IASC | Inter-Agency Standing Committee

Summary of IASC Good Practices

PREVENTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE OF AID WORKERS

May 2019

Endorsed by: IASC
29.05.2019

Introduction

This paper summarizes actions undertaken by IASC members to protect from and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment and abuse (SHA)[1]. It reflects updated information from IASC partners, complementing the 31 May 2018 review of IASC Good Practices. Actions have been grouped according to the strategy endorsed by the IASC in December 2018, which identifies priorities under three main objectives.

This summary aims to promote good practice and learning within the IASC and identify opportunities for collaboration, where possible, responding to calls for the IASC to "share and promote best practices on preventing, investigating, and responding to sexual harassment and assault."[2]

In March 2018, the IASC acknowledged that all entities are facing similar issues and have come to a shared diagnosis. They agreed that the IASC should serve as a forum for information exchange and to share best practices across the sector.[3] In May 2018, the IASC also called to "circulate the compendium of good practices and ensure that it is regularly updated"[4]. At the IASC Senior Focal Points meeting with the ERC and the IASC Champion in November, the commitment to continue to document good practice was iterated, and participants agreed to share knowledge, good practices, and lessons learned.

Only a snapshot of the extensive inputs submitted by IASC organizations is provided below; with the agreement of IASC Principals, the full record can be made available on the IASC website.

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[1] The collection of good practices built on the work led by the IASC Co-Champions on Sexual Harassment and Abuse against Aid Workers, Kate Gilmore and Lindsay Coates, in 2017.

[2] Feinstein International Center, Stop the Sexual Assault against Humanitarian and Development Workers, p. 5. Available at: http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/stop-the-sexual-assault-against-humanitarian-and-development-aid-workers/

[3] https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/principals/meetings-public/ad-hoc-iasc-principals-meeting-preventing-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation.

[4] https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/principals/documents-public/summary-record-and-action-points-iasc-principals-meeting-31-may-2018.

1. Encouraging victims to come forward and a speak up culture

IASC members reported progress achieved since May 2018 to ensure that safe, trusted and accessible mechanisms for reporting SEA are available and developed based on contextual assessments that consider the best means of safe and confidential reporting in particular environments. Information is being disseminated through community platforms, dedicated websites and internal advocacy campaigns with awareness-raising posters and other communication materials. UNICEF is developing new technology-based solutions to assess risk of SEA and strengthen access to safe and confidential reporting. It is adapting its cell phone-based reporting ([U Report](#)), currently in use in 40 countries, to make reporting safe and accessible to vulnerable communities and to reach child victims with the support they need. Its reporting procedure ("Notification Alert") escalates reports of sexual exploitation and abuse from the country-office level to the executive level within 24 hours.

1.1 Community-Based Complaints Mechanisms (CBCMs)

With support from OCHA and IOM, community-based complaint mechanisms using appropriate languages and channels are being established in all humanitarian responses. The IASC AAP/PSEA Task Team provides inter-agency guidance and support to organizations on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse through a variety of channels, including a helpdesk. PSEA has been integrated into the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (including Humanitarian Needs Overviews) by asking specific questions in multi-sector needs assessments. By incorporating these questions into the methodology, the levels of risk of SEA and trust in the response and behaviour of aid workers can be identified and acted upon.

The 3-day training on establishing inter-agency CBCMs for PSEA networks, developed by IOM, is delivered at the request of country teams and covers a broad spectrum of issues, including complaint handling and referrals, multi-stakeholder engagement, victim assistance and M&E. The IASC PSEA Best Practice Guide on CBCM was rolled out by UNICEF in collaboration with IOM in seven countries, including training on the UN Victim Assistance Protocol.

1.2 Reporting and speak up culture within IASC entities

While recognizing that IASC member entities will have their own reporting channels for misconduct, barriers to reporting SH are gradually removed. The UN Secretary General's Bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (2003) obliges UN staff to report incidents of abuse, and is binding on all UN staff, including all agencies and individuals who have cooperative agreements with the UN. UN organizations apply the 2003 bulletin and, in some cases, have used it as a foundation for the development of agency-specific policies. Protection against retaliation for reporting misconduct and for cooperating with duly authorized audits or investigations is dealt with in another UN SG Bulletin (2017), which defines and prohibit all such behaviour and put in place measures to combat whistle-blower retaliation. These Bulletins are useful references for IASC organizations as they provide clarity on definitions on SEA and SHA (e.g. Oxfam uses UN definitions for PSEA and sexual harassment).

Furthermore, many IASC organizations have specific Codes of Conduct that are relevant to SEA and SHA. IOM's Standards of Conduct enshrines "freedom from harassment" as of one of IOM's core values. Since February 2018, WFP Security Officers have also been including information specific to prostitution as SEA and prohibited conduct in their briefings to visitors and Headquarters and Country Offices. IASC organizations such as IFRC and IOM require staff joining the organizations to sign a Code of Conduct.

Under the leadership of UNICEF and UNFPA, the [United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners](#) has been developed to strengthen a common approach across the UN system and has been translated into the other five UN languages.

Laminated cards with Focal Point numbers, targeted emails reminding staff of policy (e.g. WFP, OCHA, OHCHR, UNHCR), holding townhall meetings (OHCHR), and carrying out awareness campaigns and staff surveys on issues such as harassment and abuse of authority (OHCHR, WFP) are some of the ways to increase staff awareness about policies and guidance. Making information available in multiple languages is critical to ensuring staff and affected people understand the key concepts of preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (e.g. 4 languages for IFRC's anti-harassment guidelines, 9 languages for UNHCR's Code of Conduct, and 7 languages for its brochure for staff on reporting sexual exploitation and abuse).

A key issue to enhance reporting is to address lack of trust in reporting systems and fear of speaking up and/or retaliation. IASC organizations have put in place several channels to report incidents, such as dedicated confidential email addresses, helpdesks, designated senior managers, information brochures, and web-based platforms.

Several organizations have established a hotline to report misconduct. In most cases, the possibility is offered to report in complete anonymity. At UNHCR, the helpline can also be used to obtain advice on what to do when in doubt. At Oxfam, incidents can be reported to management directly or through a global, third party independent whistleblowing hotline which is available to staff, partners, and beneficiaries and is accessible in several languages. Oxfam uses a centrally-led case management system for handling and investigating all reports of sexual misconduct. At IOM, the secure, user-friendly downloadable application (released worldwide in December 2017) contains a reporting link that goes directly to the Ethics and Conduct Office. These hotlines are being either internally or externally managed and are available 24 hours a day, both to staff and to the broader public. Most hotlines have trained and experienced responders or investigators (some with gender parity) answering calls. The online portal ([My Safe Workplace](#)) to confidentially report workplace issues, set up by Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI), benefits from the support of a pro bono labour and employment law firm which supports affiliates. WHO's integrity hotline constitutes a unique mechanism

allowing people (staff as well as the wider public) to report concerns that something of an unethical nature may be occurring involving WHO, even anonymously.

In parallel, networks of staff, Peer Support Personnel or community of practices exist in several organisations to disseminate information on staff rights and responsibilities as well as on the options available under various policies.

Training is the primary way through which most IASC organisations communicate policies, standards and expectations to staff. Many IASC organisations have included PSEA and sexual harassment in their induction training, and include other mandatory training such as the UN course on the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse of authority or the child safeguarding training at Save the Children. Newly appointed FAO managers receive a detailed briefing on prevention of harassment and their role in creating an environment free of harassment. Oxfam and UNFPA provide induction training on PSEA and sexual harassment; the former also includes tailored induction sessions for senior managers. UNHCR expanded the number and reach of its Women's Security Awareness Trainings (WSAT), of which one module focuses on sexual harassment. Delivered by women for women, this training is experienced as a safe place for female colleagues of UNHCR and partner organizations to speak up and ask questions that relate to their security. In 2018, IOM delivered in-person training to approximately 1,500 staff at 19 IOM missions on the Standards of Conduct, with key modules on harassment, reporting and PSEA. Most organizations reported that they actively monitor training completion, some by including targets in performance appraisals. OHCHR carries out 360-degree evaluations of its managers, which includes assessing their performance on fostering a respectful and harassment-free working environment. Notably, UNICEF reported its course completion rates are currently at 90% (SHA) and 95% (PSEA). UNFPA, OHCHR and UNICEF are aiming for compliance rates of 100% for the completion of training.

2. Improving quality, survivor centred support and protection

2.1 Multifunctional support.
The UN developed and field tested a protocol on the provision of assistance to victims of SEA which aims to strengthen the UN system approach to SEA victim assistance and to clarify the inter-agency governance structure at field level on PSEA.

PSEA strategies and activities such as medical care and psychosocial support are also now included in the new humanitarian programme cycle guidance for Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Humanitarian Response Plans and included in allocations of pooled funds. In January 2019, the ERC communicated a strategic shift in priority funding areas for CERF and country-based pooled funds (CBPFs). RC/HCs are encouraged to expand CERF/CBPF activities in important underfunded areas, such as support for women and girls through initiatives that address gender-based violence, reproductive health and empowerment. This includes projects

that prioritize assistance to victims of SGBV and SEA. PSEA is further being integrated into the humanitarian coordination architecture with an emphasis on attention to victims, and PSEA networks are integrated into relevant field coordination groups including Humanitarian Country Teams, inter-cluster groups, relevant and related clusters, and regional coordination groups. HCTs are responsible for development of PSEA action plans and commitment documents.

Ensuring that victims are at the centre of response is essential when managing cases of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse. As part of their standard operating procedures, organizations provide psychological, medical and other support for victims, either through internal services (such as Staff Counsellors or Peer Support Volunteers) or external services. At UNDP, professional counselling support through an independent team of counsellors is available to sexual harassment victims. At IOM, duty of care guidelines for victims of SEA are being developed to make sure all victims of abuse receive the assistance they need, regardless of location; they seek to encompass all possible needs, including medical, psychosocial, legal, financial, etc.

2.2 Additional protection measures

The UN Victim Assistance Protocol has been field tested in four countries (CAR, DRC, Iraq, and Mali) and will be finalized in 2019.[5] UNICEF has scaled up its response to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, which includes psychosocial support, referrals to trained health-care providers for medical services, referrals for legal assistance, school re-integration support and/or access to life skills training, and provision of basic care (including dignity or hygiene kits, clothing, etc.). UNICEF also provides compensation for service-incurred illness and injury to consultants and individual contractors. ICRC is mapping local capacities for survivors' referral for medical/psychological assistance; 15 National Red Cross / Red Crescent Societies that joined a PSEA 'writeshop' in December 2018 outlined such practices if they had them.

3. Strengthened vetting, reference-checking, investigation processes and disciplinary measures

3.1 Vetting and reference-checking processes

In May 2018, the IASC Principals committed to measures to strengthen the investigative capacity of agencies; share good practices on how IASC agencies prevent, investigate and respond to SEA; and prevent perpetrators from moving through the sector. As of the first trimester 2019, 13 organizations have joined the Steering Committee for Humanitarian

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[5.] For more information on victim assistance, see www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/victim-assistance.

Response (SCHR)'s [Inter-Agency Misconduct Disclosure Scheme](). The purpose of the scheme is to complement the work that organizations are doing as part of their recruitment processes. It establishes a minimum standard for humanitarian, development and other civil society organizations to share information as part of their recruitment process about people who have been found to have committed "misconduct", meaning sexual harassment, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation, during employment.

In June 2018, the UN launched an electronic tool – known as "Clear Check" – aimed at preventing UN personnel dismissed for substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, or who left the Organization while an investigation was pending, from being deployed or re-employed within the system.

InterAction's CEO Pledge includes a commitment to discuss and share best practices around the issue of perpetrator disclosure. In October 2018, UNHCR launched a review of existing policy and guidance on SEA and SH with the aim of consolidating the various elements under one umbrella. New comprehensive guidance on preventing and responding to sexual misconduct will be issued in 2019, including an amended recruitment form to include specific questions on misconduct and self-certification to sanction anyone trying to misrepresent him/herself.

IASC organizations are committed to sharing information on former staff members, to prevent transgressors from moving freely from one agency to another, but legislation related to employment, privacy and data protection limits them from doing so in certain contexts. Therefore, ICRC puts the initial onus of disclosing misconduct information on the candidate. It requires applicants to self-declare prior issues of sexual or other misconduct and termination of past employment in the application, and to consent to the disclosure of any misconduct or termination information by their former employer during the verification of references. Affirmative responses or the failure to consent to the disclosure of information results in the rejection of the applicant without further consideration.

Other examples to prevent hiring perpetrators of misconduct include: the use of pre-screening questions as part of the application process (UNHCR, UNICEF); the establishment of a system of accredited referees (Oxfam); and the development of an internal database of disciplinary measures on staff, including dismissals, to avoid rehiring them at a later point in time (WFP).

Some organizations have specific measures to hold managers accountable for taking appropriate action. FAO managers are required to undertake specific training and to implement policy; any manager permitting the existence of an environment that tolerates sexual harassment could face disciplinary measures. For some IASC organizations, failure to report wrongdoing may also be considered as misconduct.

InterAction reports that 110 Interaction members (out of 157) self-certified themselves as being compliant with US federal laws including Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibiting sexual harassment; in December 2017, the CEO Task Force that had been created to collectively address SEA resulted in a CEO Pledge signed by 119 organizations.

3.2 Investigation and disciplinary processes

The IASC established a US$1 million fund, managed by OCHA, to provide rapid grants to IASC entities to support investigations into SEA and sexual harassment allegations. In November 2018, OCHA and the CEB Task Force convened a meeting of the heads of their investigatory bodies to ensure effective, efficient, timely and victim-centred approaches to investigations. Two follow-up meetings are planned for 2019.

Investigations are generally governed by various internal frameworks and principles. For UN entities, investigatory capacity is led by a separate audit and investigation unit or an inspector general's office, mandated to conduct all investigations for the organization, including those of SEA, sexual harassment and abuse of authority. WFP reported that its most sensitive cases were handled by third party experts to ensure that SEA and sexual harassment cases received immediate attention and independent review; it also engaged a consulting firm, specializing in SEA and sexual harassment cases, to review its current processes and internal investigatory capacity. Many UN IASC members are part of the SEA Task Force of the UN Representatives of Investigations Services (UNRIS).

World Vision manages allegations of abuse through a global incident management team and the type of incident determines whether the investigation would be conducted by human resources or its audit investigation team. The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) believes that only outside investigators have the required expertise and independence to investigate serious incidents of SEA and SHA, in particular any incidents in which senior managers may be implicated. It has therefore established a stand-by Framework Agreement with specialized and trained investigators from an outside company to lead a robust and independent investigation. ICMC also believes that concluding a Framework Agreement for stand-by capacity sends a clear message within the organization that such incidents will not be tolerated and that it may help to deter potential perpetrators.

Whenever possible, additional staff were hired to support investigations processes. A multidisciplinary, multilingual, gender-balanced team of investigators which is supplemented by professional investigations consultants as required represents good practices. In UNDP, a female investigator specializing in sexual harassment was recruited in 2018, as well as two additional lawyers. All cases of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and sexual harassment are automatically prioritized. The objective is to complete the process in less than 6 months.

Training is a critical component to maintain and develop investigators' skill sets. For the UN system, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) trains UN investigators on reviewing allegations, including on forensic interviewing of child victims of abuse, and coordinates the harmonization of investigation methods and approaches across the various UN investigatory bodies. Most UN entities also reported having additional, internal training for their investigators. Some provide training to their NGO partners.

IASC organizations reported having policies and processes to ensure both the mechanisms and management responsibilities are in place to sanction staff when necessary. In cases of confirmed inappropriate behaviour, most reported that the consequences include robust disciplinary action, such as dismissal, suspension, written censure or other administrative/corrective measures as well as reporting the incident to law enforcement authorities for criminal prosecution. Those that are being investigated are also limited in professional advancement opportunities. At IFRC, disciplinary measures are visible in personal files, and by 2020 all staff will be screened for child protection.

Additional actions

At field level, OCHA supports the Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) in their responsibility to ensure that effective systems are in place for preventing and responding to acts of sexual exploitation and abuse. HC responsibilities on PSEA are included in their annual compacts, and HCs report regularly to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) on the matter. The topic is a standing item in the annual Humanitarian Coordinators' retreat. In addition, consolidated data on allegations and substantiated cases of sexual exploitation and abuse are published in the Quarterly Updates of the Secretary-General.

UNICEF has developed and rolled out a global PSEA results monitoring framework for its action in humanitarian countries, with dedicated resources provided to 16 high-risk Country Offices and 3 Regional Offices to support implementation. The results monitoring framework is currently being implemented in 17 countries and it is anticipated that an additional 17 countries will implement the framework in 2019.