

SUPERVISOR GUIDANCE: PREVENTION OF, AND RESPONSE TO, SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

The UN's position is clear and has been reiterated on several occasions by the Secretary-General personally and by his senior leadership: Sexual harassment in the UN is unacceptable and must be eradicated. As members of a human rights-based standard-setting institution, all personnel have the obligation to adhere to the highest professional and ethical standards enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, UN Staff Regulations and Rules, and the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service. We all have a responsibility to lead by example and respect the principles we stand for.

As a supervisor, you must always role-model the highest standards of conduct, both during and outside working hours, at work and in your personal life. In addition, you are responsible for creating a safe and harmonious working environment, free of fear, intimidation, hostility, and offence, as well as for holding personnel accountable for any form of sexual harassment. What each UN personnel does reflect not only on them personally, but also on the entire organization, on our credibility as a global institution, and on our ability to deliver on our mandate.

The following checklist aims to assist you in effectively fulfilling these important obligations:

Starting a new assignment

- I have carefully studied “**Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination and Abuse of Authority policy**”.
- I have **completed the mandatory training** on [prevention of sexual harassment](#).
- I have studied the policy on [Protection Against Retaliation](#).
- I have **studied the dedicated intranet page** on [Sexual Harassment](#).
- I have taken note of existing guidelines for [speaking with the media](#).
- I have talked to my predecessor about any challenges in the working environment in the office, risks and measures taken to ensure a harmonious workplace.

During an Assignment

- I **act as a role model** by upholding the highest standards of conduct in order to achieve a harassment-free environment.
- I take measures to ensure that **all team members have completed the mandatory training** on [prevention of Sexual Harassment](#). I explicitly hold those who do not comply accountable.
- I take steps to ensure that all staff have participated in **standard of conduct sessions** or similar activity.
- As part of regular staff meetings, at least once a year, I **remind personnel of the expected standards of conduct**, including related to sexual harassment and make them aware of available resources.
- I **bring in resource people, post notices, or share short articles** with my team on values, standards, principles and particularly on conduct prohibited in the UN.
- I **am aware of common signs of sexual harassment**, such as intimate comments that makes others uncomfortable such as sexist jokes, comments about bodily appearance or sexual experiences, showing or discussing pornographic materials or other such topics. I monitor the situation in the office for any disturbing signs and take steps to address them. I proactively call out personnel on inappropriate conduct.
- I make sure results of available **staff surveys are taken seriously and we implement measures** to ensure harmonious working environment. I make sure everyone is involved and can take part.
- I **take note of risk factors** strongly associated with sexual harassment, including an unprofessional work environment, sexist atmosphere, and lack of knowledge about UN Women's reporting and resolution process.

Regional Directors, Heads of Office and Directors of Division:

- I provide an annual certification to the Executive Director, as required under the policy, that I have shared and discussed the Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination and Abuse of Authority policy with my personnel; created an open environment where personnel can express concerns; ensured related mandatory trainings has been undertaken; and ensured that any behavior inconsistent with the policy has been expressly addressed with the personnel concerned or reported.

When you witness sexual harassment in the workplace

- I intervene promptly and reiterate the required standards of conduct.
- I take immediate action to ensure that information and assistance is provided to the affected person.

When an individual approaches you about sexual harassment in the workplace

Note: Personnel who have been exposed to a traumatic experience may exhibit emotional distress. If immediate psychological or medical support is needed, personnel will be referred to existing services and encouraged to avail themselves of the support as soon as possible.

- I treat the issue as a priority and schedule a meeting as soon as possible.
- Before the meeting, I refresh my memory regarding key content of the policy including informal and formal reporting processes and available resources and services, such as OIOS, Workplace Relations Advisor, the Ombudsman Office, UN Staff Counsellor, Medical Service, the Ethics Office, etc.
- I provide the personnel with information on available resources with regards to counselling, informal reporting, formal reporting, protection against retaliation, etc.
- During the conversation I apply the 10 principles:
 - I listen actively and respectfully to the affected person without commenting or making any judgement.
 - I take careful anonymized notes for my own records. I only put exact statements in direct quotes. I encourage the affected person to keep a written or electronic record of: the details, dates, times, circumstances of incidents; how the incident has affected them and their ability to work effectively; the names of any witnesses and/or anyone who may have relevant information; and that they should preserve any relevant documents or other potential evidence of the conduct or circumstances.
 - I am empathetic (“I understand”), not sympathetic (“I agree”). I don’t judge or take sides. I don’t offer personal opinions or speculate on the facts.
 - I inform that confidentiality will be respected to the fullest extent possible, but that general information may be provided (including the alleged perpetrator’s name) to the Workplace Relations Advisor who maintains an overview of what is happening in the organization.
 - I don’t give advice directly or comment on whether I believe their account. I let the affected person know their options and, specifically, how to use those options. I let them know they can get advice and support from staff dedicated to these issues.
 - I make sure they are aware of the [Protection Against Retaliation policy](#) and interim measures that UN Women may take following an informal or formal report.
 - I don’t make promises I cannot keep.
 - I act quickly.
 - I check whether some sort of accommodation is necessary. For example, if an affected person feels unsafe or threatened, they may want to be in a different physical location from the alleged perpetrator.
 - If I am uncertain about how to proceed, I seek advice from the Workplace Relations Advisor.
- Regardless of how the allegation is resolved, I regularly check progress and make sure there is no retaliation against the affected person.

Restoring the workplace environment after sexual harassment has occurred

- I seek advice from the Workplace Relations Advisor, including suggestions on what to tell my personnel.
- I conduct regular, as-needed “check-in” meetings, to see how things are going.
- I remind my personnel that everyone plays a role in improving and maintaining a harassment-free workplace.

When finishing the assignment

- I inform my successor about any challenges in the working environment in the office, risks and measures taken to ensure a harmonious workplace.
- I update my successor on the actions I have taken to create a workplace free from sexual harassment.

Possible effects of workplace sexual harassment

Reduced productivity. There is substantial research to show that workplace sexual harassment is associated with reduced motivation and commitment, as well as lower job satisfaction and withdrawal. The negative effects of sexual harassment are not limited to the affected persons and can also affect those who witness or hear about harassment and reduce both individual and team performance.

Behavioral Changes. In many cases, behavioral changes develop as a sign of sexual harassment. For example, an affected person may become less friendly and less open when communicating with others. They may also seem reluctant to go on missions and attend meetings, especially those that involve one-on-one interaction. Likewise, they may avoid social engagements, such as office get-togethers.

Physical and Mental Health. Sexual harassment also has a negative impact on the affected persons mental and physical health. For example, an affected person may become anxious or depressed.

Faster than usual employee turnover. Sexual harassment in the workplace is a contributing factor to employee turnover. A sign of sexual harassment in teams, can be that several team members have exited their positions after a short tenure. Affected persons may even change their career paths altogether.

Relevant documents

- *Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment Discrimination & Abuse of Authority Policy*
- *Protection Against Retaliation for Reporting Misconduct and for Cooperating with Duly Authorized Audits or Investigations Policy*
- *UNDSS Aide-Memoire for Immediate Response to Gender-Based Security Incidents (country specific)*
- *Affected Person Guidance on Sexual Harassment*
- *Alleged Perpetrator Guidance on Sexual Harassment*