

Evaluation of the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate

June 16, 2026

IED-25-10 (Part 2)



INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

Project team members include:

Angela Arévalo, Team Leader
Sonjuhi Singh, Team Member
Cynthia Lamptey, Administrative Professional
Christian Mena, Intern
Xilin Liu, Intern

Contact Information **OIOS-IED Contact Information:**

Deborah McWhinney, Chief of Section

Tel: +1 212-963-2838, e-mail: deborah.mcwhinney@un.org

Demetra Arapakos, Director

Tel: + 1 917-367 6033, e-mail: arapakos@un.org

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Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluated the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (OVRA) in fulfilling its mandate.

OVRA was established in 2017 with the Victims' Rights Advocate mandate clearly defined in the Secretary-General's Special Measures Strategy. OVRA was an effective advocate for victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) as it successfully elevated victims' rights and increased the visibility of SEA victims across the United Nations and with Member States. However, OVRA's role was not consistently understood among many system-wide Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) staff; and the involvement of different United Nations actors in the provision of victim assistance and handling of paternity cases has created confusion with regard to organizational roles and responsibilities related to those of OVRA.

OVRA's normative work contributed to victims' rights being recognized across the United Nations system, the alignment of policies and frameworks with common victims' rights standards, and the strengthening of safeguarding standards. OVRA was less effective in operationalizing United Nations system-wide coherence in victims' assistance. At the headquarters level, efforts to address the key challenges of a) disjointed funding, b) lack of a standardized approach, c) data challenges and d) fragmented mechanism of victim support, were only nascent.

The Senior Victims' Rights Officers (SVRO) present in a few countries with peace operations focused their attention on those operations rather than on the other resident entities of the United Nations system. Ultimately, normative work and efforts to improve system-wide coherence did not translate into practice at the country-level despite the resourcefulness and effectiveness of the SVROs in supporting a limited number of victims.

OVRA needed to pay more attention to strategic communication and outreach on victims' rights, building United Nations personnel capacity, and providing adequate support to the SVROs in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. OVRA operated from 2021-2024 without a clearly articulated workplan and was understaffed. These factors negatively impacted mandate delivery.

OIOS makes four recommendations to OVRA to:

- a. Consolidate and provide guidance to operationalize system-wide victim assistance standards
- b. Develop system-wide guidance to handle paternity claims for civilian cases
- c. Re-assess and re-balance its modalities of work
- d. Re-asses and clarify the SVRO role

I. Introduction and objective

1. The overall objective of this evaluation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, Inspection and Evaluation Division (OIOS-IED) was to assess, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of OVRA. An evaluation of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSCSEA) was conducted in parallel to this evaluation to ensure efficiency in data collection since both offices engage many of the same stakeholders.
2. The evaluation conforms to the United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards. The OVRA management response is included in Annex I.

II. Background

Mandate and role

3. The mandate of the Victims' Rights Advocate was established in 2017 through a Secretary-General strategy to improve the system-wide approach to preventing and responding to SEA, entitled "Special measures for protection from SEA: a new approach [A/71/818](#)" hereby referred to as the Special Measures Strategy. The Strategy emphasized that "our priority first and foremost must be to strengthen the support that we give to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse."
4. Appointed at the Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) level, and reporting to the Secretary-General through the Chef de Cabinet, the Victims' Rights Advocate aims to place the rights and dignity of victims at the centre of efforts to prevent and respond to SEA across the United Nations system. The mandate responds to priorities established in General Assembly resolutions [62/214](#), [71/278](#), [71/297](#), [75/321](#), [76/274](#) and [77/333](#).
5. The objective of OVRA "is to ensure that the rights and dignity of victims of SEA are prioritized in all efforts of the United Nations system to prevent and respond to SEA by its personnel - uniformed or civilian - in peacekeeping, humanitarian and development settings and by non-United Nations troops serving under a Security Council mandate... [...] ... In the field, her mandate is operationalized through SVROs in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti and South Sudan."¹

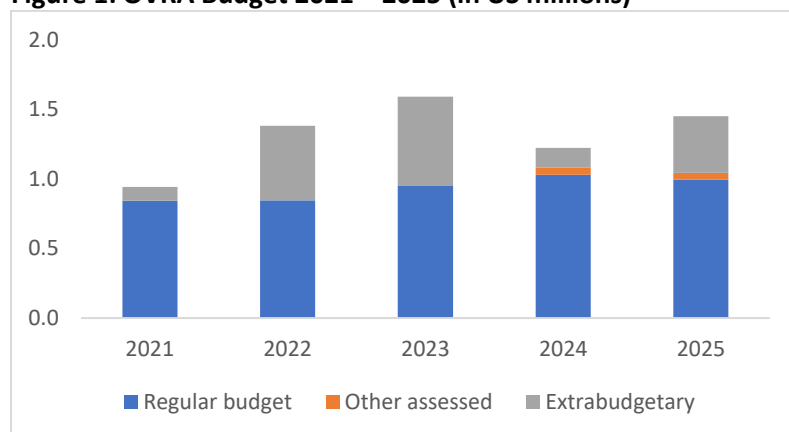
Resources and organizational structure

6. As shown in Figure 1, the Office budget has fluctuated over time reflecting variations in extrabudgetary (XB) funding.²

¹ United Nations, Proposed programme budget for 2025 A/79/6 (Sect. 1), 2024.

² United Nations, Proposed programme budget for 2022 (A/77/6 (Sect. 1)), 2023 (A/77/6 (Sect. 1)), 2024 (A/78/6 (Sect. 1)), 2025 (A/79/6 (Sect. 1)), 2026 (A/80/6 (Sect. 1)).

Figure 1: OVRA Budget 2021 – 2025 (in US millions)



Source: OVRA Proposed Programme Budgets 2021-2025

7. The Office was allocated four posts under the regular budget (ASG, P-4, P-3 and GS) and has been supported by temporary extrabudgetary hires. Four SVROs posts were established in 2019 with either a first or second reporting line to the Advocate. The SVROs are budgeted by four Peacekeeping and Special Political Missions.

III. Scope and Methodology

8. The evaluation covered the period from January 2021 to December 2025 and examined the extent to which:
 - a. The Victims' Rights Advocate and her Office – within its system-wide mandate - contributed to consistent, coordinated, coherent and comprehensive support to victims of SEA; and,
 - b. Victims were assisted in accordance with their individual needs, including provision of medical and psycho-social support, education, livelihood assistance and legal services.
9. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach using the following data sources:
 - a. Structured document review: A comprehensive review of more than 225 documents was conducted, including policies, tools and guidance developed or facilitated by the Office; programme budget documents; annual reports; performance reports; minutes from coordination meetings; and mission visit records. This also included the recent Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) Review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations system organizations ([JIU/REP/2025/2](#)), hereafter referred as the JIU Review.
 - b. Interviews: A total of 78 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 55 women and 26 men from United Nations entities,³ Member States, and civil society organizations (CSOs).
 - c. Survey: An on-line survey was administered to 101 United Nations system-wide Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) leads, Mission Conduct and Discipline Team (CDT) Chiefs, PSEA Coordinators and Victims' Rights Focal Points (VRFPs), yielding 65 responses (46 women, 18 men and 1 other) for a 64 per cent response rate.

³ For the purposes of this report, United Nations "entities" include system-wide entities such as agencies, funds and programmes, as well as Secretariat entities.

- d. Quantitative analysis of secondary data: Secondary data were analysed to identify trends and patterns for the number and types of SEA allegations, the resolution of paternity cases, and changes in United Nations staff perceptions on PSEA over time.
 - e. Direct observations: Five system-wide meetings were observed, including the Victims' Rights Working Group, High-Level Steering Group on SEA (HLSG), SEA Working Groups, and the Fifth Anniversary of the Victim Assistance Protocol event.
 - f. Country case studies: Two remote country case studies were undertaken in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, respectively, to assess contributions of the work of the SVROs, and the Advocate's high-level guidance and field visits. The evaluation also utilized the case study from the OIOS Evaluation of OSCSEA⁴ in the Central African Republic to gather additional evidence.
 - g. Social media analysis: The X (formerly Twitter) account of OVRA was analysed to understand the type of messages published and the geographic focus.
10. The evaluation was limited by a) constraints in undertaking mission travel, thus limiting data collection from external stakeholder, b) weak programme performance data that could be used to measure progress and c) significant reductions in PSEA staffing that affected data collection plans.

IV. Evaluation Results

A. There was inconsistent understanding of the role of the Victims' Rights Advocate

While the Victims' Rights Advocate mandate was clearly defined, the role was not consistently understood at the field level

11. The Special Measures Strategy clearly defined the mandate of the Victims' Rights Advocate, with specific functions, goals and accountabilities.⁵ The mandate was envisaged to not only inform standard setting, but also to engage in advocacy and partnerships. The Victims' Rights Advocate works with United Nations entities, Member States, civil society, and national legal and human rights organizations to build networks of support and assist in ensuring accountability of perpetrators through victim centred proceedings, remedies for victims and resolution of paternity and child support claims for children born of SEA.⁶
12. Despite the clarity of the mandate, understanding of the Advocate's specific role was inconsistent, particularly at the field level. A majority of all OIOS survey respondents (74 per cent) reported they had a good understanding of the role and its corresponding responsibilities. However, more than one-third (10 of 28) of surveyed PSEA coordinators – who play critical roles in ensuring system-wide coherence and managing victim assistance cases - did not. Stakeholders interviewed, as well as the JIU review, also noted the following issues:
 - lack of understanding among multiple entity country offices;

⁴ United Nations, *Evaluation of the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*, June 2026.

⁵ A/71/818, p. 9-10.

⁶ Ibid.

- greater visibility of the role in peacekeeping rather than in development settings;
- confusion regarding the extent to which the role extended to issues relating to Sexual Harassment (SH) - both at the normative level and in terms of engaging with victims of SH;
- an incorrect assumption among several Secretariat entities that the Advocate was responsible for directly assisting victims of SEA committed by their own personnel, which should be a designated role within their own organizational structures; and
- uncertainty regarding the Advocate's system-wide role

Overlapping United Nations entity roles created confusion regarding victim assistance responsibilities

13. Some United Nations PSEA leads, PSEA coordinators and CDT team members were also unclear about the different roles of OVRA, OSCSEA and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC) regarding victim assistance. This partially resulted from how OSCSEA defined its programme of work in 2022 when it became part of the regular budget, conveying its mandate as driving and overseeing United Nations PSEA efforts following a victim-centred approach and including advocacy and system-wide coordination on victim assistance issues. At times, these functions overlapped with those of the Advocate, contributing to different perspectives between OVRA and OSCSEA regarding their respective roles in victim assistance. There was further confusion regarding the DMSPC role in the management of the Trust Fund for victims of SEA, which supports projects assisting victims, and chairing of the Paternity Taskforce, which works with Member States to resolve paternity claims related to peace operations. On paternity issues in particular, headquarter-based United Nations staff expressed frustration regarding the number of actors involved, unclear roles and responsibilities and limited progress. This lack of clarity on paternity matters was also noted in the 2026 OIOS evaluation of OSCSEA.⁷
14. While OVRA, DMSPC and OSCSEA have worked together in a complementary manner, their heavy reliance on informal arrangements contributed to inefficiency. These offices have relied largely on informal arrangements to work together rather than on building on clearly defined institutional roles. In some cases, all three offices worked on a similar issue, such as resolving interim assistance payments for individual paternity cases. Resolving these inefficiencies by clarifying roles and responsibilities is not solely OVRA's responsibility, but it nonetheless had implications for OVRA's work.
15. Additionally, in countries with an SVRO presence, there was specific confusion between the victim assistance functions of the Conduct and Discipline Team (CDT) and the more recently arrived SVRO. Both often similarly assisted victims, even at times supporting the same individual victims, but without clear coordination. In two countries, the SVROs had to work with the CDT to define the boundaries of their respective roles to avoid duplication. Some CDT staff interviewed also noted that they had already been providing victim follow-up support and were unsure of the respective responsibilities between their team and the SVRO when the position was introduced.
16. There was further ambiguity between the SVRO and other PSEA functions at country-level. In one case study country, there was a blurring of roles among the SVRO, CDT, PSEA Coordinator, as well as other gender-based violence and human rights functions regarding responsibility for victim communication and assistance, particularly in complex cases. Regarding the resolution of paternity issues, in two case study countries, multiple actors were involved in overlapping roles - including the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC), the SVROs, and the CDT.

⁷ United Nations, *Evaluation of the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*, June 2026.

- B. An imbalance among its main work modalities, poorly defined workplans and limited support to the SVROs have challenged the mandate delivery of OVRA

OVRA emphasized its advocacy and strategic guidance and underutilized its capacity building and strategic communications in implementing its mandate

17. A review of 133 activities implemented by OVRA since 2021 showed nearly all (90 per cent) focused on advocacy and guidance related to policies, tools and procedures on victims' rights. This emphasis aligned well with what are perceived to be strengths and added value of the Office. Across interviews, the Advocate was consistently viewed as an effective global advocate who elevated victim-centred policy and increased the visibility of victims' rights across the United Nations system. (Results from this work are discussed in Finding C below.)
18. Given the focus described above, opportunities to build capacity around and strategically communicate critical issues faced by victims of SEA remained underutilized. More specifically, the scope and scale of OVRA capacity-building work was limited. Survey respondents rated this modality the lowest with regard to visibility and utility. The only system-wide capacity building initiative developed by OVRA was the unbranded, scenario-based System-Wide [Training Module](#) on the Rights and Dignity of Victims of SEA, jointly developed with International Organization for Migration, which reached more than 500 participants. However, uptake of this training remained uneven, with reduced awareness of its existence across entities and no evidence of systematic institutionalization. Survey results reflected this inconsistency, with 35 per cent of respondents reporting that their entity had not participated and 18 per cent reporting they were unsure. Limited resources, a reliance on other entities to deliver the training, and high staff turnover also affected the sustainability and system-wide reach of this training.
19. Although training is not formally included in the VRA mandate, the Office's 2025 programme plan⁸ includes a performance result to ensure that United Nations personnel assisting and investigating SEA complete training on the victim-centred approach, thus recognizing the importance of having a common understanding of this approach among PSEA personnel. However, this commitment has not been fully operationalised.
20. Strategic communication and outreach were similarly underutilized. Since 2021 OVRA produced 32 communication pieces — 24 globally-focused and 8 country-focused — and remained moderately active on social media through the X platform. During field missions, the Victims' Rights Advocate engaged directly with relevant implementing partners and victims' service providers. She also engaged with select RCs during their induction (either in New York or in the field), with United Nations Country Teams during UNCT-organized townhalls and in different webinars organized either by OVRA or UNCT members. Despite these efforts, targeted and systematic communication outreach to relevant field actors, such as implementing partners and victims' service providers, or to United Nations staff system-wide was weak, limiting the potential influence of OVRA messaging.

For several years, OVRA operated without clearly articulated workplans

21. The OVRA workplans from 2021 to 2024 lacked clarity and strategic focus. These workplans broadly delineated the key programmatic functions of the Office as follows: contributing to the development of policy and guidance; coordinating system-wide United Nations entities to integrate a victims' rights approach; organizing outreach activities; and expanding and supporting the network of SVROs and VRFPs. However, the workplans did not include a clear approach to achieving results in each of

⁸ United Nations, *Proposed Programme budget for 2025 (A/79/6 (Sect. 1))*, 2025.

these functions or define target goals or success criteria. The workplans also did not distinguish between key substantive tasks and more administrative tasks, such as budgeting and organizational reporting in UMOJA.

22. The 2024/2025 OVRA workplan was the first to set out specific goals and deliverables, structured around three pillars: voice, accountability and justice. This workplan, as well as the subsequent one for 2025/2026, were aligned with the Advocate’s mandate and included concrete performance measures for the Office’s main functions, such as “number of victims of SEA that have access to judicial processes has increased” and “the number of resolved cases of paternity and child support claims has increased”. Despite these improvements, the performance measures introduced lacked a timeline for achievement. While the detailed SVRO workplans were appropriately developed within specific peacekeeping operations to account for local contexts, their work was nevertheless excluded from the overarching OVRA workplan, which was a significant gap.

The SVROs received inadequate institutional support to implement the OVRA mandate at country level

23. The SVROs faced several constraints in receiving adequate institutional support. First, they managed high caseloads with limited capacities, including the support of national staff, at the country level, as shown in Table 1. In both the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the SVROs also managed high caseloads across remote geographical areas. While there were fewer cases in Haiti and South Sudan, they were often complex in nature and required significant effort to follow-up.

Table 1: SVRO caseload and staff support, 2024-2025

Country	No. of victims assisted in 2025	Staff support to the SVROs
Central African Republic	218	One United Nations Volunteer (UNV) and one national staff
Democratic Republic of Congo	148	Two United Nations Police (UNPOL) officers, one national staff, and one national UNV
Haiti	68	One national staff
South Sudan	22	None

Source: OVRA 2024 and 2025 Annual report and OIOS-IED interviews

24. The SVROs also received limited support from OVRA. The Advocate and other OVRA staff provided support to the SVROs during bilateral and monthly meetings, ad hoc meetings and during field visits. However, while these meetings were useful for sharing experiences and best practices, there was limited orientation provided to SVROs on how they should position their role, engage with Mission leadership and system-wide structures, and leverage their mandate to influence victim assistance across the Mission and with the wider United Nations country team. Unclear SVRO reporting lines, as well as the lack of consistent OVRA supervision, also diluted accountability and further contributed to gaps in support. The Victims’ Rights Advocate is aware of this challenge and is advocating with missions to ensure a consistent reporting structure.
25. Country-specific staffing challenges regarding the SVRO function also affected the continuity of victim support that the SVROs provided. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the CDT Chief has also been the Acting SVRO since May 2024, resulting in competing responsibilities and the lack of

adequate capacity to respond to evolving or long-term needs of victims and their children. In the Central African Republic, the international SVRO position was recently abolished and replaced by a national position, which may also affect the continuity of support provided. The Victims' Rights Advocate has been actively supporting MINUSCA and MONUSCO in the recruitment processes, which have been impacted by the liquidity crisis and related hiring freeze.

26. Lastly, specific guidelines or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for SVROs were lacking, despite the role having been established in 2019. Mission and system-wide stakeholders interviewed in three case study countries indicated being unclear about the SVRO role when it was first introduced, and the SVROs themselves noted that they had to build their role in real-time. OVRA has acknowledged this gap. The Victims' Rights Advocate has worked with the SVROs since September 2024 to develop guidelines, but they have yet to be finalised. The 2026 programme plan included a performance indicator on developing an SOP for SVROs and VRFPs.

Under-staffing and leadership transitions have further challenged mandate delivery

27. From 2021 to 2025, OVRA relied on three JPOs, one Gratis Personnel, two XB positions and interns, in addition to its three regular posts, to fulfil its system-wide mandate. These individuals have served for an average of a year and were dependent on raising extra-budgetary resources or reaching agreements with individual Member States. Additionally, short-term consultants were hired for discrete tasks. This reliance on temporary staffing meant that OVRA was unable to fulfil certain important and long-term functions, such as ensuring that system-wide entities have a harmonized and aligned approach to victim assistance.
28. The new Advocate assumed her position with limited staff support, which required her to focus more on administrative rather than strategic tasks. Her onboarding in May 2024 coincided with the conclusion of several short-term contracts and a vacancy in the critical P4 post of the Human Rights Officer. The new Advocate was initially supported by only one P3 and one G staff, which resulted in her reportedly spending 30–40 per cent of her time on administrative tasks, including budgeting, reporting and oversight exercises. As a result, she was unable to dedicate full attention to substantive issues, including her outlined priorities in the pillars of voice, assistance and justice.

C. OVRA was effective in elevating victims' rights and embedding them in United Nations and global policy frameworks

The normative work undertaken by OVRA contributed to increased institutional recognition for victims' rights across the United Nations system and was reflected in wider safeguarding standards

29. Normative contributions from OVRA have strengthened system-wide recognition of victims' rights. Two key documents underpin the United Nations normative framework on victim rights: i) the Victims' Rights Statement and ii) the Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of SEA. The Statement, developed by OVRA and adopted by the HLSG in 2023, articulates ten victims' rights and has been translated into all United Nations official languages and multiple local languages. A child-friendly version was also recently produced. Most survey respondents (57 per cent) reported using the Statement and a significant number of stakeholders interviewed described it as a major normative achievement which was frequently referenced in advocacy and policy documents across the United Nations and by external partners.
30. The Protocol, led by UNICEF and co-developed by OVRA in 2019, was also perceived as foundational, with most survey respondents (74 per cent) indicating they used it. Stakeholders interviewed

highlighted its role in establishing the standard that victim assistance should be provided when allegations are made rather than when investigation starts. Support expressed by the United Nations leadership and civil society actors to uphold and advance the standards of the Protocol was observed at its Fifth Anniversary event in April 2025, which further demonstrated renewed commitment, underscoring the continued relevance of the Protocol as a system-wide normative anchor.

31. While the Protocol and Statement enhanced institutional recognition for victims' rights and provided the foundation for establishing corresponding standards, the JIU Review noted that victim-centred approaches have still not yet been fully mainstreamed system-wide. According to the Review, such approaches were incorporated by only eight out of the 28 JIU participating organizations in their PSEA policies.
32. Beyond these two core instruments, OVRA influenced a wide range of other global normative initiatives shaping global safeguarding standards which were led by its different partners, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. OVRA influence on global safeguarding standards

Lead Organizations	Safeguarding Standards Influenced by OVRA
Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)	▪ Definition of a Victim-Centred Approach ▪ IASC Manual on a Victim-Centred Approach to SEA Investigations
United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)	Sexual Harassment Victim-Centred Principles
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development / Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC)	Recommendation on ending sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance
Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN)	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment indicators included in its indicator framework
United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)	Common Approach on Protection from SEAH (CAPSEAH)

Source: Desk review and interviews

The Advocate contributed to elevating and sustaining senior-level attention to victims' rights within the United Nations system and among Member States

33. Both the previous and current Advocates played a central role in sustaining high-level attention to victims' rights across the United Nations system. Staff and stakeholders interviewed consistently recognized them as important independent advocates who ensured that victims' concerns remained visible to United Nations leadership, and most survey respondents (66 per cent) rated their advocacy strongly. Field staff also described their visits as significant in that it demonstrated institutional commitment, even if operational results varied.
34. An analysis of the Advocates' engagements across the United Nations system from 2021 to 2025 indicated that both maintained regular interaction with a wide range of stakeholders, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Advocate engagement across the United Nations system, 2021-2025

Actors engaged	Engagement Focus
Secretariat entities	Integration of victims' rights into policies, accountability frameworks, budget processes and reporting mechanisms.
Agencies, Funds and Programmes (AFPs)	Implementation of victim assistance standards and, in 2025, the current Advocate undertook additional outreach to introduce the mandate to AFPs unfamiliar with the Office.
Peacekeeping Missions	Elevation of victims' rights within senior management and advancement of accountability for paternity and assistance gaps.
Resident Coordinator Offices	Inclusion of victims' rights within the United Nations Country Team coordination structures and strengthening of RC accountability for country-level follow-up.

Source: Desk review and interviews

35. More specifically, the Advocates contributed to the following system-wide results to strengthen victims' rights:

- **Advocacy with the Department of Social and Economic Affairs (DESA) contributed to the inclusion of a victims' rights indicator** in the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) framework in 2022, which assesses the effectiveness and impact of the United Nations operational activities for development. This is indicator 3.6.15 on the number of Country Teams with a designated Victims' Rights Focal Point.
- **Advocacy with the Comptroller's Office resulted in dedicated budget instructions for victim support provided to all peacekeeping operations.** As a result, MONUSCO and UNMISS 2026-2027 budgets included lines for victims' assistance in their submission while MINUSCA has had a dedicated budget line for this since 2023.
- **Advocacy with the Office of Administration of Justice led to stronger anonymization protections for victims** in United Nations tribunal proceedings in 2025.
- **Advocacy with DMSPC contributed to a shift in Trust Fund projects** from community-based activities to direct victim assistance, including the use of small, flexible grants for short-term support in 2024.

36. Advocacy with Member States also formed a significant component of OVRA engagement, with a predominant focus on paternity claims and child support. OVRA sustained an in-depth engagement with at least 13 Member States on paternity and child-support-related issues between 2022 and 2025. They also maintained consistent engagement in peacekeeping fora, including regular participation in General Assembly Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations discussions and briefings with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPO) to troop- and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs). These efforts increased attention on T/PCC accountability.

37. Beyond paternity cases, OVRA pursued other forms of advocacy with Member States. High-level bilateral engagement with representatives from the European Union, Switzerland and Australia focused on advancing harmonized PSEA approaches. Additionally, OVRA mobilized political and financial support for victims' rights through funding from the United Kingdom, Australia and Israel, including contributions dedicated to staffing and direct victim assistance. At the country level, both Advocates engaged national authorities during field visits, including ministries of justice and police in Cameroon, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Malaysia, Mali, and South Sudan, to advance accountability and clarify roles in SEA response.

OVRA influenced United Nations entities and external partners to align policies and frameworks with common victims' rights standards

38. The strategic guidance provided by OVRA contributed to the alignment of United Nations policies with victim-centred standards. OVRA provided direct guidance to at least ten United Nations entities in developing or revising SEA and SH frameworks, strengthening victim-centred elements within them. The Office also provided guidance to internal justice system actors – the Office of Administration of Justice and the United Nations Dispute and Appeals Tribunals - on applying victim-centred principles in sexual misconduct proceedings, based on a multi-year analysis of sexual misconduct judgements.
39. Additionally, the Office's engagement with academia, civil society and research partners contributed to expanding the uptake and application of victims' rights standards. OVRA collaborated with these actors on the development of operational tools, participated in safeguarding initiatives and engaged with several academic institutions, thus contributing to wider dissemination of victim-centred approaches. Specifically with civil society actors, OVRA engaged across approximately 20 country missions, including through bilateral meetings, participation in OVRA-led events and joint advocacy initiatives, such as the Fifth Anniversary of the Victim Assistance Protocol. The partnership with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) also supported the development of operational guidance to strengthen the role of national human rights institutions in addressing SEA issues. This partnership also facilitated a global conference and country-level follow-up, helping to reinforce the integration of victim-centred approaches across these Human Rights institutions.

D. OVRA was less effective in ensuring United Nations system-wide coherence on victim assistance

OVRA only recently started addressing issues of United Nations system-wide fragmentation

40. OVRA has recently started addressing issues of system-wide fragmentation, which is characterized by disjointed funding, lack of a standardised approach to victim assistance, significant data gaps, and fragmented mechanisms for supporting victims. To better align United Nations efforts on funding for victim assistance, the Advocate chaired the Trust Fund Dialogue on Victim Assistance in December 2024, convening entities managing trust funds across the system. The dialogue led to follow-up actions, including agreement to develop a shared roster of vetted implementing partners and to pilot good practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Furthermore, in July 2025, the Advocate chaired the first meeting of the Victim's Rights Working Group, a system-wide platform to identify gaps, challenges and good practices, which focused on victims' assistance. OIOS directly observed effective OVRA leadership at this meeting – by facilitating discussion and consensus to bring together different system-wide actors. This resulted in agreed recommendations on establishing a core standard of assistance, creating a collective mechanism to track assistance and developing a system-wide sustainable funding model. OVRA is also playing a key role in advancing the implementation of JIU Review recommendations by chairing the workstream on cross-cutting victims' rights in four thematic areas.
41. This lack of system-wide coherence on victim assistance also impacted the work of OVRA itself. Data gaps, and the lack of accountability for sharing victim assistance data with OVRA, prevented a comprehensive understanding of system-wide victim assistance efforts, which in turn also impeded the OVRA's strategic engagement. Outside of peacekeeping and political mission settings, paternity data was also lacking, which resulted in OVRA advocacy being limited to cases where the perpetrator was Mission personnel.

SVROs played a minimal system-wide role

42. Although SVROs were envisioned in the Special Measures Strategy to play a system-wide role, their contribution to inter-agency coordination, harmonization of victim assistance practices and improvements to data sharing remained weak. This was due to their primary focus on accompanying victims and managing individual cases. In the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, high caseloads, as discussed above in Result B, constrained their ability to take a broader system-wide role. The SVROs engagement in system-wide efforts was limited to some trainings activities, such as on the Victims' Rights Protocol, rather than provision of strategic support. In one country, their engagement in system-wide training activities was also nominal. In all countries, the SVROs were not engaged in developing PSEA Action plans and guiding the work of the PSEA networks.
43. The system-wide role of the SVROs was further hampered by their organizational placement within the Missions. The SVROs engaged primarily with Mission counterparts, particularly the CDT, who routinely referred victims to the SVROs following initial intake. Interaction with system-wide focal points responsible for internal case management within their entities was more limited. PSEA focal points relied on the SVROs for complex cases and were aware that the SVRO position had a system-wide mandate; however, in practice, the role was widely perceived as Mission-focused.
44. Data constraints also hampered the ability of the SVROs to operate system-wide. While the SVROs could access the Mission database - the Victim Assistance Tracking System (VATS) - no data outside of the Mission was shared with them. The SVROs lacked system-wide data to assess service gaps or victim needs since such data were fragmented and minimal. In one country, the SVRO attempted to create common or centralized trackers, but with limited success because of confidentiality concerns of agencies, funds and programmes.

E. Despite policy and normative advances and efforts to improve system-wide coherence, OVRA's contribution to ensuring that victims are assisted was limited

Significant gaps persist in the availability, quality and continuity of victim assistance services

45. While OVRA is not mandated to provide assistance to individual victims or undertake enforcement, the Office does play a facilitative role in ensuring that the United Nations system enables victims to receive support in accordance with their needs. Although OVRA contributed to important normative progress in articulating and promoting victims' rights and has taken steps to strengthen system-wide coherence, these efforts have not been systematically translated into practice across all field settings.
46. Victims have not consistently received adequate or sustained assistance. Essential services (medical, psychosocial and legal) were often insufficient, while longer-term support (education, livelihoods, housing) remained largely unmet, particularly in remote and conflict-affected areas where access was limited and national systems were weak. Assistance relied heavily on short-term, project-based funding, especially through the Trust Fund - managed by the CDS/DMSPC, which stakeholders viewed as insufficient and unsustainable; support frequently ended when funding ceased. Barriers to reporting further constrained access to assistance, including a lack of awareness, fear of retaliation and mistrust of institutional processes. The JIU Review also highlighted under-resourced, fragmented and non-harmonized victim assistance mechanisms. In line with the findings and recommendations of the JIU review, the Victims' Rights Advocate has been tasked by the Chef de Cabinet to develop a system-wide sustainable funding model for victim assistance.

47. In the context of these gaps, OVRA and the SVROs did contribute to a few, targeted interventions that addressed the immediate needs for some victims. This included income-generating activities, educational support and paternity cases follow-up in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Haiti and Liberia.

The extensive high-level OVRA advocacy on paternity and accountability has not resulted in tangible justice outcomes

48. The limited success in addressing paternity and child support claims, where Member States retain jurisdiction and accountability over their uniformed personnel, also exemplifies the gaps in achieving victims' rights. As noted in Result C, OVRA maintained sustained dialogue with T/PCC countries, following up on more than 318 paternity claims. These efforts have resulted in some direct contributions from these countries, including lump-sum payments from one.

49. Nevertheless, resolution rates for paternity cases remained extremely low. Of 788 recorded paternity claims, only 24 (three per cent) have been resolved as of March 2026.⁹ DNA testing challenges persist, with 631 cases having no available results and only 68 (9 per cent) yielding positive matches.¹⁰ Even when paternity is established, legal recognition does not always translate into meaningful support, with child support payments reported as low as US\$10–22 per month in some countries.

50. An earlier OIOS evaluation of United Nations Secretariat efforts against SEA¹¹ also identified significant challenges in handling paternity and child support claims. It noted that a harmonized procedure for managing such claims—proposed prior to the establishment of OVRA—had remained pending for more than five years. That evaluation included a recommendation for OVRA to establish a standardized procedure for paternity claims, which remains unimplemented.

The SVROs were resourceful and effective in supporting a limited number of victims with their immediate needs

51. Evidence from case studies in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and the Central African Republic, as well as documentation from Haiti, illustrate that the SVROs effectively maintained direct contact with victims, including regular in-person meetings, frequent phone communication and field missions to remote regions. The SVROs also ensured that victims received feedback on the status of their cases and accompanied them through investigative, DNA collection and legal processes.

52. In all three case study countries, a significant number of stakeholders interviewed recognized the key role of the SVROs in accompanying victims. Examples of where the SVROs contributed to improvements in individual victim assistance included:

- Support for school fee coverage and basic needs for children born of SEA, including the use of Mission resources in the Central African Republic to support 89 cases, and similar ad hoc assistance in Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- Facilitation of complex protection cases, including securing access to safe accommodation and emergency support for victims, in South Sudan.

⁹ [DMSPC Paternity Claims database](#), March 2026.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ United Nations, *Evaluation of the prevention, response and victim support efforts against sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations Secretariat staff and related personnel: Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services* ([A/75/820](#)), March 2021.

- Support for access to legal assistance, including advocacy in South Sudan that enabled allocation of Mission resources for legal support and lawyer fees for individual cases.
 - Support to paternity processes, including accompaniment during DNA testing, facilitation of communication of results and support for repeat testing where results were contested, in all three countries; in the Democratic Republic of Congo, retesting supported by the SVRO led to confirmation of previously negative cases.
 - Facilitation of child support in a small number of paternity cases, including lump-sum payments and coordination with concerned Member States.
53. The SVROs also were key in monitoring individual assistance cases and following up with service providers. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, this led to the identification of gaps in tracking systems and verification of whether referred services were delivered. In addition, the SVROs provided guidance on the design and implementation of Trust Fund projects. In three countries (the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan) they identified gaps in beneficiary targeting - including cases where victims of SEA were not included – and that income-generation projects were not aligned with victims’ needs.
54. Nevertheless, SVROs contributions to victims receiving the assistance to which they were entitled were primarily case-driven and dependent on direct engagement, follow-up and the identification and use of ad hoc resources. The individual case support did not translate into more systemic improvements in service delivery. The approach taken by the SVROs generated tangible benefits for individual victims but reached only a small proportion of those in need; only a small share of victims received support across all key areas -in investigations, referrals, legal aid or paternity claims.

V. Conclusion

55. Despite important advances in recognizing and promoting the rights of SEA victims across the United Nations system, these commitments have not consistently translated into meaningful changes in victims’ lives. Many continue to face gaps in access to basic services, uncertainty in navigating fragmented processes and limited prospects for accountability or redress, particularly for child support and paternity. As articulated in the previous OIOS evaluation, there is continued concern about the lack of a clear framework for addressing child support and paternity claims by uniformed personnel in peace operations. While DMSPC is the lead organization in engaging with Member States, OVRA plays an important supporting role as a member of the Paternity Taskforce.
56. The contribution made by OVRA to advancing victims’ rights has been significant at the normative and advocacy levels. Going forward, it will be important to ensure that these gains translate more consistently into practice, including through greater focus on the articulation of clear and strong Organization-wide standards that are effectively operationalized and consistently applied across all contexts. This includes clearer roles and expectations across entities, more coherent implementation approaches, and country-level functions that can operate beyond institutional silos. Within existing resource constraints, more systematic use of capacity building, strategic communications and outreach could achieve more consistent application of victim-centred approaches across contexts. Ultimately, progress will depend on moving from normative standard setting with some victims being supported, to ensuring that all victims are assisted — consistently, equitably and at scale.
57. OVRA plays a critical role in ensuring institutional accountability for the United Nations’ own victims and demonstrating the ethics and values of the United Nations. The independence, authority and credibility of OVRA are vital in that regard and to ensure expected gains are realised. The planned

abolishment of the Advocate's post and transfer of the OVRA function to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) presents an inherent high risk that the specific rights of victims of misconduct by United Nations personnel may be subsumed to the programme-focused human rights mandate delivered by OHCHR. The Organization must proactively mitigate this risk to remain accountable and provide necessary assistance to SEA victims.

VI. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: OVRA should consolidate and provide guidance to operationalize system-wide victim assistance standards in its capacity as technical lead, building on the work of the Victims' Rights Working Group (VRWG) and existing frameworks, particularly the Protocol and VRWG outputs. (Results A, C, D and E)

Indicator of implementation: A consolidated and operationalized set of system-wide victim assistance standards is issued, including how they are to be implemented in different contexts, and roles and responsibilities from entities involved.

Expected change: More coherent system-wide approach to victim assistance

Recommendation 2: OVRA should, in coordination with system-wide United Nations entities, develop guidance on victims' rights considerations for handling paternity claims and related child support claims involving children born of SEA by civilian personnel. (Results A, C, D and E)

Indicator of implementation: Operational guidance developed for cases involving civilian staff, defining a standardized process.

Expected change: More coherent system-wide handling of paternity claims in cases involving civilian staff and more timely responses to victims.

Recommendation 3: OVRA should re-assess and re-balance its modalities of work to better support the system-wide implementation of victims' rights standards. In doing so, the Office should consider increasing its strategic communication and outreach activities, and institutionalizing capacity-building on victims' rights across the system through engagement with relevant entities, including United Nations training institutions. (Results A and B)

Indicators of implementation:

- Increase of OVRA activities dedicated to strategic communications.
- Documentation showing OVRA engagement with relevant entities, including UN training centres, and in the field, on capacity-building on victims' rights delivered more systematically.
- Documentation showing OVRA engagement with UN PSEA personnel introducing them to victims' rights and victim-centred approach, including relevant tools.

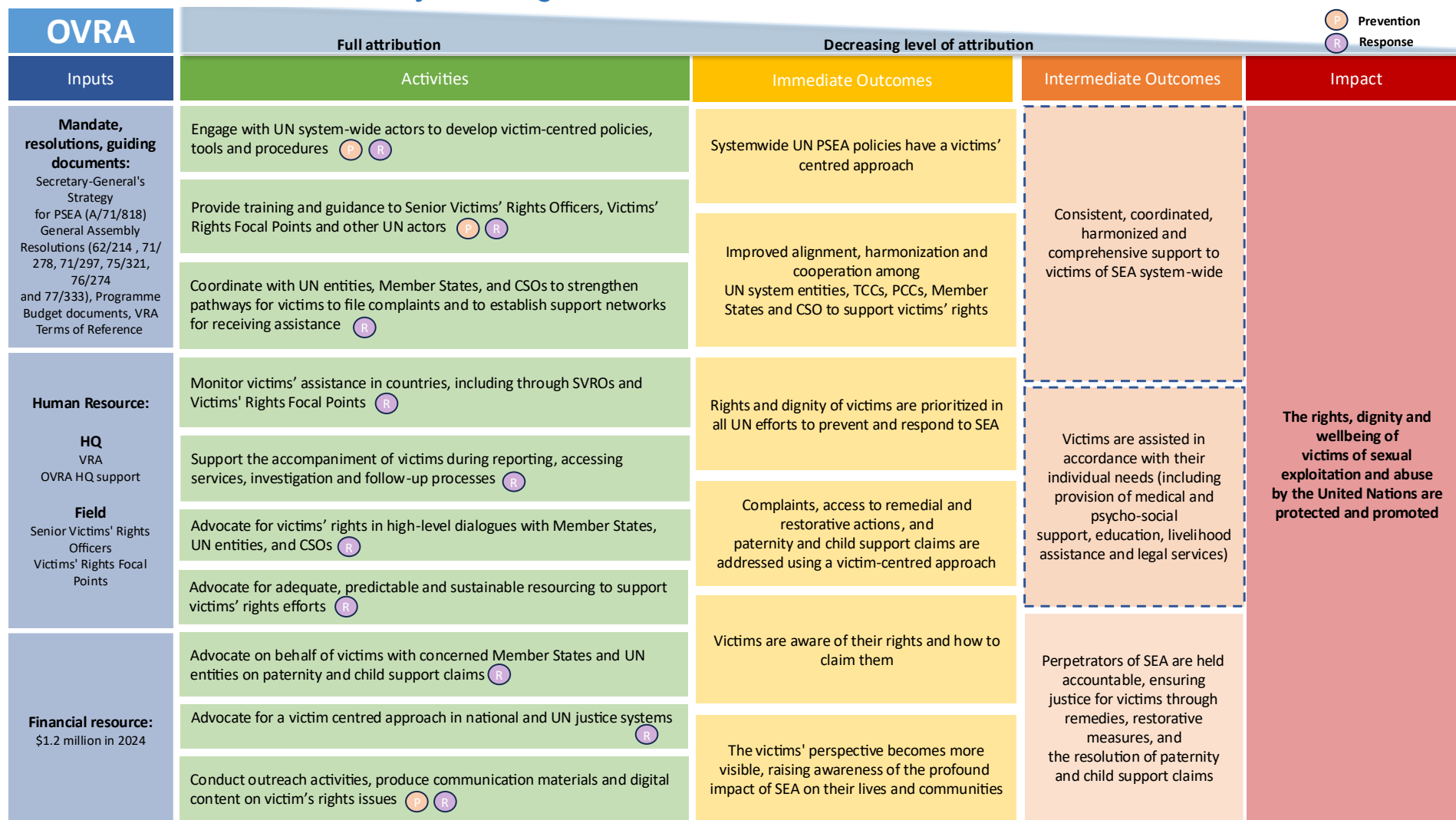
Expected change: Enhanced staff understanding of and capacity in undertaking victims' rights and victim-centred approach, and consistent application of standards at scale.

Recommendation 4: OVRA should reassess and clarify the SVRO role, including its organizational positioning, to enhance the SVRO ability to operate as a system-wide actor. (Results A, B, D, E)

Indicator of implementation: Proposal to clarify the SVRO role and adjust SVRO organizational positioning (e.g., level, profile, or host UN entity) as appropriate to improve greater efficiency and system-wide coverage.

Expected change: The SVROs contribute to strengthened system-wide support to victims of SEA.

Annex I. OVRA Evaluation Theory of Change



 Prevention
 Response

Annex II. OVRA Management Response

United Nations
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM



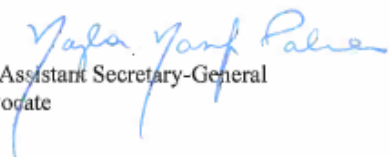
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MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

CONFIDENTIAL

DATE: 15 June 2026
REFERENCE:

TO: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, Under-Secretary-General
A: Office of the Internal Oversight Services

Demetra Arapakos, Director
Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

FROM:  Najla Nassif Palma, Assistant Secretary-General
DE: Victims' Rights Advocate

SUBJECT: OVRA Response to OIOS Evaluation Report
OBJET: (OIOS-2026-01095)

1. In response to your Office's memorandum of 3 June 2026, I am pleased to provide the response of my Office to the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate.
2. My Office wishes to express its appreciation to OIOS for the thorough and constructive consultation process, as well as for the careful consideration given to the comments provided on the draft report. We welcome the efforts made to reflect important clarifications regarding the mandate, operating context and system-wide nature of responsibilities related to victims' rights, including the recognition of the Office's facilitative role and the structural constraints within which it operates.
3. We are encouraged that the report acknowledges the significant contribution of the Office in elevating the rights of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by UN personnel across the United Nations system, including through normative and advocacy work that has strengthened institutional recognition and contributed to the development of global safeguarding standards. The report appropriately highlights that OVRA has played a central role in placing victims at the centre of the Organization's response to sexual exploitation and abuse, including through key instruments such as the Victims' Rights Statement and sustained engagement with Member States and system-wide actors.
4. The report is welcome and provides valuable insights at a time of institutional transition and reform. It underscores both the progress achieved and the structural constraints that continue to affect the realization of victims' rights, including fragmentation across the system, limited resources, and the decentralized nature of implementation responsibilities among United Nations entities. These constraints have had implications not only for the coherence of victim assistance but also for the ability to translate normative advances into consistent practice at country level.

5. The Office notes the recognition given to recent efforts undertaken to address these systemic gaps and to strengthen coherence across the United Nations system. In this regard, important progress has been made, including through the establishment and leadership of the Victims' Rights Working Group as a system-wide coordination platform, which has begun to generate concrete and actionable proposals in key areas such as establishing core standards of assistance, developing collective mechanisms for tracking support, and advancing a sustainable funding model for victim assistance. In addition, continued advocacy has contributed to the inclusion of dedicated budget provisions for victim assistance in peacekeeping operations, as well as strengthened engagement with Member States and national stakeholders to advance accountability and support for victims.

6. The Office welcomes the findings and conclusions of the evaluation and concurs with the overall direction of the proposed recommendations, which are aimed at strengthening system-wide coherence, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and enhancing the effectiveness of the Office's modalities of work. In taking this forward, OVRA will continue to build on existing frameworks and partnerships, including the Victims' Rights Working Group, and to prioritize practical measures that support the operationalization of victim-centred approaches across diverse contexts.

7. Particular attention will be given to strengthening guidance to operationalize system wide victim assistance standards, enhancing strategic communication and outreach, supporting more consistent capacity-building through engagement with relevant United Nations entities, developing system-wide guidance to handle the rights of victims in paternity claims and further clarifying the role and positioning of Senior Victims' Rights Officers (SVROs) to enable them to operate more effectively as system-wide actors.

8. I will continue to engage in advocacy during field visits, including in townhalls with UN Country Teams, and engagements with the Resident Coordinators to emphasize the system-wide role of the SVROs and to encourage agency, funds and programmes to collaborate with their work including in facilitating referrals and providing assistance to victims via existing programmes. Building upon the support to SVROs already included in the OVRA workplan, the Office will also provide more systematic guidance for SVROs including developing standard operating procedures.

9. As reflected in the report, OVRA does not exercise enforcement authority or direct operational responsibility for the delivery of assistance; rather, it supports the United Nations system in enabling victims to access services and in advancing coherence, standards and accountability, while primary responsibility for implementation rests with individual entities in accordance with established administrative and managerial frameworks. OVRA will continue to provide guidance to specialized personnel within UN entities to support victims.

10. The Office notes that the resolution of paternity and child support cases in peacekeeping operations is largely contingent upon the cooperation of troop- and police-contributing countries, as Member States retain jurisdiction and accountability over their uniformed personnel. The Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC) is the lead entity in advancing the resolution of paternity claims involving peace operations personnel, including as Chair of the Paternity Task Force.

11. Consequently, progress in such cases depends on sustained diplomatic engagement and political leverage, applied in conjunction with other relevant accountability frameworks, including Security Council resolution 2272. OVRA has, in coordination with DMSPC and other relevant entities, enhanced the framework and developed internal mechanisms for the resolution of paternity and child support claims for uniformed personnel. Moreover, OVRA recognizes that it could play a system-wide role in developing operational guidelines regarding victims' rights in paternity claims involving civilian personnel, both within peace missions and from agencies, funds and programmes.

12. In sum, the evaluation confirms that OVRA has made significant contributions in advancing victims' rights at the normative and advocacy levels. Moving forward, the Office remains committed to strengthening the translation of these gains into more consistent, equitable and sustained outcomes for victims across all contexts, while continuing to work with Member States and United Nations entities to address structural gaps in data, funding, coordination and accountability.

13. I wish to take this opportunity to thank you and your staff for their cooperation and assistance

cc: Ms. Deborah McWhinney, OIOS
Ms. Angela Arevalo, OIOS
Ms. Sonjuhi Singh, OIOS