



General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 April 2020

Original: English

Seventy-fourth session

Agenda items 148 and 129

Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations

Sexual exploitation and abuse: implementing a zero-tolerance policy

Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered an advance version of the report of the Secretary-General on the special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse ([A/74/705](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 2 March 2020.

2. The report of the Secretary-General is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions [73/302](#), [72/312](#), [71/297](#) and [71/278](#). In its resolution [73/302](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to submit annual reports, pursuant to resolution [57/306](#), on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including on progress made in implementing a zero-tolerance policy within the United Nations system, for consideration by the Assembly, in line with existing mandates and procedures (resolution [73/302](#), para. 2).

II. Status of implementation of the strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel

3. In his report, the Secretary-General provides updated information on the implementation of the strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel ([A/71/818](#) and [A/71/818/Corr.1](#)) in the following areas: system-wide response to sexual exploitation and abuse ([A/74/705](#), sect. II); coherence of the development and humanitarian sectors (*ibid.*, sect. III); accountability throughout the



system (ibid., sect. IV); implementing partners (ibid., sect. V); prioritizing victims' rights and dignity (ibid., sect. VI); risk management (ibid., sect. VII); engagement with Member States and civil society (ibid., sect. VIII); and improving strategic communications for education and transparency (ibid., sect. IX). He also provides information on allegations and investigations of sexual exploitation and abuse (ibid., sect. X). **The Advisory Committee notes that the report of the Secretary-General discusses the progress made on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and entails no additional budgetary implications.**

System-wide approach

4. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse continues to be the forum for principal-level engagement and coordination in the implementation of the strategy (ibid., para. 5). Further, a system-wide working group, chaired by the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, meets twice a month to strengthen harmonized approaches to prevention and response across the United Nations system, including with respect to the members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (ibid., para. 6).

5. The Secretary-General underscores in his report that the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse is not limited to peacekeeping, but also affects humanitarian operations and development settings (ibid., para. 8). The Advisory Committee notes that the matter of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse has been considered by the General Assembly during the resumed part of its session in the context of peacekeeping. **The Advisory Committee is of the view that consideration could be given to introducing the report of the Secretary-General on this matter in the main part of the session of the General Assembly to further underscore that preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse requires a system-wide approach.**

6. With respect to the development sector, the Secretary-General indicates in his report that, in 2019, the responsibilities to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse were included in the resident coordinators' management and accountability frameworks and terms of reference, and that initial guidance was provided to them in this respect. In addition, the Assistant Secretary-General for Development Coordination participates in the High-level Steering Group and is represented in the system-wide working group (ibid., para. 12). **The Advisory Committee looks forward to an update, in the next report of the Secretary-General, on the fulfilment of the new responsibilities related to the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse that have been entrusted to the resident coordinators.**

7. The Secretary-General also indicates in his report that the United Nations system-wide efforts are complemented by ongoing engagement with Member States, civil society and the general public through various initiatives (ibid., paras. 48–52). Those efforts have led, for example, to increased participation in the voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and in the circle of leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations, as well as the operationalization in 2019 of the Civil Society Advisory Board on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

8. **The Advisory Committee acknowledges the ongoing efforts to promote a system-wide approach to addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and trusts that additional efforts will be made through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to further enhance consistency and coherence (A/73/828, para. 7).**

Accountability and risk management

9. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that accountability and risk management frameworks have been strengthened during the reporting period (A/74/705, paras. 13–18 and 32–47). Furthermore, new and existing tools have supported risk management, personnel screening and the reporting of allegations (ibid., paras. 32, 34, 37 and 38). Regarding Clear Check, the electronic information-sharing screening tool launched in 2018 to prevent United Nations personnel who were dismissed for substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, or who left the Organization while an investigation was pending, from being reemployed within the United Nations system, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that of the 29 entities invited to participate in this system, 25 have committed to join. The Committee was further informed that, among the initiatives to improve data collection and allegations reporting, a new tool launched in 2019, the iReport SEA Tracker, provides a centralized, searchable, secure online platform to report and track allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse almost in real-time. **Recalling its previous concerns over the fragmented nature of allegation reporting and data collection (A/73/828, para. 9), the Advisory Committee trusts that the new iReport SEA Tracker tool will assist in the timely reporting of allegations and the consistency of data collection, and encourages the Secretary-General to pursue further efforts in this respect.**

Implementing partners

10. The Secretary-General indicates in his report that in 2019, there was an increase in reports of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse related to implementing partners of United Nations activities. Implementing partners are not under the authority of the Organization; they often operate in remote or high-risk environments, and many have capacity, investigative and training gaps with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse (A/74/705, para. 20). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, in addition to the 2018 United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, measures have been implemented aimed at strengthening the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse. Such measures include: amendments to legal agreements with implementing partners; the rapid provision of grants from the \$1 million fund managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to support implementing partners' investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse; and the inter-agency development of a common training package for implementing partners. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that a harmonized screening tool to strengthen accountability and the capacity of implementing partners is being developed (ibid., para. 21). **The Advisory Committee emphasizes the importance of strengthening activities in this high-risk area and recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide updated information regarding the implementation and effectiveness of these measures in the context of future reports.**

Prioritizing victims' rights and dignity

11. The Secretary-General indicates in his report that progress has been made in institutionalizing a victim-centred approach, most notably with the continued engagement of the Victims' Rights Advocate; the promulgation of the United Nations protocol on the provision of assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse; as well as with the activities of the four Field Victims' Rights Advocates located in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the United Nations

Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) and subsequently the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) (ibid., paras. 22–31).

12. In the report, it is indicated that the comprehensive mapping of victims' rights approaches and services available system-wide remains pending and that there is no system-wide tool to track victims, the assistance that they receive and the service providers available (ibid., para. 26). According to the Secretary-General, many challenges remain, including the lack of dedicated services for victims, large gaps in the comprehensiveness of the services available, and the need for the designation of additional victims' rights advocates to establish a dedicated network across the peacekeeping, humanitarian and development sectors (ibid., para. 67). **The Advisory Committee encourages the Secretary-General to undertake further efforts to complete the mapping exercise.**

13. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that funding for victims' services has been provided from the trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, which has funded projects for an overall amount of \$1.24 million, and from the resources of agencies, funds and programmes. The Committee was also informed that in peacekeeping operations and special political missions, immediate assistance has been provided through mission budgets, in the absence of other immediately available means, as envisaged by the Secretary-General in a previous report (A/70/729, para. 77). Furthermore, the Committee was informed that the Field Victims' Rights Advocates ensure the provision of services related to medical care, the facilitation and resolution of paternity and child support claims, as well as livelihood support. For instance, in South Sudan, immediate assistance to victims and related medical costs have been covered through petty cash provided by UNMISS. **The Advisory Committee emphasizes the importance of providing expeditious support to victims and encourages the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts aimed at securing contributions to the trust fund (see also A/73/828, para. 21 and A/73/649, para. 17). Noting that the utilization of mission budgets to cover the immediate needs of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse was envisaged by the Secretary-General at the time of the establishment of the trust fund, the Committee considers that this matter should be clarified further, in the context of the current status of implementation of the strategy and the full operationalization of the fund. The Committee also calls for greater transparency in the reporting on the use of mission budgets for services provided to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, the Committee stresses the importance of strict adherence to the Financial Regulations and Rules, including on petty cash.**

System-wide human and financial resources

14. The Secretary-General indicates in his report that resources for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in the Secretariat, in particular for assistance to victims, remain scarce (A/74/705, para. 68). In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, in 2019, the Office of the Special Coordinator mapped the human and financial resources dedicated to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse throughout the United Nations system. According to that mapping, there are 16 dedicated staff members in the Secretariat. No dedicated resources were identified for agencies, funds and programmes, where, as stated in the report, the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse are mainstreamed across all programming and all personnel are expected to incorporate the necessary awareness into their duties (ibid., para. 7).

15. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the position of Special Coordinator was initially established on 1 March 2016 and has since been

extended on a yearly basis through extrabudgetary resources. The current extension of the position is until December 2020 and the need for further extension will be kept under review. Upon enquiry, the Committee was provided with the costs relating to selected training courses, but did not receive the comprehensive information on the totality of dedicated resources system-wide which it had requested. The Committee notes that the Secretary-General is requesting additional human and financial resources related to combating sexual exploitation and abuse in individual peacekeeping missions.

16. **Recalling its repeated requests for a full accounting of system-wide resources dedicated to the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, the Advisory Committee notes the information provided on resources. However, the Committee considers that the information remains incomplete and does not sufficiently quantify all existing resources dedicated to this matter across the United Nations system. The Committee, again cautioning against the risk of potential fragmentation in the different work streams, recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts to provide a comprehensive accounting of the system-wide resources, to identify optimum administrative arrangements and to ensure adequate, predictable and sustainable funding for the continued, coherent and coordinated oversight and implementation of the strategy (see also [A/73/828](#), para. 18 and [A/72/824](#), para. 29).**

III. Overview of data on allegations and investigations

17. The Secretary-General discusses in his report an increase in the total number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse across the United Nations system in 2019. In peacekeeping operations and special political missions, 80 allegations involving civilian, military and police or other government-provided personnel were reported, compared with the 56 allegations reported in 2018; 95 reported allegations involved United Nations staff and related personnel of agencies, funds and programmes, compared with 93 reported in 2018; and 164 allegations related to personnel of implementing partners, compared with 113 reported in 2018 ([A/74/705](#), paras. 54–63). In addition, in 2019, the United Nations received one allegation related to sexual exploitation involving a member of a formerly deployed non-United Nations security force (*ibid.*, para. 64). **The Advisory Committee expresses concern regarding the increased number of allegations and again recalls that the General Assembly has reaffirmed the collective and unanimous position that one substantiated case of sexual exploitation and abuse is one case too many (resolution [71/297](#), para. 4) and its commitment to the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse throughout the United Nations system (resolution [73/302](#), para. 1). The Committee also reiterates its view that more focus should be given to the nature of the allegations, in particular those egregious cases, rather than the number of allegations alone ([A/73/828](#), para. 13). Furthermore, recognizing that it would be oversimplistic to measure progress in the combating of sexual exploitation and abuse solely based on the number of recorded allegations and taking into account the measures implemented since the adoption of the strategy in 2017, the Committee is of the view that future progress reports of the Secretary-General should incorporate a more analytical approach.**

18. In the report, information on investigations is also provided ([A/74/705](#), paras. 57, 58, 61, 63 and 64). According to the report, the target time to complete an investigation is six months. Within the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the average completion time is 6.3 months; while the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) average less

than 100 days (*ibid.*, paras. 39 and 40). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the investigation timelines at UNICEF and UNOPS are related to the fact that the majority of allegations recorded by those institutions involve implementing partners who conduct their own investigations. **The Advisory Committee emphasizes the importance of the timely completion of investigations and implementation of effective accountability measures. The Committee looks forward to receiving updated and more detailed information on investigations in the context of the next report of the Secretary-General on sexual exploitation and abuse.**

IV. Conclusion

19. The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General, subject to its comments and recommendations above.
