

# UN SECRETARIAT

# TAKING ACTION

# ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT



“Sexual harassment offends the very principles of what we stand for as an Organization and undermines the core values of integrity, competence, and professionalism expected of all. Let’s support colleagues who are harassed and let’s call out harassment where we see it.”

– Secretary-General António Guterres

## What you should know

**Sexual harassment** is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another (see [ST/SGB/2008/5](#)).

- It may take place in the workplace or in connection with work (for example, in the course of official travel or mission), or in other settings where it may have an impact on the workplace.
- It may include written communication, such as email, text message or social media.
- It may be a pattern of behaviour or a single incident.
- It may occur between staff of the opposite or same sex.
- It may include exploitative or abusive sexual behaviour.

Some forms of sexual harassment can become the subject of criminal or civil proceedings at the national level.

The UN has a clear policy on the prohibition of sexual harassment, setting out the duties of staff,

managers, heads of departments, offices and missions as well as informal and formal resolution measures (see [ST/SGB/2008/5](#)).

All UN staff are required to complete the mandatory course “Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Abuse by United Nations Personnel – Working Harmoniously”.

## Who can complain

- Any staff member can make a complaint of sexual harassment.
- Any other person – including consultants, interns, volunteers – who may have been subject to sexual harassment by a staff member in a work-related situation can make a complaint.
- Any third party with direct knowledge of the situation can report.

## What you can do

**If you believe you have been a target of sexual harassment**, you are encouraged to take action as soon as possible.

**If you witness such behaviour as a bystander**, it is important that you take action. This may include intervening, reporting the matter, offering

to serve as a witness in the case or providing other forms of support.

If you feel comfortable and safe, you can address the matter informally with the alleged offender. You may obtain advice and support from the resource persons and offices listed at the end of this fact sheet.

### How to take formal action

If you wish to pursue a formal procedure, or you have been unable to resolve the matter informally, you should submit a written complaint to your head of department, office or mission. In cases where this official is the alleged offender, the complaint should be submitted to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management or, if you are mission staff, the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support.

In all cases, you may report sexual harassment directly to the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

Your complaint will be reviewed to determine whether there are sufficient grounds for a fact-finding investigation. In that event, a panel of two people from the department trained in investigating sexual harassment allegations will investigate.

The panel will submit a report to the official overseeing the process and the complainant will be informed of the outcome.

- If the panel's report indicates that sexual harassment took place, managerial action may be ordered by the responsible official.
- If sexual harassment amounts to possible misconduct, the case will be referred to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources for possible disciplinary action.
- If neither is found, the case will be closed.

### Protection against retaliation

Acts or threats of retaliation against any person exercising their right to complain about sexual harassment are unacceptable and unlawful (see [ST/SGB/2017/2/Rev.1](#)).

Requests for protection against retaliation may be submitted to the Ethics Office within a six-month period from the time the complainant knew or should have known about the retaliation.

The Ethics Office will conduct a preliminary review, normally within 30 days, and if it considers there is a basis for doing so, refer the matter to the Office of Internal Oversight Services for investigation.

Pending completion of the investigation, the Ethics Office may recommend that the Secretary-General take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of the complainant.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services will report its findings back to the Ethics Office. If the Ethics Office considers there has been retaliation, remedial action may be recommended to the Secretary-General.

### Resources for advice and support

- Talk to your supervisor or a higher-level manager

Contact any of the following

- [Office of Human Resources Management](#)
- [The Ombudsman and Mediation Office](#)
- [The Ethics Office](#)
- [The Staff Counsellor's Office](#)
- [The Office of Staff Legal Assistance](#)
- [Office of Internal Oversight Services](#)

If you are in a mission, contact

- your [Conduct and Discipline Team](#)