



CEB
UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination



United Nations



OCHA

ENHANCING COOPERATION:

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING TO PREVENT AND ELIMINATE SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE UN SYSTEM AND BEYOND

Overview of the peer-to-peer learning dialogues, organized as part of the outreach, knowledge sharing and enhanced coordination efforts of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System

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This publication is based on the peer-to-peer learning dialogues conducted in the context of the coordination efforts of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN system, co-led by Assistant Secretary-General Anita Bhatia (UN Women) and Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

Created by the Office of the Focal Point for Women in the UN System at UN Women: Katja Pehrman, David Gawellek, Hannah Phillips and Tarini Wijesekera.

Our appreciation to all contributors.

Design by: Stephanie Montoya

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

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INTRODUCTION

This publication is a follow-up to [Making zero tolerance a reality: Peer-to-peer learning to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in the UN system and beyond](#), produced by UN Women in 2021. The earlier publication provides an overview of the themes and recommendations from the peer-to-peer learning dialogues conducted in the context of the outreach and knowledge-sharing efforts of the [Chief Executives Board for Coordination \(CEB\) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN system](#). This new publication includes updates from the four dialogues convened after the earlier publication to strengthen knowledge sharing and efforts to address sexual harassment.

The CEB Task Force was established in 2017 by the UN Secretary-General and the CEB to develop a common United Nations system approach to tackle sexual harassment by bringing together senior managers from across the UN System. The first publication highlighted the Task Force's progress. This includes developing a [UN system Model Policy on Sexual Harassment](#), strengthening investigations through the publication of the [Investigators' Manual - Investigations of Sexual Harassment Complaints](#), creating a [Guide for Managers: Prevention of, and Response to, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace](#), launching the [Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment at UN System events](#), implementing the [ClearCheck](#) Screening Database and [Advancing a Common Understanding of a Victim-centred Approach to Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations System](#). Throughout the dialogues, panellists emphasized that while the UN has taken important steps to develop policies and guidance, challenges remain with implementation.

Since the first publication was issued in 2021, further progress has been made. For example, more United Nations entities use the [ClearCheck](#) Database, which allows for vetting and reference checking to avoid the hiring and re-hiring of individuals who were dismissed after an investigation determined they had committed sexual harassment. This database includes the names of personnel with substantiated cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH) or who left during an investigation for any reason. In January 2023, the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate, the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the CEB Task Force Secretariat launched a [training module](#) on the rights and dignity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. Moreover, the UN System-wide Knowledge Hub on Addressing Sexual Harassment will be launched in 2023. This will improve information sharing and accessibility to many resources, policies, and tools available across the UN system to address sexual harassment.

At the beginning of 2022, the Task Force's workstreams were revised to respond to remaining challenges and remain agile. The peer-to-peer learning dialogues previously fell under the 'Outreach and Knowledge Sharing' workstream jointly led by Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) for Human Resources of the UN Secretariat and Ms. Anita Bhatia, Assistant Secretary-General

and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women. The dialogues remain under the purview of ASG Bhatia who co-leads the ‘Enhanced Cooperation’ workstream with Ms Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The other revised workstreams are: ‘Prevention and Behavioral Science’ led by the UN Secretariat and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), ‘Victim Engagement and Support’ led by the Office of the Victims’ Rights Advocate (OVRA) and the World Bank, and ‘Data and Results’ led by the UN Secretariat and the World Food Programme (WFP).

The objective of the ‘Enhanced Cooperation’ workstream is to foster “sustainable cooperation and partnership between agencies to better integrate the workforce across the UN system as well as share knowledge of where entities have already identified, invested, and implemented effective solutions that could help accelerate the work of those at earlier stages in their efforts.” The peer-to-peer dialogues remain an important part of meeting this objective.

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING DIALOGUES

Launched at the beginning of 2021, the peer-to-peer learning dialogues aim to inform and inspire United Nations organizations’ efforts to tackle sexual harassment and peer-to-peer learning. Specifically, the events have a three-fold purpose:

1. Inform the international community about efforts to address and prevent sexual harassment within the UN system;
2. Identify good practices and efforts being undertaken to tackle sexual harassment by UN Member States, UN entities, civil society representatives, academia, international financial institutions and the private sector; and
3. Deepen the dialogue on continued joint efforts to prevent sexual harassment within the UN system and beyond.

All events adhered to the [Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment at UN System Events](#), which was provided to all participants. At the dialogues, Member States, civil society actors, academia, the private sector and UN organizations and entities shared good practices and recommendations on how to work collaboratively to enhance accountability in addressing, preventing and, ultimately, eliminating sexual harassment in the UN system and beyond.

These last four dialogues convened since the first publication have featured twenty-eight different speakers and reached over 600 participants. The October 2021 dialogue referred to the importance of joint leadership to address sexual harassment. In March 2022, members of the international community discussed how to tackle the intersectional nature of sexual harassment in cross-cultural contexts. The specific context of working in the field was discussed in May 2022. In February 2023, colleagues shared best practices and recommendations to enhance collaboration to foster organizational culture change.

In total, eight dialogues have taken place since 2021, and have featured fifty-eight different speakers and reached over 1200 members of the international community to share best practices and recommendations to prevent, address and, ultimately, eliminate sexual harassment.

KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The latest dialogues complemented and affirmed the takeaways from the first four events, providing the United Nations system with a clear course of action to address sexual harassment. While common themes ran throughout all dialogues, the following are the key messages and recommendations which surfaced during the four most recent dialogues.



1. Demonstrate leadership commitment to eradicate sexual harassment

Addressing sexual harassment requires strong political commitment as well as the **collective efforts of all stakeholders**. As the United Nations is expected to lead by example, leadership at all levels should continue to make clear that sexual harassment is antithetical and will not be tolerated.

As underlined in the dialogues, the United Nations system should continue to **work with the international community to learn and implement best practices**. These dialogues offer a clear vision about how to address sexual harassment. In particular, the regular sharing of good practices among **Member States, UN Country Teams, civil society, academia, and Gender Focal Points in the United Nations** is invaluable. The **UN System-wide Knowledge Hub on Addressing Sexual Harassment** will streamline information sharing and enhance accessibility to many resources, policies, and tools available within the UN system.

All leaders should make and act upon regular, clear commitments to tackle sexual harassment. It is critical that managers set a clear tone and take action to prevent and eradicate sexual harassment. While it is the responsibility of leadership in the United Nations system to lead by example and ensure adherence to the policies, **all personnel have a responsibility** to foster an enabling working environment free from harassment, as per the [Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service](#).



2. Transform organizational culture to create inclusive working environments

It is vital for leadership and staff to foster a workplace culture that promotes open communication, inclusion, and respect. **Policies to address sexual harassment must be complemented by a culture based on trust, transparency and accountability**. While stand-alone sexual harassment policies are important, addressing sexual harassment should be integrated into other organizational strategies to foster culture change and create safe work environments.

Actions to foster culture change include **regular meetings of leaders** with small groups of personnel to discuss the working environment; ensuring that all personnel are aware of and understand the values of the organization, and providing dedicated “office hours” to increase transparency and create safe spaces to discuss. Leadership should promote **open and frank communication in local languages** in order to recognize the diversity of employees and their different languages and cultural backgrounds.

Colleagues need to feel empowered to speak up and report sexual misconduct. Panellists clarified that zero reports of sexual harassment does not necessarily mean that no incidents have occurred, but, rather, that organizations need to understand why people do not report, and transform the culture to ensure safe work environments that will ultimately prevent sexual misconduct.

Recommended resources that focus on organizational culture transformation include the [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#), its [Supplementary Guidance](#) and [Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) in support of the Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity.



3. Strengthen, advance, and implement a victim/survivor-centred approach

Panellists underlined that the United Nations must base its work on the feedback of victims/survivors to learn from their experiences and develop context-specific methodologies to measure progress. Important steps have been taken towards achieving this, including the publication of [Advancing a Common Understanding of a Victim-centred Approach to Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations System](#) as well as the forthcoming development of the survey on victims'/survivors' experiences on using formal or informal processes to address and resolve allegations of sexual harassment.

The **victim/survivor-centred approach** puts the rights and dignity of victims, including their well-being and safety, at the centre of all prevention and response efforts. The victim-centred approach is founded on the rights of victims and a set of guiding principles. The priority is creating an enabling environment in which victims can speak to someone they can trust, safely and confidentially and that they will be listened to and heard, feel supported and empowered, and that they can express their needs and wishes. They must be protected from stigmatization, discrimination, retaliation and re-traumatization. Victims must be fully informed at every stage of the process and have the opportunity to provide consent before any action is taken on their behalf.

It is crucial that there are multiple avenues of support for victims/survivors of sexual harassment. An important approach to be considered is the introduction of alternative grievance redress mechanisms, such as establishing an Ombudsperson or a dispute resolution system to allow the victim/survivor an opportunity to discuss if they wish to do so.



4. Strengthen implementation of existing policies through clear and regular guidance

The entities of the United Nations have a range of policies and tools to address sexual harassment. The CEB Task Force has made substantial progress, including on strengthening investigations through the publication of the [Investigators' Manual - Investigations of Sexual Harassment Complaints](#), developing a [UN system Model Policy on Sexual Harassment](#), creating a [Guide for Managers: Prevention of, and Response to, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace](#), launching the [Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment at UN System events](#), implementing the [ClearCheck Screening Database](#) and [Advancing a Common Understanding of a Victim-centred Approach to Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations System](#).

In order to strengthen implementation, **there needs to be awareness-raising and the possibility for transparent communication through multiple channels.** Policies should be made prominent and communicated to all personnel regularly—for example, through a communications campaign with infographics to help colleagues understand their rights and responsibilities. It is helpful to foster understanding of the organizational nature of sexual harassment, and that all personnel have a role to play in transforming workplace culture.

To advance transparency and to make clear that there is accountability for perpetrators, organizations are encouraged to **share information** about the types of cases reported and disciplinary action taken, while ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of everyone involved.



5. Strengthen efforts to reach gender balance

All genders can be victims of sexual harassment. Inequality, especially gender inequality drives sexual harassment, which is often used as a mechanism to assert power. Culture change can be fostered through increasing women’s representation, especially in leadership.

Women, in all their diversity, must be in decision-making positions in the workplace and participate fully and equally. In particular, everyone needs to be included amongst the decision-makers leading the creation and implementation sexual harassment policies. **The United Nations must lead by example in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on women’s empowerment and gender equality.**



6. Address intersectionality

Sexual harassment is the result of gendered power imbalances, as stressed by many participants. Sexual harassment can be used as a mechanism to assert unequal power relationships and **it is important to note that all genders can be victims of sexual harassment.**

When addressing sexual harassment, **it is key to ensure that women are in positions to make decisions and participate fully and equally in the workplace.** Therefore, gender parity, women’s leadership and full participation throughout all levels of the organization is critical.

Importantly, the lack of diverse women’s voices in decision-making hampers the organization’s ability to safeguard not only UN personnel but also the populations it serves. **Structural changes are crucial to meaningfully include the participation of young and diverse women as leaders, reshape organizational culture, and push for deeper programmatic transformation.**



7. Ensure policies are applied and tailored to the operational context in field locations

It is important to ensure dedicated attention to field locations when addressing sexual harassment as there are particular risks in these contexts. There should be concerted efforts to **address the gap between policies and their implementation** in the field, including through awareness-raising of reporting mechanisms and strengthening investigative capacity.

It is important to understand the **specific legal and cultural landscape** of countries in which United Nations personnel work. National laws must be known as protections may vary. For example, although the LGBTIQ+ community may be protected in sexual harassment policies formulated by a minority of countries, the criminalization of this community in over 70 countries presents particular risk, and organizations should strengthen their efforts in the field to create safe and inclusive workplaces.



8. Strengthen accountability

Implementing a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment requires persistence at all levels to ensure accountability, including for perpetrators. It is crucial for leaders to be transparent about the consequences of sexual harassment for perpetrators, to gain employees' confidence and trust. For example, the expansion of the number of organizations participating in the [ClearCheck database](#) **prevents perpetrators from being re-hired**. Furthermore, context-specific **accountability mechanisms** could be established in regional and country offices of the United Nations to ensure that policies are effectively implemented in accordance with local legislation. While leadership is responsible for holding people accountable, individual responsibility is just as important; all employees have a responsibility to take action.



9. Engaging men

It is important to actively engage men in efforts to tackle sexual harassment and support all colleagues in **modelling supportive behaviour**. Developing an engagement and communications strategy, for example through active and regular conversations with colleagues, is key to transform awareness. Panelists underlined that diversity and inclusion efforts are framed as core leadership issues and are tied to organizational outcomes. For prevention of sexual harassment, educating and engaging men should happen long before people enter the workplace.



10. Provide training and organizational learning

Participants noted that **mandatory training** supports the building of a safe and enabling working environment to tackle sexual harassment. Training programmes can be **particularly effective when they are in-person, consultative and tailored to the organization**. Bystander or upstander training empowers colleagues to prevent and address harassment. It is important to provide managers with concrete strategies to guide the way they intervene if harassment takes place.

The recent dialogues underlined that sexual harassment has long-term consequences on the physical and mental wellbeing of victims, as well as their colleagues in the workplace. It breaches the trust of the individual, of other personnel, and the trust in the organization. The loss of trust has devastating effects, it affects employee productivity, is likely to lead to employee turnover and negatively affects the credibility and reputation of the organization. Therefore, investing in training remains an important approach to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in the long term.



DIALOGUE FIVE

Realizing zero tolerance through joint leadership: Launch of a publication on preventing and eliminating sexual harassment

“Each and every one of us plays an essential role in this mission, but only through working together and learning from each other can we achieve our goals.”

– **H.E. Mr. Gilad Erdan**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations

When

October 28, 2021

Hosts

CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment, the UN Secretariat, UN Women and the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment

Speakers

- **H.E. Mr. Gilad Erdan**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations
- **H.E. Mr. Patrick F. Kennedy**, Ambassador and Senior Advisor for UN Management and Reform, Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations
- **Ms. Kelly T. Clements**, Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System
- **Ms. Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women
- **Ms. Martha Helena Lopez**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations
- **Ms. Hannan Sulieman**, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

- **Ms. Kate Jenkins**, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission
- **Professor Scott Westfahl**, Director of Executive Education and Professor of Practice, Harvard Law School
- **Ms. Kanti Joshi**, Founder, TEAM SASHA
- **Mr. Aritha Wickramasinghe**, Director, iProbono

Facilitated by Ms. Katja Pehrman, Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System, UN Women

Audience

Over 140 participants from the international community including UN Member States, UN entities, UN Gender Focal Points, civil society representatives, academia and private sector.

Summary

As well as launching the first publication, [Making zero tolerance a reality: Peer-to-peer learning to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in the UN system and beyond](#), this event discussed how to foster joint leadership to address sexual harassment.

The Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment is a Member State-led group that shares knowledge on how to address sexual harassment at the national and international levels. On behalf of the Group of Friends, H.E. Mr. Gilad Erdan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, argued that perhaps **the most critical contribution of Member States to this effort is through the sharing of national experiences**. He offered the example of Israel as the first country to adopt legislation to prevent sexual harassment and abuse online by criminalizing non-consensual sharing of inappropriate materials.

In introducing the first publication, Ambassador Erdan expressed: “Sharing is key to ensure lasting progress ... Each and every one of us plays an essential role in this mission, but only through working together and learning from each other can we achieve our goals.” He noted that great strides can be made towards realizing the vision of zero tolerance and eliminating sexual harassment everywhere by broadening horizons and adopting best practices. He **encouraged all participants to continue working together and to jointly implement the recommendations of this critical publication**.

The Chair of the CEB Task Force and United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, Ms. Kelly T. Clements, informed participants that the **efforts of the CEB Task Force are moving in the right direction** with regard to strengthening a victim/survivor-centred approach, implementing and monitoring existing tools, providing training with a focus on country level outreach, and sharing knowledge practices and collaborating horizontally across the United Nations system. She also reported that the Task Force had held a leadership dialogue to strengthen its collaboration. On the publication, she emphasized the importance of engaging with experts outside of the United Nations: “these learnings are crucial to the work of our Task Force going forward.”

“The report offers a clear vision of what we collectively must aim to achieve in our efforts to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in the UN system”

H.E. Mr. Patrick F. Kennedy, Ambassador and Senior Advisor for United Nations Management and Reform, Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations

In his keynote, H.E. Mr. Patrick F. Kennedy, Ambassador and Senior Advisor for United Nations Management and Reform, Permanent Mission of the United States to the United Nations, praised the recommendations in the publication as offering “a clear vision of what we collectively must aim to achieve in our efforts to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment” while also acting “as a powerful reminder that we have a lot of work ahead of us to translate this vision into safer and more inclusive workplaces.”

The Ambassador defined leadership as “the ardent ability of an individual to motivate and guide others towards a common goal by seeing what must be improved and then decisively rallying people to move towards that better vision.” He made clear that a single leader can end the scourge of sexual harassment and must work in partnership at different levels to share information to tackle this “common threat.” While praising the progress of the CEB Task Force, he made clear that the ultimate test of joint leadership is the degree of confidence personnel have in the organization’s ability to prevent and address sexual harassment. Only when all personnel experience a truly safe and inclusive working environment will they have full confidence in both prevention and response efforts, and our joint vision of zero tolerance for sexual harassment will become a reality.

Similarly, other panellists emphasized the importance of **leaders making a strong commitment to tackle sexual harassment**. Ms. Hannan Sulieman, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF provided the example of UNICEF’s Executive Director taking a firm stance against sexual harassment, which had a significant impact at the country level for programme staff and partners.

This was reiterated by Professor Scott Westfahl, Director of Executive Education and Professor of Practice, Harvard Law School, who added that when leaders identify why sexual harassment is significant to them on a personal level, it has a notable impact on staff’s commitment. As such, panellists pointed out that while leadership commitment is crucial, all staff must work together to fight the scourge of sexual harassment. ASG Sulieman and Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources of the UN Secretariat, noted that leaders alone cannot affect change. Organizations can make significant strides when staff and stakeholders stand together to speak up about sexual harassment.

“Leaders have to be open to learning, listening and data.”

Professor Scott Westfahl, Director of Executive Education and Professor of Practice,
Harvard Law School

A common theme was the importance of leadership being responsive to learning and understanding from the data on sexual harassment. Professor Westfahl expressed that “leaders have to be open to learning, listening and data” and that they need to use the data on the prevalence and nature of sexual harassment to inform organizational approaches. This was echoed by Ms. Kate Jenkins, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission, who shared the findings from [Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report \(2020\)](#), the world’s first national inquiry into sexual harassment at Australian workplaces. In 2018, one in three Australian workers had experienced sexual harassment in the last five years.

“The key driver of sexual harassment is power disparity ... the main power disparity in workplaces is still gender inequality.”

Ms. Kate Jenkins, Australian Human Rights Commission

Panellists made clear that **sexual harassment is a result of unequal power dynamics**. Echoing other speakers, Commissioner Jenkins expressed that “the key driver of sexual harassment is power disparity ... the main power disparity in workplaces is still gender inequality.” She cited the Deloitte Access Economics report, [The economic costs of sexual harassment in the workplace: Report for Sexual Harassment National Inquiry](#), which estimates that workplace sexual harassment cost the Australian economy \$3.5 billion in 2018. She expressed the view that these findings informed the Australian Government’s decision to shift from a reactive approach to a proactive approach in addressing sexual harassment. As ASG Bhatia underlined, “it is important to keep in mind that there is not just a moral and human rights cost to sexual harassment but that there is an economic dimension as well.”

“We are a very diverse community ... and we need to communicate in different ways”

Ms. Hannan Sulieman, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

Because of the clear causes and costs of sexual harassment, panellists also expressed that **leadership must foster a workplace culture which promotes open communication, inclusion, and respect**. As Professor Westfahl noted: “The more people feel included and able to speak up in any organizational context, the more likely you are able to have the kind of conversations you need to have to eradicate sexual harassment.”

Ms. Kanti Joshi, founder of TEAM SASHA, provided the example of a leader who ensures open lines of communication with all staff by regularly meeting with employees in small groups to discuss the working environment and ensuring that all staff are aware and understand the values of the organization. Both Ms. Joshi and ASG Sulieman noted that leaders should promote open and frank communication in local languages, recognizing the diversity of employees and their different languages and cultural backgrounds. As ASG Sulieman expressed, “we are a very diverse community ... and we need to communicate in different ways.” Moreover, Professor Westfahl emphasized that leaders need to ensure that all employees feel psychologically safe and included in the organization, as this is essential to foster an environment in which they are able to speak up and initiate conversations about sexual harassment.

ASG Bhatia expressed the view, across the dialogues, that a strong piece of learning that emerged was that **policies and procedures need to be accompanied by a culture of respect and trust within the organization**. She referred participants to the [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) developed by UN Women, in support of the Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, which offers practical recommendations and good practices for the UN and beyond. Professor Westfahl pointed to [The Purple Campaign](#) which brings together partners to improve corporate policies on sexual harassment. ASG Sulieman expressed that a holistic approach, including improving gender parity and organizational change, was crucial to addressing sexual harassment.

“A policy may read as if it applies equally [but it] may have an unequal application or fails to realize the more complex legal and social issues such as [which] the LGBT community faces.”

Mr. Aritha Wickramasinghe, Director, iProbono

The panel discussed the need to **bridge the gap between policy and practice in implementing sexual harassment policies**. As an example, Mr. Aritha Wickramasinghe, director of iProbono, noted that although the LGBTQ+ community may be protected in sexual harassment policies which are formulated in the Global North, the criminalization of this community in over 70 countries around the world means that these policies are unequally applied on the ground. He urged leaders to lead by example in creating a safe and inclusive workplace for LGBTQ+ employees and hold managers accountable for how these policies are implemented. He expressed the importance of Intersectionality which allows us to recognize that “a policy may read as if it applies equally [but it] may have an unequal application or fails to realize the more complex legal and social issues such as [which] the LGBT community faces.”

“To ensure that policies are understood and implemented, meaningful and purposeful approaches are needed by leadership.”

Ms. Kanti Joshi, Founder, TEAM SASHA

Mr. Wickramasinghe and Ms. Joshi stated that conducting **regular annual training for all staff that tests their knowledge** is critical to ensure that policies are put into practice. As an example of a practical policy, Professor Westfahl gave the example of a private company which sets clear rules regarding dating: an employee who is not in a supervisory relationship can ask a fellow employee on a date but if this is declined, the employee cannot ask them a second time. As Ms. Joshi noted, “I often notice that compliance is seen as a ‘checkbox’ activity. To ensure that policies are understood and implemented, meaningful and purposeful approaches are needed by leadership.”

The importance of **accountability and transparency** was underlined. Professor Westfahl expressed that it is crucial for leaders to be transparent about the consequences of sexual harassment to gain employees' confidence and trust. ASG Lopez shared the good practice of the [ClearCheck](#) Database being used to prevent a perpetrator being rehired. Professor Westfahl provided the example of a consulting firm which publicly announced that 12 partners were let go from the organization due to sexual harassment.

In addition, Mr. Wickramasinghe expressed that in the case of international or multinational organizations, tailored accountability mechanisms need to be established in regional and country offices to ensure that policies are effectively implemented. ASG Sulieman added that while leadership is responsible for holding people accountable, individual responsibility is just as important; all employees have a responsibility to take action if they witness sexual harassment.



DIALOGUE SIX

Making zero tolerance a reality: Understanding and tackling the intersectional nature of sexual harassment in cross-cultural contexts

“A key lesson... is to adopt an intersectional approach to addressing sexual harassment, which means understanding that certain groups will have particular vulnerabilities and experience differential impacts of sexual harassment.”

– Ms. Katja Pehrman, Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System at UN Women

When

3 March 2022

Hosts

CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment, the UN Secretariat and UN Women

Speakers

- **H.E. Mr. Jörundur Valtýsson**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations
- **Ms. Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women
- **Ms. Martha Helena Lopez**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations
- **Ms. Susanne Mikhail**, Regional Director for the Arab States, UN Women
- **Mr. Frank Dobbin**, Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, Harvard University

- **Mx. Maria Sjödin**, Acting Executive Director, OutRight International
- **Ms. Ekaete Judith Umoh**, Country Director, CBM Global Nigeria

Facilitated by **Ms. Katja Pehrman**, Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System at UN Women

Audience

Over 150 participants from the international community including UN Member States, UN entities, UN Gender Focal Points, civil society representatives, academia and private sector.

Summary

Members of the international community including UN Member States, civil society and the UN system discussed tackling the intersectional nature of sexual harassment in cross-cultural contexts. As Ms. Katja Pehrman, Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System at UN Women, noted, “a key lesson from the dialogues to date is to adopt an intersectional approach in addressing sexual harassment, which means **understanding that certain groups will have particular vulnerabilities and experience differential impacts of sexual harassment.**”

Speakers advocated for adoption of a nuanced approach to the intersectional nature of sexual harassment, as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach fails to capture the diverse experiences of sexual harassment faced by individuals. The commitment of leadership, training managers to be effective bystanders, establishing alternative grievance mechanisms and providing a safe space for personnel to discuss issues with leadership were identified as measures to address, prevent and, ultimately, eliminate sexual harassment.

“The important #MeToo continues to – painfully, I should say – remind us how far off track we currently are. It has also brought to light the importance of focusing on intersectionality to address institutional discrimination.”

H.E. Jörundur Valtýsson, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Jörundur Valtýsson, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations underlined the progress made by women and girls in Iceland, while acknowledging that more progress is needed to reach gender parity. He highlighted important preventive steps taken by the government, including implementing the first comprehensive [Policy Brief on Iceland’s Roadmap for Ending Gender-based Violence by 2026](#) which promotes sexual education and advocacy on the intersectional realities of sexual harassment.

Moreover, in adhering to UN guidelines, Iceland requires all agreements enacted with United Nations partners to include a clause on prevention of abuse and harassment. In addition, Iceland has recently adopted a law which addresses discrimination against non-binary people by changing the binary definition of gender to allow individuals to define their own gender.

Ambassador Valtýsson pointed out that “the important #MeToo movement continues to – painfully, I should say – remind us how far off track we currently are. It has also brought to light the importance of focusing on intersectionality to address institutional discrimination.”

“Harassment is about power, it’s not about sex.”

Mr. Frank Dobbin, Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences,
Department of Sociology, Harvard University

The panellists discussed how **intersecting aspects of identity can exacerbate individuals’ vulnerability to sexual harassment, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability**. ASG Lopez shared that when harassment intersects with race, it can take the form of indignities, marginalization, lack of respect, implicit bias and microaggressions. Mx. Maria Sjödin, Acting Executive Director, OutRight International, outlined various types of harassment faced by the LGBTIQ+ community in the workplace, including inappropriate suggestions and questions regarding their bodies and personal lives, threats to expose their gender identity or sexual orientation and the sexualization of LGBTIQ+ people. Ms. Ekaete Judith Umoh, Country Director, CBM Global Nigeria, informed participants that women and girls with disabilities are more vulnerable to sexual harassment as they have been socialized to believe they are “unworthy”. She highlighted that such abuse is usually perpetrated by people without disabilities which underlines the inherent power imbalance. As Mr. Frank Dobbin, Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, Harvard University emphasized, “harassment is about power, it’s not about sex.”

“In order to develop appropriate approaches and interventions and to protect women with disabilities, we need to know the risk factors and contexts.”

Ms. Ekaete Judith Umoh, Country Director, CBM Global Nigeria

When designing approaches to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, Ms. Umoh emphasized that a **one-size fits all approach is not effective**. For example, people with disabilities experience a variety of different impairments and harassment is impairment specific. She noted: “In order to develop appropriate approaches and interventions and to protect women with disabilities, we need to know the risk factors and contexts.” She called for more research and innovation to create specific approaches, especially for those in low-income or field office settings. ASG Bhatia referenced the [Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) that offer a tailored approach and complement the more general [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) and its [Supplementary Guidance](#) in support of the Secretary-General’s System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity.

“There are distinct social norms with regards to sexual harassment.”

Ms. Susanne Mikhail, Regional Director for the Arab States, UN Women

Ms. Susanne Mikhail, Regional Director for the Arab States, UN Women, highlighted that it is important to map the **specific cultural landscape** in terms of laws but also, crucially, social norms as “there are distinct social norms with regards to sexual harassment.” She noted that over 360 private sector organizations in the Arab region signed the [Women’s Empowerment Principles](#) together with UN Women’s Regional Office for the Arab States. These principles focus on the health and safety of women in the private sector. UN Women works with the organizations to identify issues affecting the workplace, including sexual harassment, and develop a roadmap to address these, such as formulating a policy on sexual harassment or devising training programs to raise awareness of a sexual harassment policy.

On the topic of **training programmes**, Professor Dobbin noted that they are most effective when directed at **managers, as they engage them in solving the problem of harassment**. Training and encouraging managers to act as active bystanders has proven to be highly effective as managers are provided with concrete strategies for intervening when harassment takes place. He referenced the [Bringing in the Bystander](#) resource created by the University of New Hampshire. While some organizations claim they cannot afford multiple, in-person training, Professor Dobbin emphasized that harassment is more costly because it leads to staff turnover, especially in terms of diversity. Mx. Sjödin further noted that online training programmes on sexual harassment tend to be ineffective; a personalized victim-centred approach which directly involves people is more consultative and promotes engagement and discussion. Mx. Sjödin stressed the importance of including issues related to sexuality, gender, disability, race, and other aspects of identity in training programmes.

Ms. Mikhail also shared several measures taken by the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States to prevent sexual harassment. These include one-on-one discussions with personnel about the Code of Conduct to prevent harassment and raise awareness of the organization’s expected standards of conduct, and providing a weekly open door hour with the regional director to increase transparency and create a safe space to discuss issues related to sexual harassment. These points were reiterated by Ms. Umoh and Mx. Sjödin who underlined the need to build a safe space where LGBTIQ+ people and women with disabilities can discuss the challenges they face.

“Especially for marginalized groups, having a holistic harassment prevention programme is key.”

Mx. Maria Sjödin, Acting Executive Director, OutRight International

Ms. Umoh and Mx. Sjödin echoed the need for **holistic harassment prevention programmes** to address the additional vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups. This includes adopting an intentional approach to tackling intersectional sexual harassment by calling out power imbalances, designing policies and programmes with an intersectional lens to ensure they do not take one-size fits all approach, and creating awareness of the different vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups. Mx. Sjödin expressed that, “especially for marginalized groups, having a holistic harassment prevention programme is key”.

Professor Dobbin also addressed the importance of establishing **informal grievance redress mechanisms**. He shared that reporting sexual harassment using formal grievance procedures can result in retaliation for those who report, causing them to leave the organization, particularly in the case of women. Professor Dobbin underlined the importance of an Ombudsperson or a dispute resolution system, such as a mediator, to allow the victim/survivor to discuss their experience if they wish. He underlined that it is crucial to have multiple avenues of support for victims/survivors of sexual harassment.

The importance of **leadership commitment** to tackling sexual harassment was raised by ASG Lopez. Referring to the “Strategic Action Plan - Report of the the Secretary-General’s Task Force on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All in the United Nations Secretariat”, ASG Lopez noted that the full engagement of leadership will be essential in its implementation, including by fostering an inclusive organizational culture; building trust among all UN personnel; holding perpetrators accountable for their actions; and providing support to those who experience sexual harassment. Ms. Mikhail highlighted the importance of management setting the tone from the top and leading by action.

DIALOGUE SEVEN

Making zero tolerance a reality: Driving organizational culture change to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment

“Sexual harassment can happen anywhere,
and in any environment, but the more
remote the operation, sometimes the
greater the risks.”

– **Ms. Kelly T. Clements**, Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System

When

May 26, 2022

Hosts

CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment, the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, the UN Secretariat and UN Women

Speakers

- **H.E. Ms. Rabab Fatima**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations
- **H.E. Mr. Mark Zellenrath**, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations
- **Ms. Kelly T. Clements**, Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System
- **Ms. Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women
- **Ms. Martha Helena Lopez**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations

- **Ms. Jane Connors**, Assistant Secretary-General and United Nations Victims' Rights Advocate
- **Mr. Edward Kallon**, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Zimbabwe
- **Mr. Maxime Houinato**, Regional Director, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office
- **Ms. Emily May**, Executive Director, Right To Be
- **Mr. Ravi Verma**, Director, Asian Regional Office, International Centre for Research on Women

Facilitated by **Ms. Katja Pehrman**, Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System, UN Women

Audience

Over 120 participants from the international community including UN Member States, UN entities, UN Gender Focal Points, civil society representatives, academia and private sector.

Summary

Addressing sexual harassment in the field was the focus of this dialogue. H.E. Rabab Fatima, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, made clear that “the prevalence of sexual harassment runs counter to everything the United Nations stands for.” As **the United Nations is expected to lead by example**, it is fundamental to ensure the effective system-wide implementation of the policies and measures. The United Nations has both a responsibility and an opportunity to lead this movement and make the fight against sexual harassment a truly universal one.

Ambassador Fatima noted that addressing sexual harassment **requires strong political commitment as well as support and collective efforts of all stakeholders**. She underlined that women must be able to participate as equals in decision-making processes. Ambassador Fatima expressed the view that Heads of Missions and Permanent Representatives have a responsibility to foster this approach in their respective organizations, creating an environment of mutual respect and zero tolerance for sexual harassment. Further, good practices to prevent sexual harassment within the UN can be a source of inspiration and a model for Member States to develop stronger policies in their own national contexts. The regular sharing of good practices between UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and Member States can add great value to the collective fight against sexual harassment.

“The prevalence of sexual harassment runs counter to everything the United Nations stands for.”

H.E. Rabab Fatima, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations

Drawing on the national context in Bangladesh, Ambassador Fatima noted that there has been a rapid rise in women’s participation in the workforce which has transformed the traditional work environment and culture. She discussed the legal and regulatory mechanisms enacted in

Bangladesh to tackle sexual harassment, as well as measures to bring about changes in mindsets. This includes the criminalization of sexual harassment in Bangladesh; the establishment of sexual harassment complaint committees in all government offices; and initiatives to raise awareness on sexual harassment in the workplace in accordance with the Guidelines issued by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. While these are important steps, she acknowledged that more needs to be done.

“There are no shortcuts to end sexual harassment.”

H.E. Mark Zellenrath, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative
of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations

On behalf of the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, H.E. Mark Zellenrath, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations, underlined that **implementing zero tolerance requires persistence**: “there are no shortcuts to any place worth going and there are no shortcuts to end sexual harassment.” He emphasized the fact that the focus should not only be on zero tolerance for sexual harassment, but also on zero tolerance for inaction towards sexual harassment. He discussed the importance of leadership fostering a safe and supportive environment in the workplace through a bottom-up approach. As part of this approach, it is vital that personnel feel supported to communicate and openly exchange ideas with leadership. As an example, Ambassador Zellenrath outlined three actions taken by the Netherlands Mission to create an enabling working environment.

First, the Mission has created a dilemma game which is used to initiate conversations about issues faced in the workplace, such as sexual harassment and integrity, and how these should be addressed. Integrating sexual harassment into broader conversations on integrity have been effective in creating a safe space for employees to speak up about difficult topics. Second, the Mission conducts civility cafes where employees are given the opportunity to discuss issues of civility and what a supportive working environment means to them in a safe space. Third, the bystander intervention tool of distract, delegate, document, delay and direct is utilized by the Mission to ensure that all employees are active bystanders equipped to tackle toxic behaviour in the workplace.

“Focus on the individuals...and focus on the systems.”

Mr. Maxime Houinato, Regional Director, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office

Deputy High Commissioner Clements shared three **reflections as emphasized by survivors of sexual harassment working in remote and high-risk locations**. First, “sexual harassment can happen anywhere, and in any environment, but the more remote the operation, sometimes the greater the risks.” Personnel who lack security, connectivity and access to facilities are more vulnerable, such as those working in emergency operations where there is high turnover of personnel.

Second, she reminded participants that the difficulty of speaking up about sexual harassment can be due to personal feelings of shame; a loss of control by victims/survivors over their lives; and concerns about safety, the risks to which can be personally, culturally, and organizationally specific. As a result, she underlined that addressing sexual harassment across all of the UN's operational contexts requires understanding the varying costs of speaking up and how they differ from person to person and from location to location. Third, survivors often describe misuse of the hierarchical structures of the United Nations as the root cause of sexual harassment. She emphasized that the United Nations needs to pay attention to those less equipped to navigate complex organizational structures and implement approaches that deconstruct rather than exacerbate such perceptions. As Mr. Maxime Houinato, Regional Director, UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office expressed, a holistic approach is needed: "focus on the individuals...and focus on the systems."

"It takes a village to raise a child and it takes all of us to advance this agenda wherever we are and whatever our role ... it's a collective effort."

Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations

ASG Lopez emphasized the **need for collective action**: "It takes a village to raise a child and it takes all of us to advance this agenda wherever we are and whatever our role ... it's a collective effort." She updated participants on the efforts taken to prevent the employment of perpetrators of sexual harassment in the UN through the [ClearCheck](#) Database. The database is a centralized platform into which UN entities can enter potential candidates to verify that they do not have established allegations of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse.

ASG Lopez shared some key statistics on the success of ClearCheck; more than 180,000 screening requests have been received from 17 participating UN organizations and two individuals were prevented from being hired due to previous cases of misconduct. She further noted that ClearCheck is in the process of being linked to the UN's talent management systems. Mr. Edward Kallon, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Zimbabwe reiterated the importance of conducting reference checks on candidates and shared that the UNCT in Zimbabwe vets external candidates during recruitment to minimize the risk of hiring perpetrators of sexual misconduct.

"There is still a big gap between policies and implementation."

Mr. Edward Kallon, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Zimbabwe

Panellists further shared some of the **key challenges faced in tackling sexual harassment in United Nations Country Teams**. Mr. Kallon pointed out that "there is still a big gap between policies and implementation" contributed to by a need to strengthen investigative capacity; limited awareness of sexual harassment and reporting mechanisms; fear of retaliation; and the silos inherent in the United Nations system. These points were reiterated by Mr. Houinato who

underlined the importance of promoting understanding and awareness of sexual harassment among personnel. In addition, he discussed the need to integrate reporting mechanisms and accountability tools into workplaces.

Ms. Jane Connors, Assistant Secretary-General and United Nations Victims' Rights Advocate, noted that all leaders need to be aware of how to support victims/survivors to report sexual harassment through formal and informal channels. ASG Connors addressed the fear of stigmatization, discrimination, retaliation and re-traumatization and the lack of trust among victims/survivors which prevents them reporting sexual harassment and underlined the need to frame victims/survivors as agents of change to create confidence in the system, especially in the field.

**“We have to hold institutions accountable.
We have to hold ourselves accountable.”**

Mr. Ravi Verma, Asian Regional Office, International Centre for Research on Women

Speakers emphasized the **importance of leadership and senior management** in setting the right tone and creating an environment of zero-tolerance for sexual harassment. Mr. Houinato emphasized the importance of such accountability: “if people do actions and they are very sure that the actions will have consequences, you have impact on the environment.” This was echoed by ASG Connors who stated that, especially in the field, leadership is essential in encouraging development of proactive and practical action to address sexual harassment informed by concerns and fears of victims/survivors. She emphasized that this should cascade from the top through all levels of leadership and leaders should prevent the recurrence of stigma and retaliation against personnel who report cases. As she underlined, “just saying zero tolerance isn't enough.” This was reiterated by Mr. Ravi Verma of the International Centre for Research on Women who called for holding institutions accountable. Mr. Verma suggested that safe spaces need to be created where difficult conversations on these issues can be raised, to generate critical thinking, especially among men, and tackle the norms and attitudes which provide a sense of security and culture of impunity for men in the workplace. Mr. Kallon further noted that fostering a transparent organizational culture in which personnel can have an open dialogue with leadership is needed to address issues related to sexual harassment.

“Just saying zero tolerance isn't enough.”

Ms. Jane Connors, Assistant Secretary-General and Victims' Rights Advocate

In her role as the Victims' Rights Advocate of the United Nations, ASG Jane Connors has collaborated in the development of tools, including the principles to [Advancing a Common Understanding of a Victim-centred Approach to Sexual Harassment](#), to be operationalized system-wide, and a survey to capture the experiences of victims/survivors of using an entity's informal and/or formal institutional processes to address reports of sexual harassment and ensure their feedback informs the organization's work.

ASG Connors shared the good practice of designating Victims' Rights Focal Points and the creation of Senior Victims' Rights Officers in the field who champion the rights and interests of victims/survivors. ASG Connors noted that the United Nations must base its work on the feedback of victims/survivors to learn from their experiences and develop context-specific methodologies and indicators to measure progress. ASG Lopez and Mr. Kallon stated that a collaborative and holistic effort is required to make progress in eliminating sexual harassment.

“We find that these ‘Five Ds’ of Bystander Intervention – Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay and Direct’ ... allow people to step into their own power and realize that there is something they can do when they witness sexual harassment happening.”

Ms. Emily May, Executive Director, Right To Be

Moreover, the **need to engage men and boys** to tackle sexual harassment was raised. Mr. Verma discussed the importance of structural intervention to address the power differentials and organizational hierarchies which drive sexual harassment. Mr. Verma informed participants that the International Centre for Research on Women works to intervene in spaces such as schools, universities and in sports to engage men and boys. Similarly, Ms. Emily May, Executive Director, Right To Be briefed participants on the [5Ds of bystander intervention](#), which are five strategies bystanders can use to intervene in cases of sexual harassment. She said: “We find that these ‘Five Ds’ of Bystander Intervention – Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay and Direct’ ... allow people to step into their own power and realize that there is something they can do when they witness sexual harassment happening.”



DIALOGUE EIGHT

Making zero tolerance a reality: Enhancing collaboration across the UN to foster organizational culture change and address sexual harassment

“Sexual harassment goes against the
fundamental values of the United Nations.”

– H.E. Mr. **Gianluca Greco**, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations

When

17 February 2023

Hosts

CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), and UN Women

Speakers

- **H.E. Mr. Gianluca Greco**, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations
- **Ms. Kelly T. Clements**, Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System
- **Ms. Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women
- **Ms. Unaisi Lutu Vuniwaqa**, Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security, UN Secretariat
- **Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham**, Director, Coordination Division, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- **Ms. Dyane Epstein**, Senior Coordinator, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, International Organization for Migration
- **Mr. Simon Springett**, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Moldova
- **Mr. Michael Nieset**, Partner, Heidrick & Struggles

Facilitated by **Ms. Katja Pehrman**, Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System, UN Women

Audience

Over 150 participants from the international community including UN Member States, UN entities, UN Gender Focal Points, civil society representatives, academia and private sector.

Summary

H.E. Mr. Gianluca Greco, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations expressed that he was pleased to open the event, especially given Italy's role as Vice-President of UN Women's Executive Board and in the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The Ambassador made clear that "sexual harassment goes against the fundamental values of the United Nations." As sexual harassment is a global problem impacting many workplaces, the Ambassador emphasized that we must change the culture so it can never be seen as normal.

Ambassador Greco advocated that **the UN must lead by example in achieving SDG 5 on women's empowerment and gender equality**. He highlighted the importance of cooperation across the UN system, including among implementing partners, donors, and Member States to eradicate all forms of harassment and violence. As a demonstration of Italy's dedication to tackle sexual harassment, he announced a recent contribution of 2.5 million dollars to the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, aimed at eradicating all forms of violence against women.

The Chair of the Task Force, Ms. Kelly Clements underlined that policies in place must be accompanied by a cultural shift based on trust, transparency and accountability. She stressed the need for a culture where colleagues feel empowered to speak up and report sexual misconduct. She noted that the Task Force has prioritized putting victims or survivors at the center of their efforts and has developed training materials and shared best practices to strengthen cooperation and prevent sexual harassment. She thanked the members of the Task Force for their commitment and emphasized the need for continued support to bring about necessary cultural change.

"I am a firm believer that in changing culture, increasing the representation of women is very important."

Ms. Unaisi Lutu Vuniwaqa, Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security

"A remarkable growth in the percentage of women board directors ... has changed... 'the old boys' network!"

Mr. Michael Nieset, Partner, Heidrick & Struggles

The panel emphasized that an important way to foster culture change is to **increase women's representation**, not just generally but specifically in leadership. Ms. Unaisi Lutu Vuniwaqa, Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security, said, "I am a firm believer that, in changing culture, increasing the representation of women is very important" which was echoed by the experience of Mr. Michael Nieset, Partner, Heidrick & Struggles, from the private sector: "a remarkable growth in the percentage of women board directors ... has changed... 'the old boys' network".

Ms. Vuniwaqa explained that the UN engages with Member States to **increase the number of women in their police departments and military forces**. The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) also organizes quarterly meetings to address issues related to sexual harassment, exploitation, and other misconduct, and reminds its workforce of the vital role they play in addressing these issues through bystander training and regular forums.

"Sexual harassment does not occur in a vacuum but is closely related to other expressions of power imbalances in organizational culture, including racism. Change in organizational culture therefore demands a concerted approach to address power imbalances based on respect for diversity and human rights."

Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director, Coordination Division,
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

As well as power imbalances based on gender, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs emphasized that addressing sexual harassment demands a concerted approach to **transform other power imbalances**: "sexual harassment does not occur in a vacuum but is closely related to other expressions of power imbalances in organizational culture, including racism. Change in organizational culture therefore demands a concerted approach to address power imbalances based on respect for diversity and human rights."

Fostering understanding of the organizational, rather than individual, nature of sexual harassment is crucial. To demonstrate this point, Ms. Dyane Epstein, Senior Coordinator, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, International Organization for Migration, shared a poem that was developed by the International Organization for Migration, emphasizing that the problem is a shared responsibility. She referred to an upcoming communication campaign on sexual harassment at the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It will be linked to behavior change and its impact will be measured through a baseline survey. She and Mr. Nieset also emphasized the importance of **engaging men** and men modelling behaviour to create an enabling and safe environment for all.

STRATEGIC IDEA

Sexual harassment is happening in our organization.
It is hurting the wellbeing of our people.
You might think this problem is caused by just a few people.
But it is actually caused by all of us.

We might not have suffered it. We might not have committed it.
But at some point, we have all witnessed it.

And usually, we say nothing.
We believe it's a problem for the individuals affected.
Or worse, we don't even recognize it as a problem.

In allowing sexual harassment to go unchallenged,
we enable a culture where it can thrive.
Our inaction tells the perpetrator their actions are ok.
Our inaction tells the affected individual 'this is normal'.

This must change.
And to change it, we must first learn how to recognise it. So we all know
what is and isn't ok.
We must also equip all those who want to act with the know-how and
permission to do so.
So we can have better conversations with each other.

It takes all of us to stop sexual harassment.
But it's time we learned *how* to do it.
It's time to...

Be an upstander not a bystander.

Poem produced by International Organization for Migration (IOM)
(Re-printed with permission).

Reinforcing the importance of **awareness-raising and transparent communication in multiple ways**, Mr. Simon Springett, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Moldova, described how the UNCT in Moldova focuses on building awareness and trust within the team to create safe spaces for conversations about sexual harassment: “everything that we are doing is trying to change culture, we are trying to build trust.” The UNCT created different communication tools which have been translated into different languages and disseminated through the United Nations communication groups to create awareness. A legal expert was hired to review the national legislation, public services and referral pathways, and a small joint trust fund was created to ensure that legal assistance to victims of harassment can be initiated.

**“Everything that we are doing is trying to
change culture, we are trying to build trust.”**

Mr. Simon Springett, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Moldova

Integrating sexual harassment in other strategies explicitly is essential to foster culture change and create safe working environments. Mr. Springett and Mr. Rajasingham discussed the importance of linking preventative work on sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. Mr. Springett highlighted the fact that the Moldova UNCT has included sexual harassment in the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse annual work planning as a stand-alone component. This was done to identify risks of sexual harassment and opportunities for prevention, increase the level of understanding of staff and partners, and to push forward global best practice into a response mechanism.

Mr. Rajasingham explained that the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee vision and strategy on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(PSEAH\)](#) focuses on creating lasting change in organizational culture, behaviour, and attitudes towards all forms of sexual misconduct. Mr. Springett and Ms. Epstein made clear that zero complaints of sexual harassment does not mean that no incidents have occurred. Organizations need to understand why people do not report, and to transform culture to ensure safe work environments that will ultimately prevent sexual misconduct. Additionally, Mr. Rajasingham highlighted the **importance of partnerships and collaboration** to foster a culture of respect for diversity and human rights.

Accountability is essential to prevent and end sexual harassment. Representing Heidrick & Struggles and the private sector generally, Mr. Nieset shared his personal experiences on gender inequality, advocating for diversity, equality, and women's rights in the workplace. He highlighted the phases of corporate America related to sexual harassment in the workplace and how the 2020 Sarbanes-Oxley Act addressed accountability for corporate board directors. He noted that the last ten years have represented a significant growth in the percentage of women directors on corporate boards. He emphasized the importance of leadership clearly implementing policies, such as an annual code of conduct and fostering an environment where there are "no exceptions for bad behaviors" for anyone at any level in the organization, to demonstrate that there is truly a zero-tolerance approach.

At the end of the event, on behalf of the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, Ms. Avital Rosenberg (Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations) thanked UN Women and the CEB Task Force for addressing the issue of sexual harassment. She appreciated the peer-to-peer dialogue and highlighted the importance of exploring new topics such as technology facilitated sexual harassment and cyberbullying. She encouraged Member States and UN entities to emphasize the need to address and eliminate these phenomena. She also thanked the President of the General Assembly for making the **online course on preventing sexual harassment** available to all Permanent Missions and United Nations staff.



APPENDIX: FURTHER RESOURCES

Please refer to the first publication [Making zero tolerance a reality: Peer-to-peer learning to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in the UN system and beyond](#) for the first four peer-to-peer learning dialogues and further resources on tackling sexual harassment.

In addition to the resources listed in the Appendix of the first publication, please see the [CEB Task Force Resource page on Addressing Sexual Harassment](#) and the forthcoming UN System-wide Knowledge Hub on Addressing Sexual Harassment.

Please see below the links of the recordings of the dialogues.

[DIALOGUE FIVE: Realizing zero tolerance through joint leadership: Launch of a publication on preventing and eliminating sexual harassment \(October 28, 2021\)](#). Password: ah*k.u3m

[DIALOGUE SIX: Making zero tolerance a reality: Understanding and tackling the intersectional nature of sexual harassment in cross-cultural contexts \(March 3, 2022\)](#). Password: Gr\$4%*?i

[DIALOGUE SEVEN: Making zero tolerance a reality: Tackling sexual harassment in the field and beyond \(May 26, 2022\)](#). Password: \$Y!Ri6wN

[DIALOGUE EIGHT: Making zero tolerance a reality: Enhancing collaboration across the UN to foster organizational culture change and address sexual harassment \(February 17, 2023\)](#). Password: u@88RF2u

UN Women, the UN Secretariat, OCHA,
and the CEB Task Force on Addressing
Sexual Harassment extend its warmest
appreciations to all those who participated
in the peer-to-peer learning dialogues and
looks forward to the ongoing cooperation
to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment
in the UN system and beyond.



220 East 42nd Street
New York, New York 10017, USA

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