WHO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE – PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

STRATEGY
As the UN specialized agency with the primary objective for all peoples to attain the highest possible level of health, WHO prohibits sexual exploitation and abuse. WHO has established and continues to strengthen mechanisms to prevent, and respond to any SEA incident.

SEA violates universally recognized international legal norms and standards, and WHO considers such acts as serious misconduct. WHO staff members and collaborators shall work and behave in beneficiary countries in a manner that respects and fosters the rights of the people they serve. For this reason, and because there is often a significant power differential in the interactions between WHO staff and collaborators and the beneficiary populations, staff must be vigilant and rigorously refrain from any action that may suggest or imply that a sexual act may be demanded as a condition for protection, material assistance or service.

WHO staff, partners and collaborators have a duty to report any act of SEA they may have witnessed, or become aware of, to WHO through the Integrity Hotline (or by contacting The Ethics team in the Office of Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics directly). Staff are protected against retaliation (see policy on Whistleblowing and Protection against Retaliation). WHO is committed to taking prompt action to treat such cases as a priority. This includes investigating the case, collaborating with relevant national authorities for criminal proceedings, and taking appropriate disciplinary sanctions, including summary dismissal.
VISION

WHO is a workplace characterized by integrity, accountability, independence, impartiality, respect and professional commitment. These are the fundamental principles documented in the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

The ethical principles apply to WHO staff members and collaborators. WHO strives to provide a safe environment for people to speak up when they are concerned that the principles of the Organization may have been broken. WHO has engaged in a communication campaign to make our zero tolerance position regarding sexual exploitation and abuse visible, and to ensure that action is taken where applicable.

The aim of this strategy is twofold:

1. to reinforce the prevention of SEA across the Organization, by fostering WHO’s ethical principles, embedded in practices that give life to our commitment, and ensure that all levels of staff understand their roles and responsibilities should they be confronted by an SEA incident during the course of their professional life.

2. Ensure that any SEA incident is responded to with diligence, tact and determination, with the people directly affected at the centre of WHO’s response.

“Sexual exploitation and abuse has no place in any Organization. Our Integrity Hotline can be used by staff and the people we work with and for around the world to raise confidential concerns of unethical behaviour.”

DR. TEDROS, DIRECTOR-GENERAL

1 Collaborators are defined as individuals who work for WHO as non-staff members including consultants, holders of Agreements for Performance of Work (APW), Technical Services Agreement (TSA) holders, Special Service Agreements (SSA) or letters of agreement, Temporary Advisers, Interns, and Volunteers, as well as third party entities such as vendors, contractors or technical partners who have a contractual relationship with WHO.
GOAL

To strengthen efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse by our own staff and to provide support to those who experience it and protection to those that report it.
OBJECTIVES

Our objectives are to

1. Ensure that all WHO staff, collaborators and local populations have access to WHO mechanisms to report SEA, raise concerns, and receive confidential advice to make informed decisions as to how to proceed, with a good understanding of processes and recourses available.

2. Mainstream internal mechanisms to ensure seamless treatment of all SEA cases that are reported, diligent action to investigate and to support people directly affected by SEA.

3. Protect people who report SEA, by recognizing the difficulties and challenges faced by people reporting, and by ensuring their concerns are responded to, over time, and as their situation evolves.

4. Investigate SEA incidents as a priority.

5. Raise awareness and train staff in order to build confidence for people to speak up and report incidents.

6. Maintain transparency and accountability at the highest levels of the Organization.

Our communication campaign aims to:

1. Strengthen efforts preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by our own staff and to provide support to those who experience it and protection to those that report it.

2. Promote (internally and externally) WHO’s policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation, abuse, unethical behaviour and abuse of authority and our commitment to stop these abhorrent behaviours.

3. Support managers, staff and partners to prevent unwanted behaviours.

4. Raise awareness (particularly with our beneficiaries) of what behaviours to expect when dealing with a WHO employee or partner.

5. Build trust with survivors to encourage reporting.
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

(as relates to WHO’s work to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse)
KEY ACTIONS AND PHASES

1. ESTABLISH POLICY
   - Availability of policy on WHO’s intranets at all levels of the Organization

2. MANDATORY TRAINING
   - Roll out the UN online mandatory training to all staff

3. ENSURE REPORTING MECHANISMS ARE KNOWN, WIDELY ACCESSIBLE AND TRUSTED
   - 24/7 independent hotline

4. RAISE AWARENESS
   - Communication material for staff across the Organization
   - Communication material to inform WHO collaborators and partner organizations of this policy, including measures such as introducing a specific clause relating to SEA and the external Integrity Hotline in standard contractual agreements

5. ENSURE PEOPLE WHO REPORT SEA ARE SAFE AND PROTECTED
   - Implement policy on Whistleblowing and Protection from Retaliation
   - Implement measures to protect survivors and witnesses of SEA

6. INVESTIGATE SEA INCIDENTS AS A PRIORITY
   - Systematic referral to ethics to protect people fearing retaliation at any stage of the process
   - Effective handling of SEA investigations and related disciplinary measures

7. ENSURE EMPOWERMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE WORKFORCE, AND MANAGERS
   - Background checks
   - Measures such as introducing a specific clause relating to SEA and the external Integrity Hotline in standard contractual agreements with WHO collaborators and partner organizations
   - Provide guidance on SEA to staff and managers
   - Training programme on SEA

8. ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY
   - Strengthen capacity on SEA
   - Monitor vetting and reference checking mechanisms
   - Evaluate and review SEA policies and procedures