updated version, July 2025

Guide for Managers

Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

**Guide for Managers – Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace**

*Instructions: Please note that this guide provides general guidance, and each agency will need to tailor it to ensure it is aligned with their approach and internal regulatory framework addressing sexual harassment. Each agency will therefore need to adapt and contextualize the guide to the policies, procedures and victim/survivor support available in their entity, prior to disseminating the guide to its personnel. The text to be contextualized is highlighted in grey and can be deleted (together with these instructions) once this is done.*

|  |
| --- |
| Sexual harassment is prohibited conduct in the workplace and in connection with work. It is unacceptable and must be eradicated from the UN workplace. All UN system personnel are required to uphold the highest standards of conduct. Managers, by virtue of their positions of leadership, are in addition accountable for acting as role models, and for creating a safe, respectful and harmonious working environment, free of fear, intimidation, hostility, and offence.  This checklist aims to support managers in fulfilling their responsibilities to foster and promote a work environment and culture that prevents and responds to sexual harassment in their respective teams and offices, in line with a [victim/survivor centered approach](https://unsceb.org/victim-centred-approach-sexual-harassment-united-nations), placing the victim/survivor’s needs, rights, dignity, and well-being at the center of any intervention. This checklist does not amend or replace the organization’s staff regulations, rules, or administrative issuances. |

**Checklist**

1. **Starting an assignment: Preparation and Learning**
* **I have completed the mandatory e-learning training** <[United to Respect: Preventing Sexual Harassment and Other Prohibited Conduct and on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse>](https://learning.unog.ch/node/25198), and <insert reference to any internal training programs, with hyperlinks, as relevant>.
* **I have familiarized myself** with the <insert relevant service responsible for addressing sexual harassment and providing psychological support, the relevant organizational/intranet page on sexual harassment, and the relevant internal policies, SOPs, and/or other guidance on addressing sexual misconduct>, as well as those available at the [UN System-wide Knowledge Hub on addressing Sexual Harassment](https://shknowledgehub.unwomen.org/en#:~:text=The%20UN%20System-wide%20Knowledge%20Hub%20on%20Addressing%20Sexual,system%27s%20efforts%20to%20prevent%20and%20address%20sexual%20harassment.).
* **I have read** the [Victim-centered Approach to Sexual Harassment for the United Nations](https://unsceb.org/victim-centred-approach-sexual-harassment-united-nations) and <insert [IASC Definition & Principles of a Victim/Survivor Centered Approach](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2023-06/IASC%20Definition%20%26%20Principles%20of%20a%20Victim_Survivor%20Centered%20Approach.pdf) and/or relevant internal policy, if available> and commit to operationalize these principles through my work.
* **I have studied** the policy on <insert the internal policy, procedures and/or intranet page for protection from retaliation, with hyperlinks, as relevant>.
* **I have consulted** **my predecessor**, senior management and/or <insert oversight service/Ethics Office and responsible function for sexual misconduct>, as applicable, and with due respect for confidentiality, about any challenges relating to the working environment in the office, and any risks and measures to be taken to support a harmonious workplace.
1. **During an assignment: Promoting Leadership and Strengthening Organizational Culture**
* **I act as a role model** in my personal and professional conduct, and I uphold the highest standards of conduct.
* **At least twice per year,** **I remind personnel under my supervision of the expected standards** of conduct related to sexual harassment (including in virtual communication) and make them aware of available resources and reporting channels. I promote and clearly communicate the relevant organizational policies, facilitate open dialogue, and explain the victim/survivor-centered approach and the protection from retaliation policy.
* **I am aware of risk factors** **that contribute to an environment conducive to sexual harassment** [ex: gender disparity; cultural norms and barriers to reporting; personnel dispersed across field/satellite offices; emergency response situations; social events involving alcohol; high turnover of personnel; shared accommodation; mission travel; lack of knowledge about the organization’s policies, reporting and resolution procedures] **and take action to mitigate these**.
* **I actively** **and carefully look out for signs of sexual harassment**, such as inappropriate comments, sexist jokes, comments about bodily appearance or sexual experiences, inappropriate touching, or showing or discussing pornographic materials, **and promptly address these**, in consultation with relevant colleagues, reiterating zero tolerance.
* **I am aware of the consequences** **of sexual harassment** [ex: mental health and wellbeing issues; damage to employee morale; decreasing social and professional functioning; higher than usual sick or leave days; performance issues; withdrawal from team engagements and communication, among others], and **actively monitor the office environment**, in consultation with relevant colleagues.
* **I take** **concrete steps** **to create an inclusive environment,** and I model respectful communication and behavior within my team and office, promoting a workplace where all personnel feel psychologically safe and encouraged to speak up.
* **I regularly check-in with my team,** including one-on-one, to build rapport and trust, and to strengthen collaboration. I address any gossiping, rumors and similar behaviors in the team.
* **I discuss with my team** the results of relevant staff surveys which address sexual harassment, and work in an inclusive manner towards implementing measures to address areas of concern.
* **I advise** **my team** about the options available to address instances of sexual harassment, as outlined in <add the entity’s policy/regulatory framework to address sexual harassment and/or the [UN System Model Policy on Sexual Harassment](https://unsceb.org/un-system-model-policy-sexual-harassment)> and I promote understanding among my team on where to seek <insert relevant dedicated/expert support>.
* Within my delegated authority, **I seek to ensure that** **resources (human, technical, and/or financial)** are allocated for safeguarding against sexual harassment in the workplace.
* **I follow-up and ensure** **that all staff have completed** the mandatory <insert mandatory training on prevention of Sexual Harassment and/or other relevant trainings>, and that all staff participate in the <insert yearly code/standard of conduct sessions or equivalent activity>.
* **I also encourage my staff to complete non-mandatory learning** which fosters strengthening my organization’s culture and promotes being an active bystander.
* **I share the** [UN Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment, including Sexual Harassment, at UN System Events](https://www.un.org/en/content/codeofconduct/) <and/or internal codes of conduct and/or policies addressing sexual harassment during meetings/conferences/events> with participants at all conferences/events organized by my team, and I request them to respect the same during their interactions with my organization.

***Note****:* *Victims/survivors who have been exposed to a traumatic experience may require* ***urgent assistance****. If immediate psychological or medical support is needed,* *victims/survivors must be counseled on existing services and encouraged to avail themselves of the support as soon as possible. Managers should urgently and confidentially consult <insert reference to dedicated/specialized support functions available to victims/survivors> to ensure appropriate steps are taken in line with the victim/survivor centered approach. <include and adjust as necessary: If no specialized/dedicated support function exists, the manager must follow critical incident guidelines for sexual assault and rape, or other relevant internal protocols. >*

1. **Witnessing sexual harassment in the workplace**
* **I** **intervene promptly, calmy and assertively** to address inappropriate behavior and reiterate the required standards of conduct <and, if applicable, formally report sexual harassment>.
* **I follow the procedures** outlined in <add the entity’s policy/regulatory framework to address instances of sexual harassment and/or the [UN System Model Policy on Sexual Harassment](https://unsceb.org/un-system-model-policy-sexual-harassment)>.
* **I take immediate action** to provide information on available resources with regard to access to specialized support, counselling, informal reporting, formal reporting, and protection against retaliation, as relevant.
* **I** **prioritize and follow-up in a timely manner** on such events on a bilateral basis with the victim/survivor and/or alleged perpetrator, as appropriate.
* **I seek out additional guidance** and support, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the victim/survivor(s), as needed, from <insert specialized/dedicated support or function >.
1. **When an individual approaches me to discuss sexual harassment in the workplace**
* **I act quickly**, **listen actively,** **and demonstrate empathy**, in line with a victim/survivor-centered approach. I do not express personal opinions or introduce biases, or undermine or minimize the experience. I mirror the language that the victim/survivor used to convey their experience (e.g. if he/she says, "It felt uncomfortable", I say "I understand that it felt uncomfortable”.)
* **I provide the victim/survivor or witness with information** on <insert specialized/dedicated support or function> and ensure they are aware of all support options available.
* **I inform the victim/survivor or witness** what it means to disclose information to me about sexual harassment (i.e., does this count as a formal/informal report in line with my organization’s approach; or any other obligations/roles/responsibilities on the part of the manager, <including, if applicable, any duty to formally report sexual harassment>).
* If the victim/survivor or witness refers to **documents or other that may help substantiating the allegations** (e.g. WhatsApp messages), I advise them not to delete these and to keep an additional copy, if possible. I also advise the victim/survivor to safely document the incident for themselves, including any details they may not have shared. I ensure that all matters involving online sexual harassment are handled in accordance with <insert applicable policy framework>.
* **I don’t gather more details** **than the victim/survivor or witness may feel comfortable sharing**. I document the allegations brought to my attention by keeping secure and contemporaneous notes. I understand that my role as a manager is *not* to investigate.
* **I do not make promises** that I cannot keep.
* Upon agreement of the victim/survivor, **I contact <**insert specialized/dedicated support or function> **to seek advice and guidance** and **to coordinate** their preferred way of accessing support and addressing their needs.
* **I ensure the colleague is aware of** <the organization>’s Policy on Protection Against Retaliation.
* **I do *not* approach the alleged perpetrator** about the incident without the explicit consent of the victim/survivor. I support as a mediator *only* if explicitly requested by the victim/survivor, and as appropriate, depending on the severity of the conduct.
* If the victim/survivor or witness does not want to raise a formal complaint, I will act in accordance with <insert relevant internal policy>. I may still **seek confidential guidance** from <insert specialized support function and/or oversight body>, <without disclosing the identity of the victim/survivor>.
* **I monitor the situation** and confidentially **check-in with the victim/survivor or witness** regularly, if they wish, to identify any change in the situation, any support which may be required, or measures that need to be implemented.
* **I collaborate** with the responsible official (i.e., head of office, human resources, ethics or investigations) to implement interim measures, workplace accommodations or adjustments, as appropriate.
* **I seek confidential guidance and support for myself from** <insert relevant psychological or wellbeing support service>, if needed.
1. **Restoring the workplace environment after sexual harassment has occurred**
* **I seek advice** from <insert relevant specialized/dedicated support or function> on communicating with personnel on the team and on ensuring adequate measures are in place, while actively working towards rebuilding trust and fostering long-term culture change.
* **I take adequate measures** to (re)create a work environment free from sexual harassment and retaliation, with a focus on applying a victim/survivor-centered approach.
* **I conduct regular and as-needed “check-in” meetings** **with the team** and with the victim/survivor, to see how things are going.
* **I continue to ensure** respect for confidentiality.
* **I remind** **personnel** that everyone plays a role in maintaining a harassment-free workplace.
1. **When finishing the assignment**
* **I inform** my successor and deputy about this Guide for Managers.
* **I inform** my successor about any challenges in the working environment in the office, risks and measures taken to ensure a harmonious workplace, while respecting confidentiality.
* **I inform my successor and manager about any pending actions or measures** which remain outstanding, to ensure that all matters are dealt with as a priority and without interruption.

