

INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIZATIONAL PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT, EXPLOITATION & ABUSE

This short guide has been prepared for staff of InterAction member organizations who in some way have responsibility for strengthening their organizational capacity to address issues of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation. It is a very basic introduction to terminology commonly used in this work, background information and key standards that should inform practice. We also provide a simple framework to consider the areas within your organization that may need to be strengthened and some tips to start making meaningful progress.

COMMON TERMINOLOGY:

WHAT IS SAFEGUARDING?

Safeguarding refers broadly to the protection of people and environments from harm. Within the humanitarian and development sector, some use safeguarding to refer to the protection of staff, partners, volunteers or communities we work with from sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, bullying, and other forms of harmful conduct by representatives or employees of aid organizations.

WHAT IS SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (SEA)?

This phrase typically is used to refer to situations in which beneficiaries or community partners are mistreated by NGO staff, volunteers or contractors. Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) occur when people in power exploit or abuse vulnerable populations for sexual purposes.

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE (SHA)?

Typically used in the context of workplace interactions, between staff members, sexual harassment refers to unwelcome sexual advances that do not involve physical contact, such as requests for sexual favors, verbal or physical conduct, or gesture of a sexual nature that creates a hostile or offensive environment. The harassment can occur in person and/or through virtual platforms. Sexual abuse is the threat or actual physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal coercive conditions.

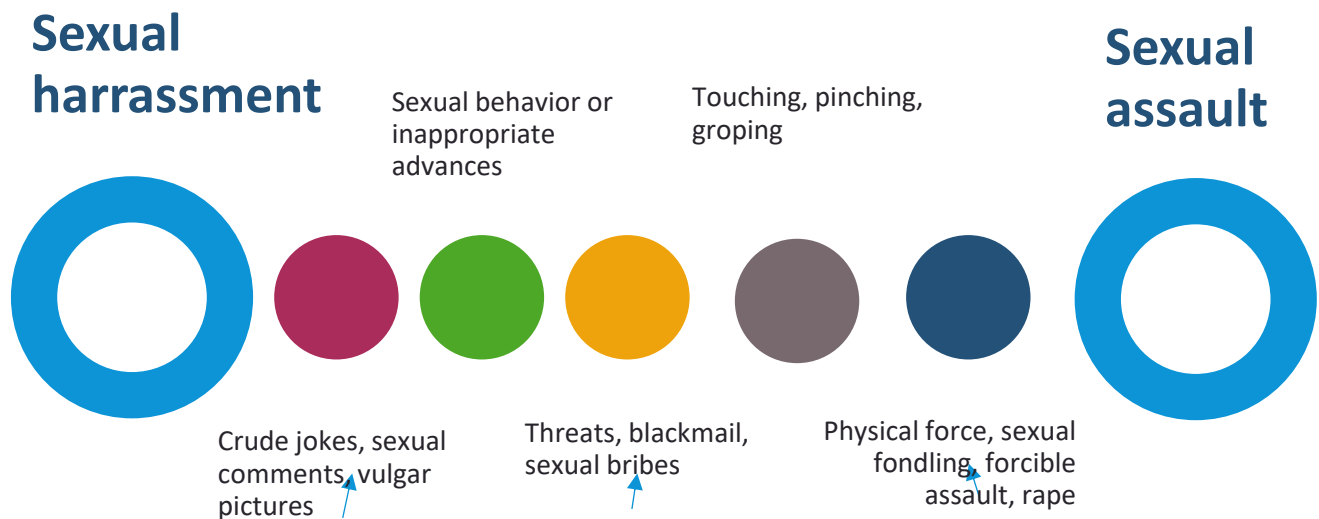
WHAT IS GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)?

Gender based violence is violence that is perpetrated against someone because of his/her gender. Both men and women experience gender based violence; however, the majority of victims are women and girls. It can include threats of violence and coercion and can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual in nature.¹

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/sexual-and-gender-based-violence.html>

Typically GBV is used to refer to risks and harms faced by vulnerable populations from soldiers, other community members or other actors. Although not directly perpetrated by staff of an NGO, it should be recognized that GBV risks might be reduced or exacerbated by the actions of international organizations.

FIG 1: CONTINUUM OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE



ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH TO PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Be clear about why this matters; not purely because of the legal and moral obligation and duty of care your organization has to its staff, partners and communities it seeks to work with, or because of the reputational risk if a major incident was to come to light. Instead, lead the discussion with your organizational values and the values that draw staff to work in this sector. If one of your core values is dignity, respect or a similar value that demands we see all people as worthy of being treated with civility, care, and respect, build on this as you engage staff.

By contrast sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment is by nature demeaning, devaluing and exploits the vulnerability of others. It is directly opposed to our core values as a sector and therefore undermines our whole mission.

COMMON STANDARDS: INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE (IASC) MINIMUM OPERATING STANDARDS ON PSEA

The following 8 standards from the IASC on the protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse are the most commonly used framework in the humanitarian sector and form a helpful guide for other

international organizations as well. They include the following areas and more information is available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/3_minimum_operating_standards_mos-psea.pdf

1. Effective Policy Development and Implementation
2. Cooperative agreements
3. A dedicated department / focal point is committed to PSEA
4. Effective and Comprehensive communication for HQ to the field on expectations regarding raising beneficiary awareness on PSEA
5. Effective community-based complaints mechanisms, including victim assistance
6. Effective recruitment and performance management
7. Effective and comprehensive mechanisms are established to ensure awareness-raising on SEA amongst personnel
8. Internal complaints and investigation procedures in place

FRAMEWORK FOR CREATING A SAFER WORK ENVIRONMENT

There are many components involved in creating a safer, or even thriving, working environment for staff, volunteers and consultants. This basic framework provides a starting point to help you consider what gaps you might have in your organization and how to address them:



1. Values and Organizational Culture

At the heart of this issue is human behavior, and last change requires us taking deliberate and consistent steps to ensure our working environment and cultures are not ones in which bullying, harassment, poor management and disrespect are tolerated.

2. Policies

At the most basic level, our policies and codes of conduct should be reviewed to ensure they clearly set out what behaviors are acceptable, and which aren't, including consequences of misconduct. Policies and procedures must be living documents in the organization, not a checkbox exercise during recruitment.

3. Hiring Mechanisms

Some of the ways you can strengthen hiring mechanisms include clear messaging on recruitment pages that your organization takes these issues very seriously and promotes a culture of mutual respect, including statements of values on job descriptions, incorporating questions into recruitment interviews that draw out applicant's values, and strengthening your reference checking mechanisms.

4. Training

Training can take many forms, and ideally staff should be engaged in a number of topics and ways of learning over time. Aim to not just inform them of standards and processes, but to equip them to respond as bystanders to incidents, to unearth and address unconscious biases and other underlying factors related to harassment. InterAction has a couple of basic online courses on our site that you are welcome to use. We are hoping more resources will be publicly available in the near future.

5. Safe and Accountable Programming

Consider how to embed SEA prevention in your program design and implementation by identifying risks to beneficiaries that might result from our activities, incorporating discussion around risk mitigation and best complaints mechanism with communities and ensuring partners and contractors agree to comply with your organizational codes of conduct and processes.

6. Complaints and Reporting

These mechanism must be accessible, easy to find, understand and use and not put those reporting at increased risk. Do not assume one global hotline is all that is needed. Considered shared mechanisms in locations with other NGOs operating. Take seriously the fear of reprisal many have that hinders them from reporting. Be clear about what will happen next following a complaint.

7. Investigations

Many organizations have struggled to find the resources and personnel to organize timely and effective investigations. Consider determining ahead of time which incidents are appropriate to investigate internally (bullying, coarse joking), which require referral to authorities (eg. A sexual assault) and if there are some scenarios in which an external investigator other than national authorities might be appropriate (not criminal, but serious incidents, or potentially incidents in

countries in which national authorities do not have the capacity to respond appropriately). There are short courses available through CHS Alliance and others for HR and other staff who might need to lead internal investigations, and peers can advise on sourcing external investigators.

8. Response

A trauma-informed, survivor-centered approach should be at the heart of how the organization responds to complaints and incidents. There are many resources available on this, to ensure the physical and psychological safety of victims and their empowerment. EISF have produced a helpful guide for preparing and responding to serious incidents against staff, referenced below.

TIPS ON GETTING STARTED IN STRENGTHENING YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN PSEA AND SHA:

1. Real change will take time, money and effort.

Identify resources you have already and sources of support available; These might include financial support from donors if you incorporate a safeguarding plan into new bids and proposals, grants from InterAction's From Pledge to Action team, attending free webinars and workshops run but consortia groups and others.

2. Ensure your senior leaders understand and lead by example in this area.

Leadership plays a huge role in shaping organizational culture and priorities. Can safeguarding priorities be included in public statements or staff memos from leadership? If your CEO has not signed the InterAction CEO Pledge, as a first public step of commitment? Is this topic a standing point on senior management agendas and incorporated into reports to boards?

3. Engage all your team.

Aim for all levels and groups of staff in the organization feel a sense of inclusion and ownership in the process of change. Imposing new procedures, without discussion, can reinforce real or perceived power imbalances and discrimination amongst the team. If you're needing to get some basic policies in place quickly, there are example codes of conduct, safeguarding policies and whistle blower **policies publicly available as a starting point**. Just remember to revisit and amend these with staff when you are able.

4. Learn from others.

Engage in the From pledge to Action working group, whether we will be looking to reach collective solutions to many of the challenging aspects in PSEA/SHA.

5. Find some quick wins.

It might be quite quick and easy to include a statement on organizational safeguarding standards on your recruitment page or incorporate safeguarding priorities in a broader exercise about organizational values, diversity and inclusion. Identify some other ways you can embed safeguarding into interview questions, exit interviews, security trainings or briefings or team sessions that raise the profile of the issue without much investment.

6. Consider what would happen when a complaint is made.

Test whether your procedures will actually be effective, across different offices/levels of your organization. Are you and others prepared to respond initially in a survivor-centered, appropriate way. If not, how can you support those who might receive complaints to play this vital role effectively?

7. Engage regional/field offices in country-specific plans.

Who would be best placed to be a focal point on the issue? What risks, gaps or challenges do the field teams foresee in implementing policies and procedures? Is there a PSEA network in that location? Or a GBV or human rights agency that can sign post you to survivor services, training opportunities or other resources you might need?

8. Identify your highest sources of risk in your offices and programs.

Can you take steps to mitigate some of the risk as a priority? Can you involve those most at risk in finding solutions? eg. Monthly groups for women in national offices which serve as a forum for discussing work related issues, that are fed back to managers can elevate the voice of those often vulnerable but disempowered on our teams.

RESOURCES LIST:

These are a few of the many resources publicly available to dig deeper into some of the topics raised above:

Online courses produced by InterAction; Sexual exploitation and Abuse “101” and management of SEA investigations. These are several years old but provide a sound basic understanding of the concepts.

<https://www.interaction.org/training/>

Building Safer Organisations Guidelines; Receiving and investigating allegations of abuse and exploitation by humanitarian workers; 2005

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/B80C3F5CCD1341A9852572A400609BD0-icva-saferguidelines-feb07.pdf>

EISF; Managing Sexual Violence Against Aid Workers: Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Aftercare

<https://www.eisf.eu/library/managing-sexual-violence-against-aid-workers/>

CHS Alliance: NGO checklist for developing or revising codes of conduct:

<https://www.chsalliance.org/files/files/NGO%20checklist%20for%20developing%20or%20revising%20codes%20of%20conduct.pdf>

Report the Abuse: Duty of Care: Protection of Humanitarian Aid Workers from Sexual Violence:

https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/rta_duty_of_care_-_protection_of_humanitarian_aid_workers_from_sexual_violence.pdf