

Prevention and response to sexual misconduct WHO Stakeholder Review Conference 2023



World Health
Organization

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Prevention and response to sexual misconduct: WHO Stakeholder Review Conference 2023

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Abbreviations

CAPSEAH	Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment
FEMNET	The African Women’s Development and Communication Network
PRSEAH	preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
PSEA	Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
PSEAH	Protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
SEAH	sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

1 The conference in a nutshell

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been on a steep learning curve in our journey to address sexual misconduct by our workforce. In 2023, we launched a three-year strategy to make zero tolerance for sexual misconduct a hallmark of our Organization, where no victim of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment goes unheard or unsupported, no perpetrator goes unpunished, no workforce member has any excuse for sexual misconduct or inaction against it, and no implementing partner is exempt from meeting our standards. In that strategy we make ten commitments. The ninth commitment is to collaborate closely with and contribute to system-wide action with the UN and humanitarian systems, governments, and civil society. The tenth commitment is to develop and implement systems for monitoring and evaluation, learning and sharing of experiences. These two commitments were the basis of convening, on 30 November and 1 December 2023, the first ever annual WHO Stakeholder Review Conference for Prevention and Response to Sexual Misconduct.

The big idea of the conference acknowledged that we all have a lot to learn and that the journey to achieving zero tolerance is a collaborative one that requires honest reflection, joint learning, and co-creation of solutions for use across the development and humanitarian sectors. WHO also wanted to celebrate the progress we had made and show gratitude towards our many partners and stakeholders who supported us during the past two years. WHO also decided to integrate into the conference our regular quarterly Member States Briefing on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PRSEAH), so that our stakeholders could also participate. WHO also planned a social engagement segment on the evening of Day 1 in order to further underscore a victim and survivor-centred approach, celebrate progress however small, and reaffirm commitment and renew energy for the journey ahead.



WHO's first Annual Stakeholder Review Conference for the prevention and response to sexual misconduct, 30 November - 1 December 2023, Geneva, Switzerland. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy

With these objectives in mind, WHO convened a diverse array of stakeholders, including UN leaders and agency representatives, humanitarian actors, civil society, Member States, donors, academics, and experts, to explore best practices, address challenges collaboratively, and foster a learning mindset. The aim was to create a safe and creative space for key stakeholders to retrospectively examine best practices, identify concrete actions for addressing complex challenges, and enhance partnerships and approaches to ensure zero tolerance within WHO.

Within WHO, the outputs of the conference will be one of the data inputs that will feed into the Year 2 implementation plan of our three-year strategy, which will be launched in January 2024.

The conference, which was held at WHO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland was attended by 140 participants in person, and recorded a further 1751 in sessions attendance virtually. There were 43 speakers organized into 10 sessions using a variety of methodologies such as case studies, presentations, round tables, panel discussions, lightning rounds and virtual feedback and participation enabled by the virtual interactivity platform Slido.

This report summarizes the sessions and records the main ideas, questions and recommendations that emerged in the two-day event, as produced by conference rapporteurs and facilitators.



High-level summary of recommendations from the WHO’s first Annual Stakeholder Review Conference for the prevention and response to sexual misconduct. © Credit WHO/M. Frigo

2 Opening session



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization launches the WHO Stakeholder Review Conference 2023.
© Credit WHO/P. Albouy

Highlights of the Opening Remarks¹ by Dr Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus, WHO Director- General.

When WHO started accelerating our work to address sexual misconduct in 2021, I committed to the highest level of internal and external scrutiny and transparency, as I indicated earlier. This conference contributes to that commitment by bringing together a range of key stakeholders and more than 1500 members of the WHO workforce from around the world. We welcome scrutiny, both internal and external, because we know that we still have a long way to go and a lot to learn – from our experiences on the ground, and from each other.

¹ The full text of the Director-General's remarks is available on the WHO website, here: <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-remarks-at-the-annual-stakeholder-review-conference-for-the-prevention-and-response-to-sexual-misconduct-30-november-2023>

The conference is also an opportunity for WHO colleagues and me to learn from the progress that you are making. We are grateful for all of you who have come together to provide your time and expertise. Preventing and responding to sexual misconduct by our own personnel and our implementing partners is essential to all our organizations. It is by definition complex, and it demands that we get our own houses in order and work together at the same time.

I appreciate the participation of Christian Saunders and Jane Connors from the UN Secretary-General's leadership team, as well as our Member States, and all stakeholders taking part today.

And Christian and Jane have been supporting us all along – my respect and my appreciation. I thank each of you who have made the effort and shown courage to join this difficult but important conversation.

The most dangerous thing is the status quo. We must continue to challenge ourselves, and to ask how we can improve. This is not something we do alone. It is something that we do together with our Member States and partners. I thank Member States for their inputs into our policy and the sexual misconduct accountability framework.

Thank you all for your participation in this conference, and for your partnership in our shared journey to make zero tolerance a reality, and not just a slogan. Partnership is at the heart of everything WHO does. We work closely with many or all of you to promote, provide and protect health around the world. We believe that the best way to truly protect the communities with which we work is through shared responsibility, with shared assessment of risks and shared support.

But one thing I would like to underline before I close is that we are just starting. There is more to do, especially in this area. It's a very, very serious issue. We should not believe that we have done a lot. We have not. We are just starting. And we are ready to learn from you. Please do not hold back. Give us all that you can give us so that we can improve. I would suggest a very candid discussion during these two days. Help us move as family, whether it's the UN, Member States, civil society, all of us to move forward.



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General and Dr Gaya M. Gamhewage, Director Prevention of and Response to Sexual Misconduct, World Health Organization at the opening session. © Credit WHO/P. Albouy

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Session 1: where are we in the journey to zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment?

Speakers

Christian Saunders	Special Coordinator on Improving the UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
Jane Connors	Victims' Rights Advocate for the United Nations
Eugene Kongnyuy	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Director Humanitarian Contexts
Amer Delic	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Senior Policy Advisor
Alexandra Hileman	International Organization for Migration, Project Coordinator for Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)-Community Based Complaints Mechanism (CBCM)
Ivana Chapčáková	United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Child Protection Specialist
Natalia Macdonald	World Food Programme, Senior Advisor.

Moderator

Gaya Gamhewage	WHO Director for Prevention and Response to Sexual Misconduct
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Key ideas

- **Collaborate and learn together:** Director Gamhewage set the stage by underscoring the principles of collaboration, learning and mutual accountability as key ideas that should be respected throughout the conference. She said that, although WHO was clearly the “new kid on the block” of work to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, the Organization acknowledged that it was part of the global ecosystem for preventing and responding to sexual misconduct and that each stakeholder at the conference had an impact on the others.
- **Recognize global challenges:** Recounting progress, Christian Saunders highlighted increased visibility and awareness across the UN system and civil society, a renewed and expanded team to give more support to UN at headquarters and field level, and the development of a toolkit for managers. He listed key challenges that exist across the system and emphasized the need for advocacy at the highest levels so that the work could be adequately resourced. He advocated for a broader safeguarding approach to be taken, the need to tackle culture and behaviour change, the importance of being open, frank and transparent and of ensuring accountability of perpetrators. He congratulated WHO for bringing down investigation times and ended by calling for the needs of the most vulnerable of the community to be addressed. He also mentioned the need for the use of a common framework with governments.
- **Address gaps in support for victims and survivors:** Jane Connors acknowledged the progress on victims’ rights, including the newly adopted Victims’ Rights statement and the steady progress in policies and putting victims in the forefront. However, she highlighted remaining challenges and the need for a paradigm shift from charity to a rights approach. Among those challenges were that victims had the right to be treated with respect, to be heard, to information, privacy, and protection; child safeguarding, which required more attention; the reality that the UN provided (only) modest resources; child paternity claims, with the mothers often being children themselves; the need to engage leadership and the need to translate aspirations into reality where we all enjoy respect and dignity. She said the biggest challenge was the practical support for victims on the ground.
- **Reform survivor support:** Eugene Kongnyuy recapped the package of assistance provided by WHO and delivered by UNFPA to 115 survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and emphasized that it needed to be reviewed. Key lessons learnt included the need for assessments to identify the needs of the survivor: medical assistance – based on the clinical management of rape and part of the minimum package of assistance – was not enough as survivors needed the full level and spectrum of care. “In delivering psychosocial care, we are encountering issues as victims are asking for the status of the investigation,” he said. Other lessons included (i) the need to provide capacity building for implementing partners; (ii) the need to review the entire support package, as at times the victim had been exposed to a higher level of living standards via the perpetrator and then once the perpetrator left the living standards decreased; and (iii) challenges with legal support.
- **Use good practice for prevention and response:** Amer Delic highlighted three good practices by UNHCR. In the area of adopting a **victim-centred approach**, the agency had strategic and action plans as well as support functions and advice, the ‘not only me’ app, and focused on safe spaces for survivors. In the domain of **learning and development**, UNHCR had recalibrated their learning to move away from a compliance approach to a more participatory approach and rolled out the programme globally. In **strengthening partnerships**, UNHCR had pushed for greater localization, and increased working with local partners. He also cited the UN Partner tools for managing the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse from implementing partners as another good example of best practice.

- **Tailor Training:** Alexandra Hileman focused on training and capacity development for PSEA work and stressed the need for context-specific training, the importance of shared responsibility, and challenges in retaining institutional knowledge, especially as the area saw a high turnover of personnel. She also highlighted the need to professionalize the area of work and to have realistic exit strategies for personnel.
- **Use common frameworks and evidence-based approaches:** Ivana Chapčáková highlighted the work UNICEF was doing to strengthen work with governments, the UN and partners, including a clause in cooperation agreements that would bring together all entities under an overarching framework. She cautioned that the implementation of the framework would require technical expertise, resources and support. She said that UNICEF was delivering results through an evidence-based approach to PSEA work with children, and had tools to help deliver this approach.
- **Manage risks posed by implementing partners:** Natalia Macdonald focused on the common and collective approach across the UN to managing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) risks posed by implementing partners (IP) and highlighted the significance of the UN protocol on the same. She described how the Implementing Partners Protocol working group had digitized the tool, developed trainings, and related recourses for agencies' use. She said that challenges remained in rolling out the tool and conducting the two-fold assessments and capacity building.



Christian Saunders, Special Coordinator on Improving the UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, outlines progress and challenges for addressing sexual misconduct across the UN and humanitarian sectors. © Credit WHO/P. Albouy

Discussion

The issue of engaging leadership was a common theme in this session; when asked how this issue could best be addressed, the following ideas were generated:

- Address underlying issues, dismantle the patriarchy, talk more about the issue, institutionalize the work
- Move from charity to rights
- Leadership and supporting national governments
- Transparency and accountability
- Strengthen accountability
- Keeping the survivors at the centre of everything we do. Learn and listen to the survivors and community.

SLIDO question: expected challenges for 2024

Participants shared their expected challenges for 2024 in preventing and responding to sexual misconduct, summarized below.

- **Sustainable funding:** the need for sustained funding to uphold effective global prevention and response initiatives.
- **Accountability:** there was strong consensus on leaders taking swift actions, encouraging reporting, and establishing a responsive and accountable system.
- **Cultural shifts:** acknowledgment of cultural barriers, emphasizing the need for a sustained effort to address bystander culture and foster a shift in attitudes.
- **Integration and collaboration:** strong advocacy for mainstreaming prevention efforts, collaborating with government agencies, and adopting a unified UN approach.
- **Global vs. field implementation:** concerns were raised about the disparity between global progress and field-level implementation, emphasizing the need for effective translation and grassroots policy application.

Session quotes

“The most dangerous thing is the status quo. We must continue to challenge ourselves, and to ask how we can improve. This is not something we do alone.”

“Strong leadership is required – there is a lot of lip service, this is the cost of doing business and needs to be resourced.”

“Victims are empowered when they know their rights.”

“We have got a lot further by doing things a little more thoughtfully.”

Recommendations

1. **Demand leadership and resources for addressing sexual misconduct:** leadership is key to moving the needle forward and directly linked to allocating the resources to do what needs to be done.
2. **Review and reform our approach and our services for victims and survivors:** shift from a charity to rights approach and review the current inadequate package of support provided to victims.
3. **Collaborate and cooperate better:** build on good practice for collaboration in the areas of engaging governments, managing risks posed by implementing partners, developing more context-specific trainings and use of common tools and frameworks. Mainstream prevention efforts, collaborating with government agencies, and adopting a unified UN approach.

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Session 2: role of Member States in preventing and responding to sexual misconduct

Chair

Catharina Boehme

WHO Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Governance

Moderator

Peter Taylor

Head of the Safeguarding Unit at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Speakers

Sumitra Gautam

Chief Consultant Obstetric Gynaecologist, Paropakar Maternity and Women's Hospital, Nepal

Manneheng Sefeane

Director for Legal Affairs in the Ministry of Public Service, Lesotho

Konrad Witek

Deputy Director for Research and Implementation, Ministry of Sport, Poland

Al-Moatasem Mohammed Al Maamari

Specialist-Psychiatry, Oman

Rubayita Hodari Claude

Sexual and gender-based violence monitoring and evaluation officer, RBC/Maternal, Child and Community Health, Rwanda

Nadeen Hilal

Advisor to the Minister of Public Health, Lebanon

Awil Djama

Director for Family Health, Somalia

Key ideas

- **Poland:** Konrad Witek unveiled a project for Ukrainian children that involved training over 900 coaches and teachers to recognize and respond to sexual abuse. Plans included a pamphlet on sexual exploitation and abuse awareness.
- **Rwanda:** Rubayita Hodari Claude highlighted a comprehensive strategy, including the “Feel at Home” training model, providing holistic support for survivors with a focus on a multidisciplinary approach.
- **Lebanon:** Nadeen Hilal shared Lebanon’s journey, addressing sexual harassment through legal reforms, services for victims, and advocacy for sex education, despite societal challenges.
- **Oman:** Al-Moatasem Mohammed Al Maamari stressed transparency as a tool to address sexual misconduct. He said that Oman’s comprehensive child protection law, emphasizing transparency, had significantly increased reporting.
- **Nepal:** Sumitra Gautam highlighted statistics and challenges in Nepal, emphasizing the need to empower women through awareness, legal frameworks, and integrating prevention and response to sexual misconduct into health initiatives.
- **Lesotho:** Manneheng Sefeane discussed Lesotho’s efforts to address gender-based violence in the workplace, with ongoing legal reforms and collaboration with the UN on guidelines.
- **United Kingdom:** Peter Taylor introduced the Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (CAPSEAH), emphasizing collaboration, awareness, and safe workspaces. CAPSEAH aimed to guide collective action against SEAH and all participants were invited to use the related online consultation platform to provide comments on the current version of the tool.



Peter Taylor, United Kingdom, and Dr Catharina Boehme, WHO Assistant Director-General for External Relations, facilitate the session on the Role of Member States in the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Misconduct. © Credit WHO/P. Albouy

Discussion

- Collaboration was key; Member States commit to working together at every level.
- Policy lead to strategy; Rwanda's model was highlighted.
- Transparency was crucial for change; there was a need to embrace feeling uncomfortable to drive transparency.
- Focus on prevention, cultural issues, and societal challenges.
- CAPSEAH could better facilitate alliance, coordination and accountability.
- Recognizing linkages between gender-based violence, inequality, and sexual exploitation abuse and harassment was crucial.
- Focus on prevention, especially programming and risk assessments.

Slido question: what more do you think Member States can do to jointly address SEAH/sexual misconduct with UN and humanitarian agencies?

- **Institutionalization and collaboration**
Participants highlighted the importance of institutionalizing prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PRSEAH) across governments. Collaboration with the UN, humanitarian agencies, and civil society organizations was seen as crucial for preventing sexual exploitation at the community level.
- **Capacity building and harmonization**
Participants stressed the need for joint coordination mechanisms and capacity building, ensuring transparency. Capacity building at various levels of government was highlighted, emphasizing the harmonization of approaches and support at the national and field levels.
- **Survivor-centred approach**
Suggestions included establishing mechanisms that survivors trust, adhering to a survivor-centred approach, and defining and implementing survivor-centred actions.
- **Legal measures and accountability**
Recommendations involved including PRSEAH in national laws and policies, implementing standard accountability measures, and consistently prosecuting cases. The emphasis on a sex offender public register and a code of conduct was noted for increased accountability.
- **Collective responsibility**
Calls for collective responsibility, holding each other accountable, and aligning on definitions of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) demonstrated the need for a unified and coordinated effort. The push for institutionalizing safeguarding in all entities and proper resourcing was underlined for comprehensive implementation.

Session quotes

- | “We need to feel uncomfortable to make a change so we need to be transparent.”
- | “Now we need to move into space where we are not the perpetrators.”
- | “We should not work in silos – to get the most impact.”
- | “We will all work on this every step of the way at every level, country, and operation.”



Representatives of WHO's Member States describe best practices by their governments. © Credit WHO/P. Albouy

Recommendations

1. Advocate for all Member States and their government entities to join the development and for humanitarian actors' efforts to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct, acknowledging and at the same time appreciating the differences between sexual misconduct/SEAH and gender-based violence.
2. Use, document and communicate existing practice and Member States who are already engaged as the lever to engage others, and support Member State-led round table discussions to plot next steps.
3. Use harmonized frameworks and consider CAPSEAH as a unifying framework that addresses both sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, sets out standards and accountabilities of all stakeholders including Member States.

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Session 3: role of civil society

Speakers

Claudine Tsongo Dynamique des Femmes Juristes*

Kalkidan Lakew Women in Global Health*

Caitlin Cadet RISE US NOW*

Memory Kachambwa African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET)*

Moderator

Ann Keeling, Women in Global Health*

Key ideas

- **Power is in the hands of perpetrators:** Ann Keeling, as moderator, pointed to the fact that power was currently in the hands of perpetrators. She stressed that there could be no excuses for sexual misconduct and recalled that its effects had lifelong consequences. She mentioned that Women in Global Health have 54 chapters in as many countries, and the work was grounded on those chapters, and spoke of a consultation with civil society on PSEAH organizations that Women in Global Health had organized with COSAMED (Conseil sur la Santé et l'Académie de Médecine, based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) the previous month.
- **Provide legal aid:** Claudine Tsongo, who ran a women-led legal aid organization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with whom WHO collaborated, talked about the challenges of addressing sexual misconduct by aid workers at the community level. She said her organization had established legal clinics led by women lawyers, who intervened to help women when there were situations of violence (not only sexual violence). Her teams were in the community and tried to make women aware of existing standards, laws and norms. She also highlighted a project to help 26 women victims, 17 of whom had become pregnant, all of whom were still waiting to have their rights realized as the trials were still ongoing. She said that investigations had started late, when the perpetrators were no longer there, and the victims/survivors were trying to lead a normal life again.

- Listen to civil society to find actions that work:** Kalkidan Lakew spoke of a consultation convened by Women in Global Health in October 2023 with 105 participants, including 42 civil society organizations, from more than 50 countries. She pointed out the critical roles that civil society organizations played in PSEA, from community to global levels, and that they could do more. However, progress was slowed down at the national legal level as legal procedures and follow up (at national level) could be challenging and slow. Women were rarely the perpetrators; gender-equal leadership was needed across all levels. She identified sensitization of communities, avoiding repetitive actions, working with women-led organizations for the discussions with victims and survivors, and using women community health workers in community reporting mechanisms as effective practice. She said that while they focused on quick wins, long term cultural change was especially important, with sustained civil society engagement. Finally, she mentioned the power of stories and testimonies and that Women in Global Health had collected a huge amount of data from women health workers.
- Build a community of survivors to pass their own legislation:** Caitlin Cadet recounted the work done by a survivor-led organization to advocate for and create legislation including authoring and advocating for the US Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights Act. She pointed out that part of the healing was for victims and survivors to draft and pass their own laws. Civil society was the watchdog for all levels of government, but the challenge was to find each other and coordinate and find the resources for this important work.
- Consult women's organizations from the start,** and not just to mine information: Memory Kachambwa, who described the work of FEMNET, said that the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse was like the house that most Member States and the UN were building, with beautiful policies and tool kits that were progressive, yet the women's rights movement, who were working to end sexual exploitation and abuse, were outside. She mentioned the struggle in some Member States in the African Region on women's reproductive health rights. She said that civil society organizations were a watchdog aligned with a feminist perspective and should be consulted holistically and meaningfully, and not seen as just a source of information. She called for more forums – like the Conference – in which civil society organizations had a voice on a range of issues from policy to practice.



Civil society leaders outline challenges faced by victims and survivors, and propose expanded roles for civil society in the prevention and response to sexual misconduct. © Credit WHO/P. Albouy

Discussion

The discussion focused on four questions:

1. What one thing would you most like to change to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct?

- National and regional level coordination to avoid duplication. Leveraging the convening power of the UN/WHO.
- Sustainable funding mechanism for civil society for work to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.
- A seat at the table to discuss and develop policy and have the voices of survivors in the room.
- Localization agenda for prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse will help civil society to have more accountability.
- Equal partnership.
- Solidarity.
- More activists and advocates in UN and Members States to speak up and speak out.
- Registers for offenders in countries.
- More investments in the referral pathways that really work.
- Speak to the backlash to women's rights that are rolled back and support body autonomy.
- Creating safe spaces and being bolder.

2. How can we engage leadership in prevention of sexual misconduct? Whose leadership is critical in this space?

- Bold leadership and accountability mechanisms. Example: WHO when the case happened, then action was taken.
- Rethink how we define leaders, and recognize community leadership with the survivors, women, and communities. They will decide to participate and contribute to changes. At community level, it will reduce exposure and vulnerabilities.
- Leadership within civil-society organizations, led by women, could be spaces for creation and cocreation.
- Need visibility and data in the life of the community, and/or organization.
- Leaders must be accountable.
- Leadership from the very top level. At UN level, Sierra Leone and Japan had led for the UN resolution. First follower role is also important.
- Need political will from Member States and UN entities.
- Building a coalition of Member States. Requires a leader at the most senior level that cares and puts resources into it.
- Leaders should adopt a zero-tolerance approach and should start shifting the narrative.
- Need policy coherence, need leaders who are able to make these linkages.
- Leaders who have a feminist foreign policy agenda/approach.

3. What do you most need from the UN agencies and Member States sitting here?

- We need resources and solidarity; we need the investment; Member States to prioritize PSEA activities in their budgets. So much can change.
- Resources to tackle the root causes that the feminist movement has been asking for; support the front line who do the work.
- Looking at our work in the field, we need resources and UN agencies to prioritise in their programmes access to justice. If justice is effective, it is a great pillar for prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- UN agencies make their bureaucracies more flexible. Investigations should happen very swiftly.
- Civil society to use UN General Assembly Resolution 76/304 on access to justice for reparation and resources as a tool, adopted by all Member States.
- International cooperation for access to justice for remedies.
- Models of safe UN organizations/spaces (like WHO) whose example others should follow.

4. How can civil society organizations and governments reinforce/complement each other?

- More joint programming, collective action.
- Platforms for listening to each other and safe spaces for listening and transparency.
- Coordination for activities to complement each other and fill gaps where they exist.
- Deep listening, Survivor town halls, not officials speaking. Victims spoke about what they need. These (like the Conference) type of forums.
- Opportunities to lead with joy for resistance, healing, and recovery.
- Celebrate resilience. Opportunities that are inviting.
- Women in Global Health organizing town halls on collective actions and responsibilities.
- Sexual misconduct should be the collective responsibility of everyone in the room.
- If you have collective mentality, we can work together towards a common goal in eliminating sexual misconduct.



Memory Kachambwa, representing African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET) advocates for civil society organizations to have a seat at the table at all stages of prevention and response to sexual misconduct, from policy to practice. © Credit WHO/P. Albouy

Slido question: role of civil society. What unique role can civil society organizations play to jointly address sexual misconduct by developmental and humanitarian workers?

A word cloud that represents participants' answers to this question is shown in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1 Word cloud: the role of civil society in addressing sexual misconduct

Session quotes

- | “Power is currently in the hands of perpetrators.”
- | “Access to justice is not supported enough, and yet it is indispensable.”
- | “Women are rarely the perpetrators; gender equal leadership is needed across all levels.”
- | “Ending impunity is a deterrent.”
- | “PSEA is like the house most Member States and UN build, with beautiful policies and tool kits that are progressive, yet the women’s right movements, who work to end sexual exploitation and abuse, are outside.”
- | “We need opportunities to lead with joy’ for resilience, healing, and recovery.”

Recommendations

- 1. Create equal partnership with civil society for addressing sexual misconduct:** Give civil society a seat and voice at the table from policy discussions to implementation and provide access to resources for this work.
 - a. Use women-led organizations to engage communities:** sensitize communities on risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, rights and services including legal services and justice mechanisms, avoiding repetitive actions, and focus on both quick wins and sustained civil society engagement for long-term cultural change.
 - b. Provide resources and implement complementary but joint programming:** Panellists called for increased resources, funds, and investments for work of civil society organizations and for referral pathways; and advocated for joint programming and collective action, and creating transparency were identified as critical components of reinforcing work of civil society organizations, UN and governments.
- 2. Be meaningfully victim and survivor led:** create fora for deep listening to survivors, support safe spaces and integrate survivors' voices in policy discussions and the creative use of legislation, and problem-solving with survivors
- 3. Provide solidarity and ensure political will:**
 - a. The need for solidarity and activism, especially in UN and Member States,** to speak up and address sexual misconduct, leaders must adopt a zero-tolerance approach, shift the narrative, and implement feminist foreign policy agendas.
 - b. Build a coalition of Member States for addressing sexual misconduct** that involve all levels of leadership: Leadership at all levels - survivors, communities, civil society, UN agencies and national and government agency leaders must be vocal, bold, transparent, and accountable for sexual misconduct. Senior level leader must be involved, must care and must put resources into addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, and support fellow leaders to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to start shifting the narrative. Equally, leaders must be able to create policy coherence, make these linkages, and support feminist leadership approaches.



Conference participants carry their personal messages during a Solidarity Walk as part of day 1 events. © Credit WHO/P. Albouy

6

Session 4: strengthening a survivor-centred approach to preventing and addressing sexual misconduct

Speakers

Jane Connors Victims' Rights Advocate for the United Nations

Eugene Kongnyuy UNFPA Director Humanitarian Contexts

Rachel Maher UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Accountability to Affected People Advisor

Alina Potts Global Women's Institute-George Washington University, Principal Investigator*

Saba Zariv WHO Gender Based Violence

Moderator

Pascale Allotey WHO, Director Sexual Reproductive Health/Human Reproduction

Main ideas

The session focused on strengthening a victim and survivor-centred approach within the UN system, acknowledging the consistent progress made in promoting the rights and dignity of victims. Key challenges highlighted by the panellists included:

- **Losing sight of survivors**

The system often lost sight of survivors, and victims of SEAH shared similar complaints. While the approach was useful, there was need to shift focus to a more people/person centred approach focused on enabling victims and survivors to thrive.

- **Lack of trust in the system**

Victims and survivors hesitated to access services due to a lack of trust in a system managed by individuals associated with the abuse.

Challenges included undefined reporting mechanisms, multiple helplines, and complaints systems not tailored to local languages or literacy levels. Deep fear of reporting among victims, with an absence of safe and accessible reporting mechanisms, hindered addressing these challenges.

- **Limited awareness and fear of retaliation**

Survivors may not know when and where to report sexual exploitation and abuse, lacking awareness of their rights and fearing repercussions for their families and communities.

Perpetrators often hid their identities, and procedural delays, disbelief, and requests for additional evidence deterred victims from reporting.

- **Challenges in reporting procedures**

Normalization of sexually abusive behaviours and impunity contributed to disbelief even when complaints were filed.

Instances were shared where victims faced expulsion and disbelief, exacerbating their reluctance to report.

- **Intimidation and sociocultural stigma**

Power dynamics within health facilities, combined with sociocultural norms, made survivors reluctant to report to healthcare professionals.

Victims may feel guilt and turn to friends, family, or community members rather than formal care facilities. That underscored the importance of engaging communities and trusted interlocutors at community/country level in efforts aimed at preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse.

- **Underfunding of gender-based violence and child protection services**

Gender-based violence and child protection services were underfunded, and legal support was insufficient and delayed. Modest resources provided by the UN were not streamlined across entities, leading to inefficiencies and duplication. Those challenges – which existed in both development and humanitarian settings but were more pronounced in humanitarian settings – made it difficult to provide victims and survivors with the support and services they needed.

Session quotes

“We need to organize ourselves around people, rather than them organizing themselves around us. Issue is of trust...it has to be part of our work’s DNA...it can’t be just switched on and off!”

“We believe in power ...be part of the ripple effect, only right now we are different ripples.”

“There is a trust deficit in our own workforce; and we want that workforce of our own system to become trustworthy.”

“The gender-based violence package, while useful, is not really best suited to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.”

“Quadruple SEAH funding!”

Slido question: multiple choice: which of the following could have the biggest impact for agencies to shift to a victim and survivor-centred approach?

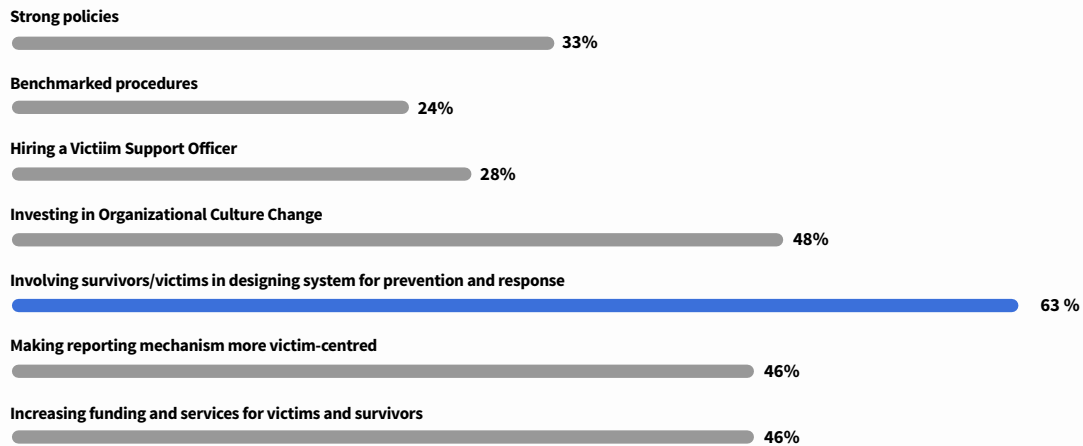


Fig. 2 Participants' answers to multiple choice question "Which of the following could have the biggest impact for agencies to shift to a victim and survivor-centred approach?"



Dr Pascale Allotey, WHO Director Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research, moderates a high-level panel on how agencies can implement a meaningful survivor-centred approach. UN Victims' Rights Advocate Jane Connors is one of the experts speakers. © Credit WHO/P. Alboury

Recommendations

1. Enhance reporting mechanisms

- a. Develop well-defined, accessible, and contextually appropriate reporting mechanisms, including information systems and help lines available in local languages.
- b. Conduct awareness campaigns to inform victims of their rights and the reporting process, addressing the fear of retaliation.

2. Reform survivor support

- a. Involve victims/survivors in designing systems for prevention and response and engage civil society more actively in these processes.
- b. Invest in structural prevention in countries to reduce vulnerability.
- c. Establish support networks and resources for victims, ensuring a coordinated and efficient approach.
- d. Develop a unified and streamlined approach to allocate resources and compensation across UN entities, eliminating inefficiencies and duplication.
- e. Advocate for increased funding for gender-based violence and child protection services to ensure timely and adequate legal support.

3. Address power dynamics and cultural stigma:

- a. Implement measures to address power imbalances within health facilities and counteract socio-cultural stigmas that discourage reporting.
- b. Provide training for healthcare professionals to create safe and supportive environments for survivors.



Panelists call for reform of current practices for services and support to victims and survivors of sexual misconduct by UN personnel. © Credit WHO/P. Albouy

7 **Session 5: a case study:** Democratic Republic of the Congo – finding ways forward

Speakers

Claudine Tsongo Dynamique des Femmes Juristes*

Eugene Kongnyuy UNFPA Director Humanitarian Contexts

Islande Cadet Inter-Agency Standing Committee Coordinator – North Kivu

Boureima Hama Sambo Head of WHO Country Office, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Sigrid Kranawetter WHO, Senior Adviser (Organizational Accountability), Office of the Director General

Moderator

Oliver Stucke WHO Department for Prevention of and Response to Sexual Misconduct

Main discussions

The discussion on the Democratic Republic of the Congo case study highlighted WHO's unique approach in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse cases. A victim- and survivor-centred, holistic, and non-discriminatory support strategy was emphasized. Challenges included a fear of reporting, lack of trust in the system, and delays in legal procedures. The need for customization of legal support, exploration of innovative ideas, and coordination among UN agencies, local partners, and nongovernmental organizations were key points. Challenges in investigations, compensation models, and the involvement of external experts were also discussed. The session emphasized continuous learning, societal involvement, and victim-centric justice.

Session quotes

“It is important to know that the gender-based violence and child protection support packages do not meet the specificities of sexual exploitation and abuse victims.”

“Unsubstantiated cases come in different shapes and forms, as do investigations. Unsubstantiated cases mean we cannot find the perpetrator; it does not mean that we do nothing. Support to victim is not related to this.”

“Identifying perpetrators is a challenge.”

“Customs and traditions often prevent survivors from moving forward.”



Dr Boureima Hama Sambo, WHO's Head of Country Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, describes support provided to victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse related to the 10th Ebola outbreak in the country. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy

Recommendations

1. Reform victim and survivor support

- **Customize holistic support:** tailor support services to the specific needs of victims and survivors, adopting a holistic and victim-centric approach.
- **Redefine justice for victims:** redefine justice for victims, acknowledging that it may go beyond prosecution, and address challenges related to transnational paternity claims.
- **Harmonize compensation models** across different UN agencies to avoid discrimination among victims and ensure a unified approach.
- **Focus on psycho-economic reintegration:** prioritize psycho-economic reintegration, considering the marketability of skills provided and addressing the specific needs of victims born out of sexual exploitation and abuse.

2. Involve survivors, communities and key stakeholders

- **Explore and innovate** ideas beyond traditional support packages, involving survivors in decisions about the support they need.
- **Advocate for a holistic societal and community approach**, recognizing that addressing sexual exploitation and abuse requires the collective effort of society.
- **Rethink support models:** rethink how survivors are supported, moving away from a “reparations on the cheap” approach, and pull funds together for a stronger, more unified support system.

3. Strengthen the system response

- **Prioritize continuous learning and improvement** in victim and survivor support, especially in the legal, medical, and psychosocial domains. Emphasize the need for continuous dialogue, learning, and improvement to ensure the successful support and reintegration of victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- **Enhance coordination and collaboration** among UN agencies, local implementing partners, and nongovernmental organizations to provide effective support, avoiding discrimination.
- **Involve external experts** in the reintegration process, particularly in running businesses and offering microfinance to enhance the sustainability of victims’ recovery.
- **Maintain transparency and independence** in approaches, considering external evaluations and ensuring that victims’ needs remain the central focus.
- **Integrate DNA testing in employment conditions:** consider incorporating DNA testing as part of employment conditions in the UN to address issues related to paternal responsibility.



Claudine Tsongo from the women-led legal aid NGO Dynamique des Femmes Juristes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo urges the UN system to redefine justice for victims and survivors of sexual misconduct by their personnel. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy

8

Session 6: using data and evidence for best practices in PRSEAH

Speakers

Kathleen Jennings Norwegian University of Science and Technology*

Megan Daigle The Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI*

Alina Potts George Washington University*

Moderator

Jasmine-Kim Westendorf La Trobe University

Main ideas and discussions

Discussions centred on how research on sexual exploitation and abuse can enhance decision quality, policies, and implementation. Key topics included addressing evidence gaps and challenges in PRSEAH research.

- There was a need for **more research** into the prevalence, patterns and context across the humanitarian development continuum as much of the research, policy and practice was based on sexual exploitation and abuse in the peacekeeping context.
- Research had confirmed that perpetration of sexual exploitation and abuse and an imperfect response **undermined perception of peace keeping, development and humanitarian work** both at community and global level.
- Research had shown that **not everyone in UN peacekeeping missions understood or agreed with the discouragement of sex with beneficiaries**. People after multiple trainings still stated they didn't understand what they could and couldn't do with local populations.

- There was a need for research to better understand **patterns of perpetration**. In the humanitarian context, exploitation was a more complex area, it was harder to ensure accountability, shaped by material conditions. Research suggested that transactional sex may be the only way for community members to meet basic needs, underlining the critical need to meet basic needs to stop sexual exploitation and abuse. It was noted that Ukrainian experience of sexual exploitation and abuse was quite different, as refugees had basic needs met, and vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse moved into hidden places, mostly the private housing market and trafficking networks.
- It was important to understand the economic context of peacekeeping: research into the **economic impact** of peacekeeping forces on the community showed that while most resources stayed outside the country, at a local level the main entry into the economy was the expenditure of peacekeepers, leading to a development of a service economy, with sex work central to the economy as part of an ecosystem of bars and restaurants. Research showed that sex workers made more money with international clients, allowing reduced number of clients and working hours.
- Discussions emphasized **not pathologizing local populations**. The UN zero tolerance policy had initially been misunderstood at peacekeeping mission level, perceived as having been developed without considering local realities. Initial training prioritized interdiction, reputation management, and a negative focus on locals, rooted in 1990s humanitarian culture. Security training lacked consideration of power dynamics, normalized stress responses, and perpetuated problematic attitudes, assuming aid workers inherently did good without the potential for harm.
- While the wide role of power imbalances in sexual exploitation and abuse were recognized, **specific power imbalances were harder to track**. The understanding of power balance was very nuanced and subtle both from peacekeepers and people in the communities they served.
- **Qualitative data had a critical role to play in sexual exploitation and abuse research**, given the limitations of quantitative research in this area. Needed to recognize that research could be subversive in shifting power, and understand the potential for negative and positive impact of how and where it was done; there was a need to open that discussion.
- **Already identified research gaps** encompassed studies within humanitarian organizations, autonomy and survival research; connections between gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment; evidence on changes in peacekeeping missions; perpetrator pattern research; studies on males and boys; and the division between gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual violence in conflict. Those gaps may be driven by resource competition due to funding shortages and humanitarian resistance to non-crisis situation research.



Researchers and academia make a strong case for using data and evidence for improving prevention and response to sexual misconduct by development and humanitarian aid workers. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy

Slido question: what research or evidence do you need to support your work in prevention and response to sexual misconduct?

Summary of participants responses

- **Effectiveness of reporting mechanisms**

Participants expressed a need for research on the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms, understanding the willingness of individuals to use them, and the practical evidence of what worked in strengthening policy and practice.

- **Understanding perpetrators**

There was a call for research on perpetrators, their profiles, perspectives, and whether there were repeat offenders. The need to separate narratives on specific types of perpetrators from cultural norms that normalized misconduct was emphasized.

- **Barriers to reporting and anonymity principles**

Research on barriers to reporting sexual misconduct and strategies to uphold anonymity principles within affected communities was highlighted.

- **Cultural and behavioural change**

Participants emphasized the need for research on culture and behavioural change within large organizations, aiming to move towards a values-based culture. Strengthening UN/humanitarian culture and understanding the origin of sexual harassment were also mentioned.

- **Long-term action and community involvement**

The importance of research in building long-term action beyond specific interests, involvement of local actors (including survivors), and understanding the root causes and coping mechanisms in crisis settings were emphasized. Additionally, there was a call for research to be decolonized and to consider the realities on the ground, minimizing the burden on affected communities.

Session quotes

“Research suggests transactional sex may be the only way to for community members to meet basic needs, underlining the critical need to meet basic needs to stop sexual exploitation and abuse.”

“Research has shown that not everyone in UN peacekeeping missions understands or agrees with the discouragement of sex with beneficiaries.”

“Research shows that sex workers make more money with international clients allowing reduced number of clients and working hours.”

“There is a need to recognize that research can be subversive in shifting power.”

Recommendations

- 1. Better identify and address research gaps** that currently include the need for studies within humanitarian organizations, autonomy and survival research; connections between gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment; evidence on changes in peacekeeping missions; perpetrator pattern research; studies on males and boys; and the division between gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual violence in conflict.
- 2. Fill the critical gap between implementors and researchers** through partnership, including developing shared research agenda based on gaps and changing circumstances and increasing access of researchers to implementing agencies.
- 3. Include existing research findings in policy and practice revisions:**
 - a. Consult panel members during the current revision of the Secretary-General's Bulletin - Special Measures for PSEA.
 - b. Research the differences between sexual exploitation and abuse in development and humanitarian context from sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping when developing preventative and response measures.
 - c. Acknowledge and seek to understand and respond to the factors that can push local people towards transactional sex with UN and humanitarian personnel, recognizing the material inequalities and structural factors that create the conditions in which perpetrators sexually abuse and exploit local communities in diverse ways in different contexts.



Representatives from the permanent missions to the UN in Geneva joined the Stakeholders Conference and attended the roundtable on Member States best practices. Here representatives of the permanent missions of the United States of America and Australia carry their handmade poster during the Solidarity Walk. © Credit WHO/P. Albouy

9 Session 7: PRSEAH in health emergencies and community facing programmes

Speakers

Michael J. Ryan WHO Executive Director for Health Emergencies, Preparedness and Response

Doris Voorbraak Inter-Agency Standing Committee

Margaret Lamunu Senior Emergency Officer, WHO

Yoko Iwasa Senior Policy Officer, UNHCR

Ivana Chapčáková Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF

Moderator

Aidan O’Leary WHO Director for Polio Eradication

Main ideas and discussions

The main discussions on PRSEAH in emergencies and community-facing operations underscored the noteworthy progress made in preventing and mitigating SEAH risks, particularly in emergency settings. The commitment to safe programming, integration of policies, and deployment of PSEAH technical capacities globally were highlighted. Challenges included the increasing number of emergencies, funding limitations, and shortages of PSEA technical officers. The need for evidence-driven policies, research, and a collective commitment to addressing SEAH risks in diverse contexts emerged as key takeaways. The session emphasized the importance of inter-agency cooperation, a victim-centric approach, and continuous engagement with staff and communities to effect tangible change and strengthen PSEAH measures in health emergencies and community operations.

Session quotes

“There aren’t enough resources to do everything. Money is contracting. Investment is falling but numbers (of people) needing assistance is increasing. 25 per cent of the world will live in fragile contexts. The context we live in means the vulnerability for sexual exploitation and abuse increases plus resources aren’t there.”

“We can fix it – but it is hard to find the people with the right skills. It is really hard.”

“The nature of the PSEA is both interagency and programming in nature. It isn’t about ticking boxes. But a holistic approach.”



Dr Michael J. Ryan, Executive Director WHO Health Emergencies Programme and Aidan O’Leary, WHO Director for Polio Eradication, explore challenges in addressing sexual misconduct in emergencies and humanitarian response together with the panel of inter-agency experts. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy

Recommendations

1. Address key drivers and in community-focused programmes

- a. Develop and implement community-focused programmes that **address underlying** issues of poverty and gender inequality, taking a feminist approach.
- b. Strengthen community engagement and trust-building initiatives**, acknowledging that acceptance and trust are key to successful operations.
- c. Contextualize and adapt:** continue to understand and adapt policies and procedures based on the specific risks, drivers, and contextual factors in different countries.
- d. Monitor continuously:** recognize that SEAH risks will persist, requiring constant monitoring, vigilance, and ongoing efforts to address challenges.

2. Strengthen organizational approaches

- a. Prioritize capacity building and training in PSEAH**, advocating for the UN to consider it as a core skill set and encouraging collaboration with other agencies.
- b. Focus on prevention and sustainable approaches:** shift focus towards preventative sustainable approaches, going beyond zero-tolerance policies to bring about systemic change.
- c. Emphasize strong leadership and coordination:** and collaboration with various stakeholders, including governments and local actors.
- d. Dedicated roles for prevention and response to sexual misconduct:** support the continued existence of dedicated roles for prevention and response to sexual misconduct and recognize their effectiveness in safeguarding people in emergencies.

3. Operationalize tools and guidance:

- a. Address the challenge of operationalizing tools and guidance, ensuring that progress made is effectively implemented in the field.
- b. Strengthen inter-agency cooperation**, emphasizing the need to engage with wider communities beyond the UN and fostering a culture change at the front-line field level.
- c. Develop and implement a comprehensive action plan for 2024**, outlining priorities and commitments to address PRSEAH in health emergencies and community-facing programmes.



Elizabeth Pender, UNFPA, emphasizes the importance of focusing on the needs and wants of victims and survivors. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy



Doris Voorbraak, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Dr Margaret Lamunu, Senior Emergency Officer at the World Health Organization, and Aidan O'Leary, WHO Director for Polio Eradication during the session on PRSEAH in health emergencies and community facing programmes © Credit WHO/A.Tardy

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Session 8: addressing sexual harassment in our workplaces

Moderator

Kelly Clements

UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner

Main discussions

The session emphasized the need to shift focus from distant victims to acknowledging that both victims and perpetrators exist within the Organization. It stressed the importance of connecting individuals experiencing sexual harassment with professional support and recognized the uniqueness of each case. *The safe space survey* of 2018 reported that 1 out of 3 people had experienced sexual harassment. There was a 42% increase in the number of reports of sexual harassment in 2021, where 97% of the perpetrators were male, most of them being senior to the victim/survivor. More than 90% of those who reported were women. 80% of sexual harassment incidents happened outside the location of headquarters, where fear of retaliation remained a concern.

The session proposed an annual survey to assess the system's progress in building trust, with entities such as the World Food Programme and UNICEF co-leading reporting efforts. The transition of the current Chief Executives Board (CEB) task force into an executive group marked a significant development.

Slido question: what in your view are some of the critical actions we need to undertake collectively to address sexual harassment in our workplaces?

Summary of participants' replies

- **Transparency in handling cases:** advocacy for agencies to publish data on how harassment cases are handled, promoting transparency and accountability.
- **Open discussions on harassment:** emphasis on the importance of fostering open discussions on harassment, considering cultural perspectives, and promoting understanding.
- **Transformative feminist leadership:** suggestion to introduce transformative feminist leadership to address power imbalances and promote power-sharing in the workplace.
- **Cost analysis of harassment:** recommendation to conduct a cost analysis of sexual harassment, including individual and operational costs, to make a clear business case for investing in prevention.
- **Engagement and encouragement:** recognition of the need to closely engage with the workforce, encouraging them to speak out against harassment and fostering a supportive environment.

Session quotes

“The tone from the top (leadership) really matters. Management and leadership need to be vocal, visible and present.”

“We seem to be more comfortable in talking about victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse because they are far away, but we (agency personnel) are also victims and survivors, and sometimes we are the perpetrators.”

“Timeline for investigation is very long and it becomes a big black box, hence the communications part is crucial. If we cannot take care of our people, how can we take care of the others?”

Recommendations

- 1. Adopt a survivor-centred approach** to address sexual harassment.
 - a. Sustain a focus on survivor voices
 - b. Align model policies and allow survivors to report anonymously, and
 - c. Address persisting challenges such as fear of retaliation, confidentiality, and inadequate protection measures.
- 2. Establish a common and broader framework** across entities to address sexual harassment and other forms of abusive conduct.
 - a. **Broaden the focus** beyond sexual harassment to encompass all forms of abusive conduct.
 - b. **Improve reporting mechanisms** and encourage a “speak-up” culture.
 - c. **Develop monitoring and evaluation tools** to track progress effectively; collect evidence and lessons learned on policy implementation.
- 3. Enhance accountability**
 - a. **Strengthen leadership accountability**, making management vocal, visible, and present.
 - b. **Expedite investigations** with a focus on speed and expertise; consider creating an external inspector general office for investigations for ensuring individual accountability of perpetrators.



Kelly Clements, UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner shares lessons learned in her leadership to transform institutional culture at her agency. She presented an overview of findings related to the annual survey on sexual harassment conducted by the UN System Chief Executives Board for coordination. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy

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Session 9: culture change – best practices

Speakers

Razia Pendse

WHO Chef de Cabinet

Usha Dwarka- Canabady

Gender Focal Point of the Human Rights Council

Gabriela Ourivio Assmar

International Labour Organization Mediator

Jo Healey

Trauma Work*

Aba Ankrah-Ntambwe

WHO Ombudsperson

Patrick Cronin

WHO Human Resources and Talent Management
Department, Coordinator

Youssoupha Niang

UNHCR Ombudsperson

Moderator

Gaya Gamhewage

WHO Director for Prevention and Response to Sexual
Misconduct

Main discussions

The discussion underscored the multifaceted and dynamic nature of organizational culture, emphasizing the diverse microcosms of culture within different contexts. The interplay between individual and organizational cultures, often influenced by hierarchical norms, posed challenges to reporting cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. Efforts to transform the culture within organizations, as exemplified by the WHO, demonstrated a notable shift toward a 'speak-up' culture, albeit with persistent challenges such as fear of retaliation and a culture of silence. The session highlighted the motivation of staff in challenging situations, emphasizing a sense of duty to serve the deprived. However, the lack of a 'culture of support' within organizations, unclear reporting mechanisms, and the complexity of internal processes created obstacles for victims and survivors of SEAH. The impact of media, especially social media, on organizational cultures was recognized, emphasizing the need for gender-responsive reporting education.

Slido question: what is your biggest idea to change institutional culture to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct?

1. Governance and structure

- Set up an independent investigation body for all UN agencies.
- Ensure transparency and accountability in the ethics department.
- Recognize and address hierarchical organizational cultures.
- Create policies that foster a non-hostile environment for reporting.
- Establish an independent case review and judgment mechanism outside the organization.

2. Leadership and awareness

- Encourage feminist leadership.
- Rethink informal resolution processes.
- Promote exemplary, unbiased, and open sentencing to deter misconduct.
- Build trust in organizational systems and emphasize the urgency of taking timely actions.
- Promote education and ethics programmes to instil a culture of respect.

3. Employee engagement and cultural shift

- Reflect on power dynamics at individual and institutional levels.
- Promote more women aid workers and diverse representation.
- Adopt UN culture and professional behaviour to discourage abusive practices.
- Engage in adaptive changes, creating safe spaces, and sharing stories to shift organizational culture.
- Address root causes of power imbalances through values that promote equality.

4. Prevention and reporting mechanisms:

- Rethink the use of informal resolution mechanisms, especially in hierarchical organizations.
- Implement anonymous reporting with protection against retaliation.
- Ensure prompt investigation and disciplinary processes.
- Hold management accountable for respectful communication and addressing microaggressions.
- Increase awareness through initiatives such as Power, Privilege, and Bias sessions.

Session quotes

- | “Culture change is our journey, and we are just at the beginning of it.”
- | “Let's make sure it (sexual misconduct) doesn't happen again, so that nobody else will have to suffer by being able to have a culture where we stand up for each other and where we speak up for each other.”
- | “We want to look at the multi-faceted nature of organizational culture. We want to think about staff concerns, conflicts, ethical issues.”
- | “Culture is created within our organizations. The media also has a very big input into how we perceive ourselves. And it impacts our culture as well.”
- | “Organizations should not just focus on mandatory reporting but also foster a culture where people feel safe to discuss and address problematic behaviours through communication and collaboration.”



Ambassador Usha Dwarka-Canabady, Gender Focal Point of the Human Rights Council, speaks on the challenges of integrating gender equality in her work. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy

Recommendations

1. Continue focused interventions to change the culture around SEAH, addressing overall normalized abusive behaviours within the Organization.
2. Provide training to personnel, encouraging them to speak up for others, ensuring confidentiality, and promoting a 'stand-up' culture.
3. Socialize cultural change by linking it to empathy, identity, and a shared culture of support within the organization.
4. Conduct clear, consistent, and sustained briefings on organizational norms and standards, facilitating a transformational change.
5. Establish clear accountability measures to support survivors of SEAH.
6. Simplify processes within organizational culture, making them effective and accessible.
7. Empower leadership to champion cultural change, ensuring psychological safety, accountability, and staff empowerment.
8. Promote a culture of empathy and belonging in order to foster immediate support for victims and survivors of SEAH.
9. Encourage leaders to play a key role in driving cultural change, with necessary support and resources provided.



Conference participants prepare for a Solidarity Walk in support of victims and survivors of sexual misconduct by UN personnel on the evening of the first day. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy



WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, leads the Solidarity Walk with colleague Dr Karen Reyes Castro from the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team. © Credit WHO/A. Tardy

Contact: PRSEAH@who.int

Visit: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/preventing-and-responding-to-sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment>

Report wrongdoing: bit.ly/WHOIntegrityHotline

