication Programme and representatives of each of the six Regional Directors drawn from different functions, including Heads of WHO country offices. Since August 2021 the task team developed, and has been implementing, a workplan that encompasses actions to address prevention and response, aligned with actions requested in decision EB148(4), as well as promoting best practice drawn from across the United Nations system and the development and humanitarian sectors.

4. The report of the Independent Commission to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse during the tenth Ebola virus disease outbreak in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, the

¹ Documents EB150/33 and EB150/33 Add.1.

² WHO. Preventing & responding to sexual exploitation and abuse: WHO management response to the Report of the Independent Commission to investigate allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation during the response to the 10th Ebola Virus Disease epidemic in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, of 28 September 2021. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/ethics/who-management-response-20211020-finalv2.pdf?sfvrsn=591a9adf_12&download=true, accessed 29 March 2022).

Democratic Republic of the Congo, issued on 28 September 2021,¹ concluded that: sexual exploitation and abuse happened in the context of the response to that outbreak and the Organization did not take adequate actions to prevent it, actions that included conducting a comprehensive risk assessment, putting in place preventive measures, enabling outreach to local populations and reporting of incidents from the outset of the emergency operations; and that there was a failure or lack of mechanisms in the Organization to identify and appropriately address potential opportunities for or instances of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Independent Commission's report made recommendations in eight areas, some of which were specific to the country and others which were applicable to WHO overall. The Secretariat has been transparent in its communication of the report with all key stakeholders: Member States, staff members, media, the public and representatives of the alleged victims and survivors. The release of the report was accompanied by a rapid and comprehensive consultation with Member States, all regional offices and senior managers in the Organization so as to facilitate the drafting of the WHO Management Response Plan.² The Plan and its accompanying implementation plan³ have been posted on WHO's website to ensure continued transparency and accountability, and are now being implemented. An update to the Implementation plan was published in March 2022.³

A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK FOR WORK ON PREVENTION OF AND RESPONSE TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

5. The WHO Management Response Plan presents a unified framework that outlines WHO's actions to respond to all recommendations made in the Independent Commission's report, implement decision EB148(4), respond to recommendations made in the report of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme's Subcommittee for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment⁴ and promote best practices from other entities in the United Nations system and nongovernmental organizations. The Plan brings together the Organization's work on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and its efforts to implement its policies and procedures on addressing abusive conduct.⁵ It dovetails with the many Organization-wide actions under the Respectful Workplace Initiative. The Plan is a living document and will be implemented in two phases. It addresses the recommendations of the Independent Commission and lays the foundation for effective work while a longer-term strategy is developed for the period 2023–2025. It will contribute towards reaching the goals of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and for inaction in preventing and addressing it.

¹ Independent Commission on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during the Response to the 10th Ebola Outbreak in DRC. Final Report of the Independent Commission on the review of sexual abuse and exploitation during the response to the 10th Ebola virus disease epidemic in DRC. Geneva: World Health Organization; September 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/final-report-of-the-independent-commission-on-the-review-of-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-ebola-drc>, accessed 29 March 2022).

² WHO Management Response Plan: meeting report. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-management-response-plan>, accessed 29 March 2022).

³ Implementation Plan (IP) of the WHO Management Response to the Report of the Independent Commission to investigate allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation during the response to the 10th Ebola Virus Disease epidemic in the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Geneva: World Health Organization; Version 2, March 2022. (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-implementation-plan>, accessed 29 March 2022).

⁴ Document EB150/34.

⁵ WHO. Policy: Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct: Policy and Procedures Concerning Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and Abuse of Authority. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/preventing-and-addressing-abusive-conduct>, accessed 29 March 2022).

6. In the short term (mid-October 2021 to March 2022), the Management Response Plan has prioritized: complementing the investigation of the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse outlined in the Independent Commission's report with assistance from the United Nations Office for Internal Oversight Services; conducting an investigation into alleged professional negligence by WHO personnel; ensuring support is provided to survivors and victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment perpetrated by WHO personnel; conducting an audit of the management of cases by WHO's accountability functions; and mobilizing WHO's entire workforce for the implementation of the Plan.

7. To put these actions into operation, the Secretariat has agreed with the Independent Expert Oversight and Advisory Committee that the latter will oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the implementation plan, which include the recommendations of the Independent Commission. WHO has contracted an independent supplier to undertake an audit of the Secretariat's case management of allegations and complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The audit will cover all allegations and complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, together with a random sample of allegations and/or complaints of harassment, received by the Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics Department or the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the Secretariat during the period 1 August 2018 to 30 September 2021. The audit will also be overseen by the Independent Expert Oversight and Advisory Committee. In addition, WHO and the United Nations Office for Internal Oversight Services have agreed that the latter will complement the investigations conducted by the Independent Commission and its external investigative team in order to positively identify additional alleged perpetrators, in compliance with WHO's investigative requirements and, under the oversight of the Independent Expert Oversight and Advisory Committee, to review whether there has been failure on behalf of WHO's management to initiate investigative processes where warranted.

8. WHO is using the "Clear Check" screening database, which is a centralized database that permits the sharing of information amongst United Nations entities on former United Nations staff members with records of sexual exploitation and abuse or sexual harassment, with the aim of preventing their re-employment within the United Nations system. WHO enters the names and details of former WHO staff members against whom allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse or sexual harassment have been confirmed and, under certain conditions, former personnel who are the subject of pending allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse or sexual harassment. Where applicable, this includes the names of alleged perpetrators identified in the report of the Independent Commission. By end February 2022 a total of 14 names of alleged perpetrators from the report had been entered into the database. The use of the database to vet individuals considered for employment, engagement or deployment by the Organization is being extended across the Organization. For example, it was used to screen personnel deployed during the thirteenth outbreak of Ebola virus disease in the Beni Health Zone in North Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in October 2021, and to complete the vetting of all the polio experts in the database of 2400 staff members. Additionally, in December 2021, all WHO staff members were vetted against the Clear Check database.

9. Concerning victim and survivor support, in November 2021 WHO and UNICEF jointly led an Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Mission to Goma and Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, with representatives from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate. Members of the mission team met with various stakeholders, including the humanitarian country team, partner agencies, government officials, nongovernmental and community-based organizations, victims and survivors, and donor organizations. The objectives of the mission included the implementation of relevant actions from WHO's Management Response Plan, assessment of progress made since the previous mission of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee a year

before, and formulation of recommendations for the further strengthening of work on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the country.

10. The mission also advanced support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse from the tenth Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the finalization of a memorandum of understanding between WHO and UNFPA to ensure that all victims and survivors receive the support they need. WHO has provided the funding required to support 92 victims and survivors of actions perpetrated by individuals identified by the Independent Commission, as well as the children born as a result. The Secretariat mapped the services already accessed by the victims, using data provided by UNFPA and the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate. The memorandum of understanding covers activities, funded by WHO and implemented under the supervision of UNFPA, to assess the current medical, psychological, legal, socioeconomic and reintegration needs of victims and survivors and to examine the needs of children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse. WHO is collaborating with a well-established, women-led legal aid nongovernmental organization in the country to ensure that the victims who want to pursue legal action are supported to do so. Initially, this nongovernmental organization will be contracted to provide full legal aid to up to 25 victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse in 2022. The Secretariat will in addition support integrated and holistic services for victims through nongovernmental organizations, including HEAL Africa. The United Nations humanitarian country team is developing a standard framework for victim-support services and the Secretariat will align with this framework once it is validated by the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate. Members of the mission also met: the Provincial Governor of North Kivu in Goma; the national Minister of Public Health, Hygiene and Prevention in Kinshasa to discuss government action related to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and the newly-formed National Commission on the subject; the Vice-Minister of Public Health, Hygiene and Prevention to discuss the strengthening of referral services for gender-based violence that any victim can access; and the Minister of Gender, Family and Children for scaling up protection and legal aid for victims of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

11. In the medium term (November 2021 to December 2022) WHO's Management Response Plan seeks: to define, internalize and operationalize a victim- and survivor-centred approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment across the Organization; to develop and enforce an accountability framework for all personnel that is accompanied by training and building capacity and outlining enhanced responsibilities for supervisors, managers and senior managers; and to reform WHO's culture, structures, policies, processes and practices to enable effective work in the area. A three-year Organization-wide strategy for the period 2023–2025 on tackling sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment will be a major longer-term result of the Management Response Plan.

12. By the end of March 2022, 86% of activities in the Management Response Plan had been completed or were in progress. Additionally, all the inputs provided during the relevant agenda items of the 150th session of the Executive Board, along with recommendations from the report of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme's Subcommittee for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment had been integrated into the Management Response Plan, to maintain a single unified framework for the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment across WHO.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR PREVENTION, DETECTION AND RESPONSE TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

13. Strong leadership is essential to achieve zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The Director-General and the six Regional Directors lead the Organization's work

on the matter. A new WHO public website on the subject was launched in July 2021, providing easy access to key documents, including the report of the Independent Commission, the Management Response Plan, the implementation plan and a monthly newsletter on progress, which promotes greater transparency and accountability.¹

14. A comprehensive review of WHO's relevant policies and procedures has been launched to identify gaps and inconsistencies in relation to the WHO regulatory framework as well as with regard to existing best practice in this area and to address specific concerns identified in the findings of the Independent Commission. In the interim, WHO's new Policy Directive on protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse came into effect on 3 December 2021 with the aim of clarifying and aligning with the key elements of the United Nations Secretary-General's Bulletin 2003/13, including definitions of sexual exploitation and abuse,² as well as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee core principles³ and minimum operating standards⁴ and the clause on the subject recently adopted by WHO and 15 donor Member States. The Directive also aligns with the United Nations protocol on assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse⁵ and the United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners.⁶

15. As set out in the Management Response Plan, the Secretariat is making progress towards creating a comprehensive, up-to-date, easy-to-use policy framework that will consolidate all relevant revised policies, accompanied by procedures and implementation guidance. An information note on the Policy Directive on Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse was issued in December 2021.⁷ In 2022, the focus is on revising and updating the WHO code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

16. WHO's Policy on Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct,⁸ which covers sexual harassment in addition to other forms of harassment, discrimination and abuse of authority, came into effect on

¹ WHO. Preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/initiatives/preventing-and-responding-to-sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment>, accessed 29 March 2022).

² United Nations Secretariat. Secretary-General's Bulletin: special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Document ST/SGB/2003/13. New York: United Nations; 2003 (<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/se-st-sgb-2003-13.php>, accessed 29 March 2022).

³ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. IASC six core principles relating to sexual exploitation and abuse, 2019. New York: United Nations; 2019 (<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-standing-committee/iasc-six-core-principles-relating-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>, accessed 29 March 2022).

⁴ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Minimum operating standards (MOS-PSEA). New York: United Nations; 2016 (<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-accountability-affected-populations-and-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/minimum-operating-standards-mos-psea>, accessed 29 March 2022).

⁵ United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. New York; United Nations; 2019 (https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/UN%20Victim%20Assistance%20Protocol_English_Final.pdf, accessed 29 March 2022).

⁶ United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse involving Implementing Partners. New York; United Nations (<https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/UN%20Protocol%20on%20SEA%20Allegations%20involving%20Implementing%20Partners.pdf>, accessed 29 March 2022).

⁷ WHO Information on Policy Directive on Protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (SEA), Information note, 6 December 2021 (https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/ethics/information-on-policy-directive-on-protection-from-sexual-exploitation-and-sexual-abuse-.pdf?sfvrsn=8926f2fa_19&download=true, accessed 29 March 2022).

⁸ WHO. Preventing and addressing abusive conduct: Policy and procedures concerning harassment, sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/preventing-and-addressing-abusive-conduct>, accessed 31 March 2022).

1 March 2021. The policy, which revised and updated the Organization's previous harassment policy, strengthens the coherence of the complaints process, while taking into account the need to pay particular attention to claims and allegations relating to sexual harassment. Its accompanying implementation plan includes the dissemination of new communication materials and resources for the workforce; the creation of guidance tools for managers and supervisors; the development and delivery of new training sessions tailored to the needs of different audiences; and the updating of related human resources instruments and processes. Particular emphasis is being placed on ensuring that the necessary training and other forms of support are in place across the Organization. Moreover, a system has been established to ensure the implementation of the policy's prevention measures in all offices. In addition, the recently established Prevention and Response to Sexual Misconduct department is coordinating efforts to build institutional capacity to ensure the effective prevention of and response to sexual harassment.

17. The Secretariat's core capacity to receive and investigate complaints and allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment is being strengthened. A Head of Investigations ad interim was appointed in November 2021 to focus on sexual misconduct cases and strengthen the specialized expertise needed to handle such cases effectively and efficiently within WHO. In addition, the reporting hotline (the "Integrity Hotline") was moved into the Investigations unit and is being streamlined. Safe and accessible reporting mechanisms that incur no fear of retaliation are essential for both the WHO workforce and the communities that the Organization serves, and will be essential to building trust and countering perceptions of impunity for perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. As such, the Secretariat is reviewing the internal reporting mechanisms and the entire process from suspicions, raising alerts, complaints, investigations to administrative actions as a whole, informed by an independent external audit. The Secretariat will report aggregate figures to Member States on a quarterly basis.

18. Decision EB150(23), containing the provision requiring the temporary suspension of Financial Rule XII, 112.1, provides the Head, Investigations with the authority for all investigations of sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment and other abusive conduct covered under the WHO Policy on Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct. In this capacity the Head, Investigations has the same reporting lines, the same type of access, the same channels for reporting the results of work undertaken, including to the Executive Board, and the same authority as those currently granted to the Director, Internal Oversight Services in this area. This has allowed for increased effectiveness and efficiencies in the management of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment investigations. The backlog of cases relating to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment has been addressed, with all cases either assigned or completed. In addition, all outstanding harassment cases are being assigned. Efforts will be made to investigate all new cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment within a period of 120 days. A new, globally dispersed team of 15 experts in conducting sexual misconduct investigations, has been established (70% of the team is composed of women). A victim and survivor-centred approach has been introduced into case management and case investigation. The WHO Survivor Assistance Fund has been used in countries to provide immediate and urgent medical and psychosocial support for alleged victims, and for such logistics as their transport to locations where services can be accessed.

19. Although progress is being made, and the increasing numbers of complaints suggest that trust in the system is being strengthened, the institutional capacity for investigation of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment remains fragile. Several measures are required to achieve stability and sustainability. As per recommendation 2.2 of document EB150/34, the Report of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme's Subcommittee for the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment, a dedicated and independent unit within the Office of Internal Oversight Services at headquarters has been established to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. Investigations are

conducted confidentially, and are sensitive to the capacities, rights and needs of survivors and communities, taking into account age, gender, sex, disability, ethnicity/race, language and socioeconomic status and other characteristics.

20. The Secretariat has completed a review of United Nations agency and inter-agency sexual exploitation and abuse risk assessment tools and guidance. While working with the United Nations country team and humanitarian country team joint risk assessments where they exist, WHO has prioritized the need to develop an agency-specific risk assessment tool for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. Such a tool would allow monitoring and management of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment risk in all countries where WHO is operational. It would also support accountability and compliance with relevant policies, procedures and practices. The tool will be used to conduct an annual assessment in every country of the prevailing risk resulting from factors within the country: risks of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in country offices and in all operations and programme activities that are community-facing. It will include a compliance checklist to be completed by each Head of WHO country offices to reduce sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment risks. The Secretariat will test and pilot the tool in several priority countries in 2022 before integrating it into the Organization's broader enterprise-wide risk management framework. Furthermore, the reporting on relevant control measures will be fully integrated into the questionnaire accompanying the annual internal control self-assessment checklist.

21. The request for an initial core budget of US\$ 50 million allocated to work on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment for the biennium 2022–2023 has been included in the proposed revision of the Programme budget 2022–2023. Additional resources will need to be mobilized for prevention, detection and response activities in field operations and community-facing programmes. As at the end of February 2022 WHO had a network of more than 60 country focal points on the subject in 30 countries, who are being supported with capacity-building and training activities. Guidance has been developed and disseminated to all Heads of WHO country offices to assign a prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment focal point in every country office. The allocation of the programme portion of the funds for the implementation of the Management Response Plan, amounting to approximately US\$ 30 million, will be made with country impact in mind, with 46% of the funds being allocated to country offices, 18% to regional offices, 13% to headquarters and 23% to cross-Organization activities for all levels of the Organization, including a victims' assistance fund. Approximately US\$ 10 million will be allocated to creating strong institutional capacity for investigation services for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and other forms of abusive conduct, and the remainder for reforming, streamlining and strengthening related accountability functions across the Organization. Guidance has been drafted outlining 10 core activities for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment at country level and the global team is supporting regional offices to include these and related budgeting into public health and health emergency programmes and initiatives.

TACKLING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN HIGH-RISK SETTINGS

22. Sexual exploitation and abuse can happen in any setting, but the risk is significantly increased during health emergencies and in any programme that brings WHO personnel into direct contact with communities in need of assistance. WHO is prioritizing interventions to prevent sexual exploitation, and abuse and sexual harassment as its primary strategy, while scaling up detection and response operations across the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and at operational level. WHO's prevention and response capacities, especially in high-risk settings, including the polio eradication programme, is being strengthened in several ways. Due to the increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual

harassment, and its specific characteristics, steps have been taken to fully embed prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment interventions into the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and in emergency operations. To this end, a cell on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment has been established within the Programme and is responsible for overseeing integration of policies and recommendations into emergency operations. The cell interacts and works closely with the relevant programmes and units at headquarters and in the regions, to support countries' efforts to operationalize the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment policies in emergency settings and operations, while engaging with other relevant agencies and stakeholders.

23. As part of embedding prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in WHO emergency operations, a range of interventions are being streamlined and integrated into graded emergency response operations. These include:

- embedding a prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment technical expert within the Incident Management Response Team for the event;
- ensuring that a plan of action, informed by a risk and capacity assessment is integrated within the emergency response framework, response strategy and budget, advocacy and resource mobilization plan;
- implementing recruitment and pre-deployment safeguarding measures, including screening through Clear Check, signing a code of conduct, ensuring that a prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment clause is inserted in all contracts, and that all staff members undertake mandatory prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment training, including in induction and refresher training courses;
- working with other partners to streamline reporting and referral pathways, build capacities for service provision to survivors and victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, enhance community awareness and engagement on rights and services as components of the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse network plan of actions, where prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse network partners are in existence.

24. Many of these measures were implemented during the thirteenth Ebola virus disease outbreak response; and are currently being implemented in the north-eastern Ethiopia crisis response, the response to Lassa fever outbreak in Nigeria, the response to flooding in Malawi, and will become be applied systematically within the WHO Health Emergencies Programme. All funding requests for preliminary emergency response operations benefitting from the WHO Contingency Fund for Emergencies are required to include a budget line on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, with clearly articulated activities for implementation during the initial response period. At least 10 requests for Contingency Fund for Emergencies funding in 2022 thus far have responded to this requirement. Notable examples include: WHO responses to disease outbreaks in Cameroon, Nigeria and Afghanistan; flooding in South Sudan and Madagascar; conflict in Ukraine; civil unrest in Sudan; COVID-19 in Guinea and Sierra Leone; and to flooding and poliomyelitis in Malawi. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, WHO contributed to the joint operational review of prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment measures post containment of the thirteenth Ebola virus disease outbreak. This approach, with its enhanced focus on embedding prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in all emergency operations, must be allocated adequate funding and sufficient human resource capacities, if it is to be sustained.

25. The review of prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment during the thirteenth outbreak of Ebola virus disease in the Beni Health Zone in the Democratic Republic of the Congo showed that several safeguarding measures had been undertaken by the humanitarian community, including the subregional Inter-Agency Standing Committee coordinator responsible for this area of work, whose position is funded by WHO. These measures included screening by WHO of all personnel deployed for the response through the Clear Check database, the training of responders including governmental and national responders, the assignment of a government focal point for prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, the sensitization of communities regarding standards of behaviour to expect from responders, and the establishment of community-based complaint mechanisms linked to the national hotline.

26. The measures and interventions outlined as part of embedding the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in WHO emergency programmes will inform the development of a plan of action for emergency contexts, aligned with the global efforts and policy framework, and the finalization of the WHO's Emergency Response Framework.

27. The WHO Health Emergencies Programme and the polio eradication programme and the Prevention and Response to Sexual Misconduct department are establishing full-time capacity for prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, using a risk-based approach. New staff positions have been provided for in 12 priority countries, identified primarily through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the polio programme. In addition a senior coordinator post, that will work closely with the global team, is being established in each of the six Regional Director's offices. Each Regional Director has a team of senior staff members working on the matter in close collaboration with the global team. The WHO Health Emergencies Programme holds monthly meetings with Heads of WHO country offices in fragile and conflict-affected countries to provide guidance and support, resolve issues and strengthen leadership and senior management commitment in this area.

28. A prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment learning pathway for all WHO Health Emergencies Programme staff members and focal points was introduced in January 2022. There are ongoing efforts to further mainstream and integrate prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in all health cluster coordination platforms; to ensure improved gender balance in WHO Health Emergency Programme operations; and to mitigate the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. To strengthen human resource capacities in prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment to cope with its multiple emergency response operations, WHO is reinforcing its collaboration and partnerships with the standby partner mechanisms to support deployment of experts to high-risk graded emergency operations.

STAFF ENGAGEMENT, AWARENESS AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

29. WHO introduced the new United Nations mandatory training on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in October 2021. All staff members must complete the training within three months, and all new personnel working in emergencies must complete it before they can work in or be deployed to the field. By February 2022 the training had been assigned to around 15 400 persons – staff and non-staff – with a global completion rate of 90%. An interim WHO-specific training is available and is being used to brief and train staff members across the Organization. The WHO-specific training has been piloted among 100 personnel across the world, and is due to be launched globally and will be made mandatory for all staff during the second half of 2022. A module on the subject has been introduced for the first time into staff induction briefings in 2021 and will

continue to be a stand-alone session in 2022. Materials are being developed for introduction into pre-deployment training for health emergency responders, country readiness training, Health Cluster Coordinator training, front-line polio worker training and training for Emergency Medical Teams, the Global Outbreak and Alert Response Network and other networks and partners associated with WHO, including the WHO Global Emergency Operations Centres Network, applying lessons-learned and best practices from the United Nations system and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. In March 2022, WHO assigned to its workforce a new United Nations mandatory training course – United to Respect: Preventing Sexual Harassment and Other Prohibited Conduct.

30. The engagement of personnel for prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment will intensify throughout 2022. This is part of a #NoExcuse engagement campaign that will ensure that each and every person working for and with WHO knows the zero-tolerance goals related to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, knows and acts on their responsibility to report any suspicions, and is aware of the enhanced responsibilities of supervisors and managers. The #NoExcuse campaign increases the awareness of managers concerning their responsibility to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and that promotes timely action and response to incidents, including reporting to WHO's investigational services. WHO vacancy notices and procurement contracts now outline WHO's position and conditions regarding prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The #NoExcuse campaign is observed by all WHO personnel during WHO's Goals Week (28 February–4 March) where staff and supervisors discussed performance goals and objectives for the year including those related to the prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. The week was launched with a leadership letter written by the Director-General and all six Regional Directors to each member of the WHO workforce outlining their expectations related to zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and for inaction against it. For the 2022 electronic performance management and development system (ePMDS), all WHO supervisors were required to hold at least one team meeting in which to discuss prevention of and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and, with their teams, to select a team goal to be achieved in that area. Staff members will be offered a series of learning, capacity development and engagement activities throughout 2022, and all staff must re-affirm their commitment to relevant policies before being able to submit their ePMDS forms. At the end of the year, supervisors will be required to attest that everyone under their supervision has completed all mandatory training, which currently includes the United Nations mandatory training in prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, the United Nations training on addressing sexual harassment, as well as WHO's own agency-specific training on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

31. Following the introduction of WHO's Policy on Preventing and Addressing Abusive Conduct on 1 March 2021, the Secretariat implemented a communication campaign to raise the workforce's awareness of abusive conduct, the support available within the Organization, and the mechanisms through which reports may be made and offenders held accountable. Actions to promote engagement have included Organization-wide information sessions, dissemination of communication and guidance materials, and ongoing training at all levels of the Organization. Special emphasis has been placed on the role of managers and supervisors and the empowerment of all members of the workforce to immediately intervene or to report instances of abusive conduct. Since the policy's adoption, an estimated 4000 staff members have attended the information sessions and training.

32. The global team on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment held briefings and training sessions for more than 8500 staff members between July 2021 and February 2022, reaching personnel across all levels of the Organization, including Heads of WHO country offices and their staff members, incident managers from the African, European, Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Pacific regions, members of the network of country focal points on

prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, staff members from technical departments and the United Nations global prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse focal point network.

33. Thus, WHO is reaffirming with all staff and partners that they have not only an obligation to abstain from any behaviour that may constitute sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, but also an obligation to report any suspected incidents through established reporting processes. Managers, senior managers, Heads of country offices all have an added role to play to create the systems and environment for effective prevention, early detection, safe reporting and support to victims and survivors.

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS ACROSS THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

34. WHO has taken concrete measures to learn from and align efforts on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment with initiatives taken by other organizations in the United Nations system and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, in order to strengthen significantly the Organization's inputs into system-wide efforts. WHO has been working with the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse; the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate; the Inter-Agency Standing Committee; the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; and other entities in the United Nations system.

35. Lessons have been drawn from the experiences of partner agencies and concrete priority areas of collaboration have been identified with organizations in the United Nations system (including the International Organization for Migration, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Food Programme); various nongovernmental organizations and professional associations (including Oxfam and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and multilateral and international organizations (including the World Bank, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, GAVI – the Vaccine Alliance, and Unitaid). The aim is to ensure WHO's alignment within the existing framework of United Nations entities and other interagency mechanisms, and to collaborate on current best practices for prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Priority bilateral collaborations with partner agencies include a commitment to closer country-level collaboration with UNHCR on risk assessment; with IFRC, UNICEF and more than 50 agencies that make up the Risk Communication and Community Engagement collaborative service on integrating prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in their work with communities, including for the COVID-19 vaccine rollout; and with World Vision, which this year assumed the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Championship on Prevention from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment: on (i) defining, standardizing, and operationalizing a survivor-centred approach to prevention work, investigations, and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment violations; (ii) supporting the deployment of Inter-Agency Standing Committee coordinators in prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in highest risk contexts; and (iii) continuing the process of culture change, ensuring a zero-tolerance approach for inaction.

36. Since July 2021 WHO has intensified its collaboration with other bodies in the United Nations system, for instance in the areas of victim- and survivor-centred approaches and frameworks, risk assessment and management, capacity-building, dealing with sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in health emergencies, application of the United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse involving Implementing Partners, and reporting through the Secretary-General's electronic incident reporting form among others.

37. The findings of the external review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's approach to prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, released in November 2021, which examined the body's past 10 years of work, identified some of the main barriers to inter-agency collaboration. These included: the failure of some entities to adopt a victim- and survivor-centred approach; the length of time it takes, across the United Nations system, to conduct and conclude investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment; the overengineering of community-based complaint mechanisms, and the lack of confidence in them; and the lack of long-term cultural and attitudinal change to all forms of sexual misconduct. The report and these findings indicate that achieving the desired changes requires a long-term vision, strategy, collaboration, capacity and resources; this includes WHO becoming a strong participant in international efforts to safeguard its programmes and operations against sexual exploitation and abuse.

38. In the first quarter of 2022, the Director-General has reported to the United Nations Secretary-General on progress on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment; WHO has completed the implementation of the 2021 Action Plan on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, managed by the Office of the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse; and the Secretariat has contributed to the United Nations Secretary-General's special measures report to the United Nations General Assembly.

OVERSIGHT

39. The Secretariat has provided quarterly updates to Member States as requested by the Board in decision EB148(4), together with ad hoc updates and briefings to Member States individually and in groups upon request.

40. Following the establishment of the task team (see paragraph 3) the Director-General invited the Chair of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme to establish a subcommittee of its members to consider how the Organization's current policies and procedures on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment could be improved to achieve best-in-class status and to oversee, guide and monitor the Secretariat's work in this regard.¹ The subcommittee constituted and consulted a reference group of interested Member States to advise on good practices in safeguarding against sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and held a series of consultations with various external stakeholders and WHO staff members to compare WHO's policies, procedures, structures and resources with international best-in-class standards. The subcommittee recommends urgent action by the Secretariat in five priority areas: (1) clarifying accountabilities, lines of responsibility and delegation of authority across the three levels of the Organization and strengthen the accountability framework for emergency response and other field operations, including for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; (2) reforming the Organization's management structure for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and accelerating the scale-up of organizational capacity to implement a victim/survivor-centred approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; (3) investing in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment as an essential function; (4) developing and implementing a context-specific, risk-informed, risk-management strategy for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in field operations; and (5) promoting, advocating for and institutionalizing culture change in order to

¹ WHO. IOAC sub-committee on the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PRSEAH). Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/groups/independent-oversight-and-advisory-committee/sub-committee-on-prseah>, accessed 30 March 2022).

strengthen prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, including greater gender and racial diversity, improved performance management and a renewed commitment to WHO values.

41. As noted above, progress has been made in the implementing recommendations (2), (3) and (4) of the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee's subcommittee's recommendations. Recommendation (1) is being addressed as a matter of priority and recommendation (5) will be addressed in the medium and long term partly by aligning with initiatives underway in human resources and talent management, and initiatives on diversity, equity and inclusion. In addition a new leadership coaching programme will be supported for the area of prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, to support female leadership development.

42. As noted in paragraph 7, the Independent Expert Oversight and Advisory Committee will provide oversight of the implementation of the Independent Commission's recommendations which are now integrated into the WHO Management Response Plan for prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

CHALLENGES

43. Tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment is a shared responsibility. WHO has made good progress in strengthening its engagement and participation with other United Nations and humanitarian actors to address the matter in countries. However, to achieve greatest impact, the Secretariat needs to intensify its engagement with and support to governments and authorities in countries where WHO has programmes and operations. This includes the strengthening of gender-based violence referral services so that all victims and survivors, including those affected by sexual exploitation and abuse can safely access the support they need. The role of WHO Member States should be clearly articulated in the proposed three-year WHO strategy on prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment to be developed in 2022.

44. The Organization has committed core funds for the establishment of institutional capacity for prevention and response, but further funding and institutional capacity are required for safeguarding WHO's community-facing programmes and response operations. As such, all emergency operations and their respective humanitarian appeals and resourcing mechanisms will have to allocate an agreed percentage of their overall budgets to supporting this area of work. Such investment is needed to implement effective prevention efforts and avert further incidents, and should be applied to other large community-facing programmes, such as the polio eradication programme.

45. Addressing the systemic issues that provide opportunities for sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment to happen within the Organization and transforming the Organization's culture require long-term and sustained action. There is need to invest in the broader, Organization-wide accountability functions and approaches that promote a respectful workplace. This includes strengthening and stabilizing investigation function capacity, including with dedicated expertise for conducting trauma-informed case investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and other forms of abusive conduct that incorporate a victim- and survivor-centred approach, and to report out anonymized data to track progress.

46. As the Organization expands its own capacity to tackle this matter, it relies on delivering results through implementing partners. Therefore, it needs to provide support to partners so that they have the necessary human and technical capacity to effectively implement adequate safeguarding measures. The lack of expertise to fill the major gap in the human resources needed within the Secretariat and across

the United Nations system is already evident. Prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment is a new area of expertise that draws on many disciplines without a well-defined educational or professional path. Existing pools of experts are limited in size, difficult to access and resource. The Secretariat proposes that efforts are made within WHO and across the United Nations system to professionalize this area of expertise and to contribute to the development of a global pool of expertise, using modern adult-learning approaches, which can support work in countries, programmes and operations.

CONCLUSION

47. WHO reaffirms its commitment to zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and for inaction against it. Sexual exploitation and abuse of the people served by WHO is a grave failure of the Organization to do no harm and to protect the vulnerable. Sexual harassment and sexual abuse within the Secretariat is a fundamental failure of the Organization's duty of care to its workforce and a failure to provide a safe and respectful environment in which to serve. WHO is committed to providing a respectful work environment and to promoting and enforcing policies that respect the inherent dignity of all persons, including those whom the Organization serves. WHO has an abiding responsibility to prevent and respond to discrimination, abuse of authority, harassment, including sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

48. The Health Assembly is invited to note the report.

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