
Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

Report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board to the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly

1. Updating the report of the Director-General to the Health Assembly,¹ the Secretariat presented the actions undertaken by the Organization and progress achieved under the WHO three-year strategy on preventing and responding to sexual misconduct (2023–2025), drawing attention to both key achievements and key challenges. This included an update on the support offered in all nine substantiated cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the 10th Ebola outbreak.
2. The Committee commended the Secretariat on its leadership in addressing sexual misconduct and in providing support and assistance to victims and survivors of such acts. It particularly welcomed the hiring of a victim and survivor support officer at WHO headquarters as a means of integrating a victim support-centred approach into all relevant policies, procedures and practices.
3. The Committee firmly agreed with the recommendations of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee² relating to the cultural and behavioural aspects of preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and the development of an action plan, key performance indicators and regular surveys to track the evolution of WHO's organizational culture. It called for further concerted action to ensure that those recommendations were implemented in full.
4. The Committee also supported the end-to-end tracking of investigations and disciplinary measures of all cases of misconduct, including sexual misconduct, and called for a widening in focus of such work to incorporate all kinds of inappropriate behaviour, such as fraud and corruption.
5. In response to the Committee's comments on promoting organizational culture change, the Secretariat confirmed that efforts were already under way to draft a culture change strategy aligned with the WHO values charter, which fostered the desired behaviours among all members of the workforce and made the best use of internal capacity, behavioural science, data analysis and cross-cutting collaboration.

¹ Document A77/4.

² Document EBPBAC40/2, paras. 34–37.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

6. The Committee, on behalf of the Executive Board, recommended that the Health Assembly should note the report, and proposed, as guidance for the Secretariat's implementation of existing mandates, that the Secretariat should:

- (a) maintain its strong leadership and focus on the prevention of and response to sexual misconduct;
- (b) continue efforts to assess, strengthen and, where necessary, build the sexual misconduct prevention capacity of implementing partners and WHO operations;
- (c) further strengthen the support provided to victims and survivors of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment;
- (d) strengthen the prevention of and response to other kinds of misconduct, including abusive conduct as well as fraud and corruption, leveraging teams and networks across all levels of the Organization;
- (e) continue its work on the implementation of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee's recommendations related to organizational culture and systems change and the tracking thereof, including through staff surveys;
- (f) continue to formulate proposed options for:
 - (i) the funding and integration of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment prevention in emergency operations;
 - (ii) ensuring Member State accountability for safeguarding joint government and WHO operations against sexual misconduct.

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