



Guide for Managers

United Nations Secretariat:

Prevention of, and Response to, Sexual
Harassment in the Workplace



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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 workplace is unacceptable and must be eradicated from the UN's operations.

As members of a standard-setting institution, all UN 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 manager, you must role-model the highest standards of conduct at all times, 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 prohibited conduct. What each UN personnel member does reflects 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 mandates.

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

Checklist

1. Starting a new assignment

- I have carefully studied the [policy on “Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination and Abuse of Authority”](#) and the [policy on “Sexual Exploitation and Abuse”](#).
- I have completed the [mandatory training on prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination and Abuse of Authority](#) and on [prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#).
- I have studied the policy on [Protection from Retaliation](#) and the [Ethics Office Intranet page on protecting the whistleblower](#).
- I have studied the [dedicated intranet page\(s\) on Sexual Harassment](#) and [Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#).
- I have studied [available staff survey results on Sexual Harassment](#) for my office and the [SG’s latest report on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) and [Annex](#) (this is to be done every time there is a new GSS or SG report).
- I have taken note of existing [guidelines for speaking with the media](#) on the issue of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse.
- I have talked to my predecessor about any open and ongoing cases, as well as any challenges in the working environment in the office, risks and measures taken to ensure a harmonious workplace

2. During the assignment

- I act as a role model by upholding only 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 trainings on prevention of Sexual Harassment](#) and [Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#). I explicitly hold those who do not comply accountable.
- I take steps to ensure that all staff have participated in yearly Code of Conduct sessions or similar activity.
- As part of regular staff meetings, I remind personnel of [the expected standards of conduct](#), including related to [Sexual Harassment](#) and [Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) and make them aware of available resources. This took place within at least the last six months.
- 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 workplace harassment, such as work performance changes, behavioral issues, attendance changes or overall tension (see Annex 1). I monitor the situation in the office for any disturbing signs. I proactively call out personnel on unacceptable conduct and encourage others to do the same.
- 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 takes part, as relevant.

- I make sure that work practices in my office are gender-sensitive and conducive to general well-being (e.g., no meetings after working hours; sufficient notice is given before events outside of the working hours so that personnel have time to make arrangements for care, as needed; personnel are aware of flexibility policies, and use them appropriately; personnel take care of their well-being, e.g. take leave, etc.).
- I take note of risk factors strongly associated with sexual harassment, including unprofessional work environment, sexist atmosphere, and lack of knowledge about the organization's reporting and resolution procedures.¹
- I make sure there are Focal Points to coordinate and support work in this area.

3. When you witness sexual harassment in the workplace

- I intervene promptly and reiterate the required standards of conduct.
- I take prompt action to report the issue to the concerned authority and facilitate resolution, as appropriate.
- I take action to ensure that immediate assistance is provided to the alleged victim as needed.

4. When a staff member approaches you/reports sexual harassment in the workplace

Note: If a staff member has been exposed to a traumatic event (e.g., sexual violence), I follow the [traumatic incident protocol](#) for my agency (i.e., immediately contact security, medical and counselling services for further assistance).

- 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](#) ; [internal reporting procedures](#) ; and [available resources and services](#), such as the respective investigation body, the Ombudsman Office, HR/ Staff Counsellor, Medical Service, the Ethics Office, Staff Representative bodies.
- During the conversation I apply the *10 principles* (see Annex 2).
- I provide the staff member with information on [available resources](#) with regards to counselling, informal resolution, formal resolution, protection against retaliation, etc.
- Regardless of how the allegation is resolved, I regularly check progress and make sure there is no retaliation against the complainant.

5. Restoring the workplace environment after harassment has occurred

- I seek advice from the investigators and specialists, including suggestions on what to tell my personnel.
- I conduct regular, as-needed “check-in” meetings, to see how things are going.

¹ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1018769016832>

- I remind my personnel that everyone plays a role in improving and maintaining a harassment-free workplace.

6. When finishing the assignment

- I inform my successor about any open and ongoing cases.
- I update my successor on the actions I have taken to: create a workplace free from sexual harassment and prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.
- I update my successor about any risk assessments done and issues to be mindful of.

Annex 1

Possible signs of workplace harassment²

- Work Performance Changes.** Often, a victim of harassment exhibits performance changes. For example, a person may have trouble focusing on his work or meeting deadlines. He may also submit sloppy or disorganized work or fail to meet goals altogether. Decision-making and problem-solving skills may deteriorate as well.
- Behavioral Issues.** In many cases, behavioral changes develop as a sign of workplace harassment. For example, a person may become less friendly and open when communicating with other staff members. She may also seem reluctant to attend meetings, especially those that involve one-on-one interaction. Likewise, she may avoid social engagements, such as office parties.
- Attendance Changes.** If a previously punctual and reliable worker suddenly develops a habit of showing up late for work, this may be a sign of harassment on the job. Likewise, an increase in work absences may indicate such issues. This sign may prove particularly telling if accompanied by physical signs of stress, such as frequent headaches, upset stomach and fatigue.
- Overall Tension.** Sometimes an entire workplace can become affected by harassment. In such a case, the harassing behaviors of some staff members or supervisors may cause the environment to seem tense overall. Communication problems might also develop as a result of the harassment, and morale may appear lower than usual. Additionally, harassment may even cause an increase in the rate of worker turnover.

² Source: <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/signs-symptoms-harassment-11837.html>

Annex 2

The 10 Principles to follow

when someone approaches you with a complaint³

1. Listen actively and respectfully to the complaint.
2. Take careful notes for your own records. Put only exact statements in direct quotes. Suggest that the complainant keep careful notes and any material evidence, such as e-mail or letters.
3. Be empathetic (“I understand”), not sympathetic (“I agree”). Don’t judge or take sides. Don’t offer personal opinions or speculate on the facts. Once you have the facts, then you will be in a position to make a managerial judgment about the situation.
4. Inform that confidentiality will be respected to the extent possible, but make it clear you are required to respond to the situation and that some procedures foreseen in the organization’s policy make it necessary that other people on a “need to know” basis will be informed. For example, within the formal process the Office that is responsible for investigations.
5. Don’t give advice directly. Let the complainants know their options and, specifically, how to use those options. Let them know they can get advice and support from staff dedicated to these issues.
6. Make sure they know they will be protected from retaliation.
7. Don’t make promises you cannot keep.
8. Act quickly.
9. Check whether some sort of accommodation is necessary. For example, if a complainant feels unsafe or threatened, they may want to be in a different physical location from the alleged perpetrator.
10. If you are uncertain about how to proceed, you can seek advice from your supervisor, HR manager or from the list of resources available in your organization.

³ The “10 Principles” are taken from the UN training course “Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Abuse by United Nations Personnel – Working Harmoniously”.

Glossary

- Policy on Prohibition of discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority (<https://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2008/5>)
- Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (<https://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2003/13>)
- Mandatory training on SEA (<https://iseek.un.org/article/New-efforts-launched-prevent-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>)
- Policy on protection from retaliation (<https://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2017/2/Rev.1>) and Ethics Office Intranet page on protecting the whistleblower (<https://www.un.org/en/ethics/protection.shtml>)
- Intranet Page on sexual harassment (<https://iseek.un.org/sexualharassment>)
- Intranet Page on SEA (<https://iseek.un.org/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>) and Public Website on SEA (<https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/>)
- Staff survey results on sexual harassment (<https://iseek.un.org/article/secretary-general-shares-results-safe-space-survey>)
- Latest Secretary-General's report on SEA (<https://undocs.org/en/A/73/744>) and Annex (https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/sites/www.un.org.preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/files/data_annexes_to_the_sgs_special_measures_report_20190318.pdf)
- Guidelines for speaking with the media (https://iseek.un.org/webpgdept580_9)
- Mandatory training on sexual harassment (<https://iseek.un.org/article/new-mandatory-online-course-prevention-sexual-harassment>)
- Mandatory training on SEA (<https://iseek.un.org/article/New-efforts-launched-prevent-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>)
- Expected standards of conduct (Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service? <https://icsc.un.org/Resources/General/Publications/standardsE.pdf> or Putting Ethics to Work: A Guide for UN Staff? https://www.un.org/en/ethics/pdf/putting_ethics_to_work_en.pdf or Status Rights and Duties of United Nations Staff Members? <https://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2016/9>)
- Key messages on sexual harassment (<https://iseek.un.org/sexualharassment>) and SEA (<https://iseek.un.org/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>)
- Traumatic accident protocol (<https://emergency.un.org/Emergency-Preparedness-A-Guide-for-United-Nations-Personnel-in-New-York.pdf>)
- Key content of the policy: Sexual Harassment policy (<https://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2008/5>) and SEA policy (Special Measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (<https://undocs.org/ST/SGB/2003/13>))
- Internal reporting procedures for sexual harassment (https://iseek.un.org/system/files/sexual_harassment_fact_sheet-2_feb2018-web5.pdf) and for SEA for UN field missions (<https://conduct.unmissions.org/report-now>) and Office of Internal Oversight Services (<https://oios.un.org/page?slug=reporting-wrongdoing>)
- Summary of available resources for sexual harassment (<https://iseek.un.org/sexualharassment>) and SEA (<https://iseek.un.org/department/office-special-coordinator-improving-un-response-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse> & <https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/>)