



**SHEA and Safeguarding and Safer Programming  
in ActionAid's COVID-19 Response**

**Guidance Note for all Staff and Representatives**

**Developed by the Global SHEA and Safeguarding Team – April 2020**

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## 1. Introduction

This Guidance Note provides direction and tools for ActionAid staff and representatives (partners, volunteers, contractors etc) on how to embed SHEA and Safeguarding into COVID-19 response work, with a focus on safer programming and emerging risks.

*Please see the SHEA and Safeguarding Risk Assessment for guidance on emerging risks and mitigation strategies.*

ActionAid recognises that SHEA and Safeguarding incidents are rooted in an imbalance of power. We know that the pandemic will exacerbate existing inequalities and can lead to increased exposure to sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation. As ActionAid moves to a Red Alert humanitarian response we must ensure that the vital humanitarian services delivered never compromise the safety of anyone who comes into contact with our work, and that our staff/representatives or our programmes never cause harm. Special attention will be given to groups at higher risk of harm or exploitation (e.g. refugees, people from the LGBTQI community, and children and people living with disabilities).

This Guidance note makes recommendations on how to embed SHEA and Safeguarding into safer programming approaches, identifies SHEA and Safeguarding risks and challenges emerging from COVID 19, and identifies ways to ensure that our staff/representatives do not carry out sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse and that our programmes do not lead to harm.

## 2. Key Terms

<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	Sexual abuse is defined as “the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal conditions” <sup>1</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For example, <b>sexual assault, rape or attempted rape.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Sexual Exploitation</b>	Sexual exploitation is defined as “any actual or attempted abuse of power or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting commercially, monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another” <sup>2</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For example, <b>requiring a rights holder to have sex in order to receive assistance</b> (e.g getting on a distribution list) or <b>making a job or promotion conditional on the applicant having sex with the recruiter.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Sexual Harassment</b>	Sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. It can occur as a one-off incident or as a pattern of behaviour, and can be physical, verbal, or non-verbal. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Physical</b> – unwanted physical contact, entering someone’s physical space</li> <li>○ <b>Verbal</b> – inappropriate jokes, whistling/cat calling, comments about someone’s sex life or physical appearance.</li> <li>○ <b>Non-verbal</b> – staring, inappropriate texts, emails etc</li> </ul>
<b>Child Abuse and exploitation</b>	A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18. Child Abuse and exploitation is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Physical abuse</b> – e.g assault, inappropriate physical punishments</li> <li>○ <b>Sexual abuse</b> – any sexual activity, or actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, with someone under the age of 18</li> <li>○ <b>Psychological abuse</b> – threats of harm or abandonment, humiliation,</li> <li>○ <b>Neglect</b> – preventing access to education, food or other life necessities, and any emotional or physical care needs.</li> <li>○ <b>Exploitation</b> – e.g online sexual exploitation of children</li> </ul>
<b>Adult at-Risk Abuse</b>	An adult at-risk is someone over the age of 18 who, for physical, social, economic, environmental or other factors can be <b>more vulnerable to harm</b> (e.g people with disabilities). Forms of abuse include: neglect, financial abuse, domestic abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and psychological abuse. For example, <b>a rights holder experiencing harm because of their involvement in an unsafe programme</b>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/405ac6614/secretary-generals-bulletin-special-measures-protection-sexual-exploitation.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://pseataforce.org/en/overview>

### 3. SHEA and Safeguarding Core Principles in the COVID-19 Response

- ✓ All assistance and support is free and rights holders/communities should never be asked to exchange anything for assistance (e.g sexual favours in exchange for hygiene kits)
- ✓ Any engagement with communities includes awareness raising on SHEA and Safeguarding, there are safe and inclusive reporting mechanisms in place, and communities are encouraged and enabled to report
- ✓ ActionAid staff and representatives are committed to living by ActionAid's values and feminist approach at all times (whether on duty or off duty) and are committed to creating safe and positive working cultures (whether working in offices, online spaces, or in community spaces)
- ✓ ActionAid staff and representatives do not carry out any form of sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse or harm towards anyone they come into contact with through their work during the COVID 19 response.
- ✓ ActionAid staff and representatives understand their responsibility to report any SHEA and Safeguarding concerns, have access to safe reporting mechanisms, and are encouraged to report

## 4. Safer Programming during the COVID-19 Response

ActionAid programming has been significantly impacted by COVID 19. New programmes are being set up in response to humanitarian needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, existing programmes are being paused, are transitioning to COVID 19 response work, or are closing. These all bring different risks and challenges. ActionAid is committed to carrying out safe programming as we recognize that rightsholders and communities, including children, may be harmed as a result of how programmes are designed and delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is essential that we ensure that safer programming measures are put in place to protect communities, including marginalized and at-risk groups, during the COVID-19 response. *Please see programming risks in the SHEA and Safeguarding Risk Assessment.*

### Principles of Safer programming for Covid-19



## 5. PSEA Do's and Don'ts for Safer Programming during the COVID-19 Response

PSEA (Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) work is about ensuring that our staff/representatives or programmes do not cause harm to rights holders and communities. It is central to the responsibility that organisations have, to make sure their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to anyone they come into contact with, and that they do not expose anyone to the risk of harm and abuse.

Do's	Don'ts
<p><b>Active participation of rightsholders in assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating COVID-19 response programmes through the systematic use of participatory methods</b></p>	<p>Do not set up COVID-19 response programmes or realign existing programmes without community involvement in the process. Try to ensure community participation and sensitivity to COVID-19 health risks. First listen, understand the key concerns of the communities then involve them in the designing and delivering of the programme activities. Involvement of the community ensures trust, effective identification of existing safeguarding risks and active participation in the prevention measures. With restriction of movements, lockdowns and a ban of public gatherings during the response, involving identified community opinion leaders to participate on behalf of the community may suffice but try to ensure a balanced group, with representatives from women or marginalised groups. <i>In order to ensure this is done safely use tools such as the Needs Assessment toolkit in Appendix A</i></p>
<p><b>Include community-based complaints mechanisms and reporting processes for receiving both safeguarding and non-safeguarding concerns during COVID-19 response</b></p>	<p>Community-based complaints mechanisms enable the community to raise safeguarding concerns and obtain information pertaining to COVID-19. To be effective, complaints reporting mechanisms should be owned by the community and the community involved in identifying what works for them before setting up of the same. These should consider the current government COVID-19 directives on restricted movement, ban of large gatherings and lockdowns. The complaints mechanisms should be easily accessible by the community and may include use of tollfree mobile communication helplines and empowering of trusted community opinion leaders on safeguarding to serve the community as they are on the ground and closer to the people. Concerns must be responded to in a timely and robust manner.</p>
<p><b>Recognize that sexual exploitation and abuse is grounded in gender and other inequalities thus the need to carry out COVID-19 response and humanitarian activities in a gender-sensitive manner</b></p>	<p>While certain vulnerable groups such as women, children and persons with disabilities are considered vulnerable and highly at-risk during emergencies, don't assume that sexual exploitation and abuse is only limited to select groups of people. Safer programming recognizes that other groups and anyone including males can experience sexual exploitation and abuse. Staff and representatives must be unbiased, not carry out sexual exploitation and abuse towards others and should recognize that it's their responsibility to maintain an environment (at work/in</p>

	the community) free of sexual exploitation and abuse and to report any abuse they suspect or witness.
<b>SHEA and Safeguarding policies are translated into local languages and shared with the communities we work with during the COVID-19 response</b>	Do not share the SHEA and Safeguarding Policies without considering the possibility of language barriers resulting in the information being ineffective or potentially discriminatory/disenfranchising. The SHEA and Safeguarding policies should be translated into the local languages and communicated to everyone working with ActionAid or within the community – where necessary shorter documents such as the SHEA and Safeguarding policy one pagers, communications on SHEA and Safeguarding can be translated more quickly and easily.
<b>Integrate and mainstream PSEA into all development and humanitarian work as well as promote protection programming in humanitarian settings with clear complaints mechanisms</b>	Staff and ActionAid representatives must not carry out sexual exploitation and abuse towards colleagues, rightsholders and community members. Staff and other representatives should recognize that it's their responsibility to maintain an environment (at work/in the community) free of sexual exploitation and abuse and to report any abuse they suspect or witness.
<b>During inception and closing of programmes/projects avail to the community information on services and referral pathways such as where to access psychosocial support etc</b>	The community should be given information on services available at the community level including the existing community referral structures. ActionAid staff and representatives should not work in isolation but instead focus on programme sustainability by building and empowering local structures including partners who can then continue serving the community once programmes close or transition during the COVID-19 pandemic.
<b>All ActionAid staff and representatives should be made aware that under new ways of working, all SHEA and safeguarding policies still apply, and staff and representatives are encouraged to report any digital safeguarding suspicions and incidences</b>	ActionAid staff and representatives should not bully or harass colleagues on online spaces during the working from home arrangements. ActionAid staff and representatives should avoid inappropriate use of technology e.g. sharing content that is violent, discriminatory, sexual or extremist whether relating with children in the community, colleagues or others. The internet should be used responsibly.
<b>Carry out online staff training on SHEA and Safeguarding to ensure all AA staff and representatives are aware of the ActionAid SHEA and Safeguarding approach</b>	Do not assume that all staff are trained on SHEA and safeguarding. With recruitment of new staff to support the COVID-19 response and staff turnover replacements, there is the need to maximize on online staff training to ensure that all staff and representatives are aware of the AA SHEA and Safeguarding approach. <i>Use tools such as the key messages document and the policy one pagers in the appendix</i>
<b>Carry out safeguarding risk assessments</b>	Do not carry out programme activities before identifying the risks of abuse or exploitation that may take place as a result of the COVID-19 response. Safeguarding risk assessments must be carried and efforts made to reduce the identified risks i.e. through developing mitigation strategies. <i>Please see the SHEA and Safeguarding Risk Assessment</i>



## 6. Child Safeguarding Do's and Don'ts for Safer Programming during the COVID-19 Response

Child safeguarding is about ensuring that appropriate actions are taken to promote the welfare of all children and protect them from harm. Given the risks to children that COVID 19 poses, it is critical to embed child safeguarding measures into COVID 19 programming work. This will help ensure that ActionAid challenges the current systems and structures that lead to children being harmed, and that we ensure our staff/representatives and programmes do not pose a risk to children in any way.

<b>Do's</b>	<b>Don'ts</b>
<b>Child participation in the set up or realignment of child focused programmes during the COVID-19 response</b>	Where children are rights-holders of programmes, during the set up or realigning of existing programmes, do not proceed without considering children as active participants. Child participation must be in line with sensitivity to COVID-19 health risks and government directives such as movement restrictions. Listen, understand the key concerns of the children involved before setting up or realigning programmes. Involvement of the children ensures trust, effective identification of existing child safeguarding risks and active participation in the response prevention measures.
<b>Include community-based complaints mechanisms and reporting processes that are child friendly for receiving both child safeguarding and protection concerns during the COVID-19 response</b>	Child friendly complaints mechanisms should enable children to raise complaints safely using child friendly approaches. To be effective, complaints reporting mechanisms should be owned by the community and the community (including children) involved in identifying what works for them before setting up of the same. These should consider the current government COVID-19 directives on restricted movement, ban of large gatherings and lockdowns. The complaints mechanisms should be easily accessible by children and may include use of tollfree mobile communication helplines and empowering of trusted community opinion leaders on safeguarding to serve the community/children as they are on the ground and closer to the community/children. Concerns must be responded to in a timely and robust manner. Ensure that all response sites are connected to referral pathways and linked to local child protection mechanisms.
<b>Recognise that sexual violence is gendered and affects boys and girls differently. Using survivor centred approaches, we will listen to complaints from all children without discrimination or bias</b>	Do not assume that sexual violence only affects a certain category or group of children. Staff and representatives must be unbiased, not carry out sexual exploitation and abuse towards children and recognize that it's their responsibility to maintain an

<b>and ensure that our safeguarding approach protects their rights</b>	environment free of child abuse and exploitation in the communities they work in and to report any abuse they suspect or witness.
<b>SHEA and Safeguarding policies including the Child Safeguarding Policy is translated into local policies using child friendly means</b>	Avoid sharing versions of the policies that children do not easily understand. Child focused SHEA and Safeguarding communication and information material should be in a child friendly manner i.e. shorter versions in language easy to be understood by children, captivating (i.e. colourful, more graphic and less wordy to quickly catch the attention of young persons and pass on the intended message) and able to sensitize about and meet the needs of children living with disabilities. Safeguarding materials should also be sensitive to the COVID-19 health risks and government directives affecting accessibility to the material.
<b>Integrate and mainstream child safeguarding into all activities in the COVID-19 response</b>	Do not promote activities that break the AA Child Safeguarding Policy and ensure that all ActionAid staff/representatives are trained on child safeguarding and AA's approach, and are made aware of their responsibility to report child abuse.
<b>During inception and closing of programmes/projects avail to the community information on services and referral pathways such as where to access psychosocial support etc for children in need</b>	Do not wait for incidents to take place but instead establish referral pathways and service options early. The community should be given information on services available at the community level including the existing community referral structures for children, particularly for children in distress during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
<b>All ActionAid staff and representatives should be made aware that under new ways of working the PSEA and Child Safeguarding Policies still apply, and staff and representatives are encouraged to report any digital safeguarding suspicions and incidences. All ActionAid staff should be made aware about the risks that children face with online sexual exploitation and abuse</b>	ActionAid staff and representatives must not engage in any activity where children are abused and exploited on online and social spaces. ActionAid staff and representatives should avoid inappropriate use of technology e.g. sharing content that is violent, discriminatory, sexual or extremist whether relating with children in the community, colleagues or others. The internet should be used responsibly and in line with AA's IT policies.
<b>Ensure safer recruitment procedures are followed during the COVID-19 response. For example, carrying out background checks and vetting to avoid hiring individuals who may pose a risk to children</b>	During the COVID-19 response do not recruit staff without proper selection procedures. For those who will be working directly with children and vulnerable groups in the community, carry out background checks and put measures in place to prevent abuse and exploitation. Where that is not possible under COVID 19 restrictions, put in place other measures (e.g reinforcing the rule that individuals are never working alone, and are never 1:1 with children; carrying out spot checks) to help manage safety.

<p><b>Carry out online staff training on SHEA and Safeguarding-including child safeguarding-to ensure all AA staff and representatives are aware of the ActionAid SHEA and Safeguarding approach</b></p>	<p>Do not assume that all staff are trained on SHEA and safeguarding and child safeguarding. Do not assume that all staff know how to work with children or how to identify child abuse and exploitation or take complaints from children. <i>Use tools such as the key messages document and the policy one pagers in the appendix</i></p>
<p><b>Carry out safeguarding risk assessments to identify risks of child abuse and exploitation</b></p>	<p>Do not carry out programme activities before identifying the risks of child abuse or exploitation that may take place as a result of the COVID-19 response. SHEA and Safeguarding risk assessments must be carried out to identify the said risks and mitigation strategies identified. <i>Please see the SHEA and Safeguarding Risk Assessment</i></p>

## 7. SHEA and Safeguarding work with AA Partners during the COVID-19 Response

ActionAid is committed to working with our Partners to establish SHEA and Safeguarding processes that protect the rights of all. We will work jointly with partners to champion SHEA and Safeguarding across our programmes and business functions, learn from each other, and build safe working environments together. SHEA and Safeguarding activities with Partners include:

- ✓ We will work with partners to advance a mutual understanding of ActionAid's Code of Conduct and all SHEA and Safeguarding policies during the COVID-19 response. For example, joint training and knowledge sharing on SHEA and Safeguarding.  
*Please use the key messages document and policy one pagers in the Appendix*
- ✓ Ensure Partners' Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) incorporate SHEA and Safeguarding provisions and partners understand the need to embed and ensure safeguarding during the COVID-19 response
- ✓ We will support partners to put in place safer recruitment and selection processes for new staff. Background checks of staff and volunteers must be done and/or measures put in place to prevent abuse and exploitation of children and adults at risk.
- ✓ SHEA and safeguarding risk assessments must be carried out by partners to reduce the SHEA and Safeguarding risks during the COVID-19 response and mitigation measures identified and put into place.
- ✓ Work with partners to develop and disseminate SHEA and Safeguarding messages to communities through safe social networks (e.g. through use of the radio, key messages display in public areas etc) during COVID 19
- ✓ Work with partners to develop safe and inclusive reporting mechanisms that enable their staff and community members to raise concerns during the response. The reporting mechanism should consider accessibility by everyone with the current movement restriction and lockdown directives.
- ✓ Ensure that partners are aware of their duty to report any SHEA and Safeguarding concerns during the COVID-19 response and ensure that they feel safe and supported to do so. ActionAid will work with the partner to ensure that any concerns raised during this period are responded to in line with our policies.

## 8. Integrating SHEA and Safeguarding into wider COVID-19 Response Work

### SHEA and Safeguarding and Protection work

There are strong links between SHEA and Safeguarding and Protection work. Where SHEA and Safeguarding focuses on preventing our staff/representatives or processes from causing harm to the communities we work with (with a particular focus on sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse and child abuse/abuse of adults at-risk) Protection work encompasses all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with human rights law, international humanitarian law (which applies in situations of armed conflict) and refugee law; and includes ensuring that harm carried out within communities is addressed safely and appropriately, for example domestic abuse.<sup>1</sup>

All ActionAid entities are encouraged to embed strong Protection Approaches into their work and assess the connections between Protection and SHEA and Safeguarding so that work is done in a holistic way. For example, engaging with Protection Clusters already present in countries; assessing safe referral mechanisms so that those who experience violence can receive support; and creating safe and inclusive reporting mechanisms.

### Lobbying and Advocacy Work

ActionAid has a critical role to play in lobbying governments and advocating for the rights of those most marginalised and at risk due to COVID 19. Linking with the work ActionAid is already doing to advocate for the rights of communities, there are critical areas relating to Protection and Safeguarding risks where we can lobby governments to act now to protect those most at risk of harm in our communities.

- Lobby governments to spend money on domestic violence services (e.g. set up of reception centres for survivors, helplines, psychosocial support during their national response to the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Lobby governments to protect the rights of particularly at-risk populations (e.g. refugees, LGBTQI communities, people with disabilities) during their national response to COVID-19.
- Lobby governments to address the rights and needs of children and young people in their COVID response work, and to safeguard against sexual exploitation and abuse, and other harms.
- Work with others (such as women's rights organisations) to advocate that governments ensure that their COVID 19 responses do not inadvertently cause harm (for example, governments/local authorities doing food distributions at night which increase the risk of harm to women and children; or lockdown systems which force individuals to choose between continuing to feed their families or putting themselves at risk of COVID 19).

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<sup>1</sup> OCHA on Message: Protection. Available on <https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/120405%20OOM%20Protection%20final%20draft.pdf>

## 9. Annex A: Needs assessments and Sexual Harassment, Exploitation & Abuse (SHEA) and Safeguarding Considerations

Risks of abuse and exploitation rise significantly in a humanitarian crisis context. To avoid taking power away from those already at risk, it is critical to consider the security, rights, protection, and distress of survivors and those most vulnerable to harm before conducting any assessment.

**\*Before conducting an assessment, all members of the assessment team (including ActionAid staff, volunteers, partner staff, contractors and community representatives) must read, understand and sign the safeguarding checklist and policies\***

ActionAid's approach is to prevent and respond to:

- **Sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse (SHEA)**
- **Other safeguarding concerns – child and adult at-risk\* abuse and exploitation**  
(adult at-risk is someone aged over 18 who, for physical, social, economic, environmental or other factors is more vulnerable to harm)

whether carried out by ActionAid staff and other representatives working on our behalf (e.g. partner staff, contractors), or resulting from our programmes or projects that are unsafe and put people at risk.

Survivors can include anyone we come into contact with through our work (e.g. rights holders, volunteers, partner staff, AA staff). We have a commitment to protect anyone who comes into contact with ActionAid from sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse as these are gross violations of human rights. **Every aspect of our work must be carried out in a way that ensures the**

**rights and dignity of everyone we come into contact with through our work.**

### Sexual abuse – definition

*“The actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions”*

*(Secretary General's Bulletin 2003)*

- e.g. **rape; attempted rape; inappropriate touching**

### Sexual harassment

- Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature
- Anyone can experience it
- Can be persistent behaviour or a 'one off'

It typically takes three forms:

**Physical (e.g. touching)**

**Verbal (e.g. offensive phone-calls, jokes)**

**Non-verbal (e.g. display of sexual materials, staring)**

### Sexual exploitation - definition

*“The actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another” (SG Bulletin 2003)*

- e.g. **requiring someone to have sex in order to get on a distribution list; making a staff appointment conditional on the applicant having sex with the recruiter**

### Examples of child and at-risk adult abuse

(NB this is not an exhaustive list, other types of sexually exploitive or sexually abusive behaviour can fall under the umbrella of 'abuse')

**Physical** – e.g. hitting, pushing

**Sexual** – e.g. online exploitation, grooming

**Psychological** – e.g. humiliation, blaming

**Neglect** – e.g. preventing access to education or food

**Domestic** – e.g. intimate partner violence, 'honour' based violence

**Financial/Material** – e.g. theft or coercion (more likely to affect adults)

**Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking**



## ✓ Do's

- ✓ Assume that you will come into contact with survivors of abuse or sexual harassment, exploitation, or abuse in your work, even if you have never been told about it directly.
- ✓ Work in ways that empower survivors, by actively listening and respecting what they have to say and ensuring they know they have a right to raise concerns about ActionAid. Be prepared to offer options for getting support and follow up with them if needed.
- ✓ Read the [Psychological First Aid pocket guide](#), and ensure you know the latest active referral mechanisms and have a focal point in their organisation to revert to with any concerns.

### During interviews/focus group discussions (see [Tips on Inclusive Focus Group Discussions](#))

- ✓ Make sure your facilitation team has at least 2 people, and is as diverse as possible, with at least males and females represented. It is also best practice to have facilitators representing any ethnic groups present.
- ✓ Ensure informed consent by introducing yourself and the activity properly. Write an introduction in advance to present verbally including:
  - The name, role and organisation of the interviewer, and show your ID card
  - A brief explanation of the exercise, how the information given will be used
  - That participation is voluntary and the interview/discussion can be stopped at any time
  - That confidentiality will be maintained UNLESS AA staff or representatives become concerned that somebody's safety is at risk or that a child (under 18) is at risk of harm or has been harmed. If information is shared under these conditions, it will be for protection or security purposes with a trained referral focal person, and done on a need-to-know basis.
  - Details of complaint and feedback mechanisms, including routes independent of ActionAid. (If no complaints mechanism is established, ask how people would prefer to raise complaints)
  - Ask if anyone has any questions before you start.
- ✓ Ask permission to take notes, and if required, photos or video, completing the consent form. Avoid taking photos of children.
- ✓ Use active listening skills. Where possible, ask open questions rather than ones with yes/no answers, avoid leading questions, and try not to give examples (only as a last resort). Be careful of your non-verbal responses, facial expression, and body language, as well as what you say. Be aware of other participants' body language; if they look distressed ask if they would like a break/leave the discussion before continuing. Listen openly and briefly paraphrase what you have been told.
- ✓ Wrap up and summarize what the interviewee has disclosed and make sure they confirm that your notes are accurate.
- ✓ Follow up if needed (see next page)

## ✗ Don't

- ✗ DON'T do further harm to survivors: plan to mitigate distress, don't make assumptions about participants' experiences, avoid forcing people to answer upsetting or retraumatizing questions, and do not make judgements or force advice on people.
- ✗ DON'T expose participants to unnecessary risk in your activity. Has the location for discussions been chosen for privacy and safety? What are risks for participants, especially women, when out in the community or at home? What can you do to mitigate these?
- ✗ DON'T allow male assessors to enter or use the women safe spaces to conduct enquiries under any circumstances.
- ✗ DON'T assume participants have read your introduction; talk to them in their local language or present through pictures if possible to confirm they understand the situation. Offer them a copy to keep listing contact information should they wish to discuss their involvement at a later date.
- ✗ DON'T take down names, personal information, or information that might identify individuals unless absolutely necessary.
- ✗ DON'T get distracted. Avoid looking at your phone and put it in silent mode.
- ✗ DON'T keep any concerns you have to yourself or try to investigate/take action without support. This can accidentally lead to higher risks for the person experiencing the harm and limit their choices.
- ✗ DON'T ignore the consequences that disclosing abuse can have for a survivor, ranging from personal distress to threat to life.

### Follow up if needed

Contact your country SHEA and Safeguarding Focal Point or the Global SHEA and Safeguarding Team ([safeguarding@actionaid.org](mailto:safeguarding@actionaid.org)) if you see or hear anything that worries you, if you require personal support or have any questions. They can help find specialist support for any concern while protecting confidentiality.

If there is a chance that the activity may have caused pain or risk, plan to check in with participants and offer additional support. Even if a disclosure of sexual violence does not cause harm to the survivor, it is important to acknowledge that it is a significant step to take.

**If any participant mentions having experienced any type of violence or abuse, offer to talk with them separately.** Acknowledge that they have been heard and provide a space to share detail away from the group. At the end of the session, follow up with them discretely, away from others hearing. Let them know of services that might be available if they want support. **Only make referrals to services if the services are accessible and safe AND the participant expresses a desire to seek help in this way.**

**If the person is under the age of 18 AND/OR at risk of immediate harm regardless of the age of majority/age of consent locally, you should escalate immediately. You must report this, even if they ask you not to.**

If the person is an adult who has capacity to make their own choices about their safety and they ask you not to escalate, you should still tell the SHEA and Safeguarding Team, who can advise you in a way which preserves confidentiality and choice.

### FURTHER INFORMATION/SUPPORT

#### ActionAid Policies:

- [SHEA and Safeguarding Overarching Policy](#)
- [Child Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\) Policy](#)
- [Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse \(SHEA\) at Work Policy](#)
- [Code of Conduct](#)

[Pocket Guide: How to support survivors of gender-based violence when a GBV actor is not available in your area](#) -WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF

#### Report a concern/find out more:

Global SHEA and Safeguarding Team: [Safeguarding@actionaid.org](mailto:Safeguarding@actionaid.org)  
or your ActionAid SHEA and Safeguarding Country Focal Point who can provide support locally.



### SHEA & Safeguarding Preparedness Checklist - before you conduct an assessment:

- ✓ Have you read and signed ActionAid's Code of Conduct, SHEA and Safeguarding Overarching Policy, Child Safeguarding Policy, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy, Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse (SHEA) at Work Policy?
- ✓ Do you know how to report a safeguarding concern? ([safeguarding@actionaid.org](mailto:safeguarding@actionaid.org))
- ✓ Do you know who your country's SHEA and Safeguarding Focal Point is and how to access support with SHEA and Safeguarding questions?
- ✓ Do you have an up to date list of relevant services in your area, in case a referral is needed? (These should include services which focus on children, youth, psychosocial support and/or mental health, medical services, sexual and reproductive health, legal support, people with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities.
- ✓ Are there feedback and complaint mechanisms available to community members, both within and independent of ActionAid?
- ✓ Are you in touch with and taking advice from local women's protection committees?
- ✓ Do your relationships with local partners and other actors include knowledge sharing about SHEA and Safeguarding?
- ✓ Do you have strong information management processes in place to keep information shared with you confidential and protected?



10. Annex B: Feminist Principles and SHEA and Safeguarding during COVID-19



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- 1. Self-Awareness:** we commit to recognising our vulnerabilities and we will encourage resilience during the COVID-19 responses and during lockdown. We will continue to engage in reflection and learning as AA staff.
- 2. Self-care and care for others:** We will prioritise our wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic; and find new ways to look after each other and others. We recognize that we and many of our colleagues will be impacted by caregiving responsibilities. We will hold space for our colleagues who report domestic abuse and support them.
- 3. Dismantling bias:** We will continue to check our power and privilege and we will consider the different realities of all our staff and partners during the Covid-19 pandemic. We will continue to champion safeguarding values in all areas of our work.
- 4. Inclusion:** As we start to work remotely, we will attempt to dismantle barriers to participation online and we will promote inclusive and pluralist participation and recognition of everyone's contribution.
- 5. Sharing power:** As we are all champions of SHEA and Safeguarding, we will create spaces for Focal Points to lead on SHEA and Safeguarding approaches in the COVID response. We will support the resilience of communities to take the lead on promoting safety, protection and information dissemination. We will support women humanitarian leaders as key decision makers and champions of SHEA and Safeguarding.
- 6. Responsible and transparent use of power:** We are committed to being accountable and transparent in our use of power. For example, as we develop new programmatic approaches in our COVID response work, we will be transparent about our approach and work, so we are open to constructive challenge from others.
- 7. Accountable collaboration:** We commit to collaborating with diverse groups, particularly those that are most marginalised and excluded, and holding each other accountable to ActionAid's SHEA and Safeguarding policies.
- 8. Respectful feedback:** As part of any COVID response work we will listen to those most marginalised, including survivors of harm, and promote safe and confidential reporting mechanisms that are inclusive and accessible to all during COVID.
- 9. Courage:** We will speak out against any new forms of abuse emerging during the COVID-19 response, and take bold action to challenge inequality and harm, and promote justice for all.
- 10. Zero tolerance:** We will be zero tolerant to sexual abuse, harassment, child abuse and exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will promote safe spaces for all.

## 11. Annex C: Key Messages on SHEA and Safeguarding During Our Covid-19 Response



### **ActionAid Key Messages on SHEA and Safeguarding during our COVID-19 Response**

ActionAid is committed to *preventing any form of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse* during the COVID-19 response whether carried out by staff/representatives (e.g partners, volunteers, contractors) or as a result of unsafe programmes or processes.

Every aspect of our work in the COVID-19 response must be carried out in a way that ensures the rights and dignity of everyone we come into contact with and ensures that we do not put communities at risk of contracting COVID or at risk of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse or other Safeguarding concerns (child abuse and abuse of adults at-risk).

#### **Key reminders to ActionAid Staff and Representatives:**

- ✓ All assistance and support is free and rights holders/communities should never be asked to exchange anything for assistance (e.g sexual favours in exchange for hygiene kits)
- ✓ ActionAid staff/representatives must never carry out any form of sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse or any other harm towards anyone they come into contact with through their COVID 19 response work
- ✓ ActionAid staff/representatives must report to their SHEA and Safeguarding Focal Point or the Global SHEA and Safeguarding Team if they suspect that sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse or other harm has taken place or is at risk of taking place.
- ✓ We all have a responsibility to champion and promote positive behaviours and create safe working cultures during the COVID 19 response We will live by ActionAid's values and feminist approach at all times (whether on duty or off duty) and will help to create safe and positive working cultures (whether working in offices, online spaces, or in community spaces)

Please look at ActionAid's SHEA and Safeguarding policies for more information about including safe approaches to our work and eradicating sexual violence and abuse of power in all its forms:

- SHEA and Safeguarding Overarching Policy
- Child Safeguarding Policy
- Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy
- Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse (SHEA) at Work Policy

*If you have any questions or you want to report a SHEA and Safeguarding concern please contact your SHEA and Safeguarding Focal Point or the Global SHEA and Safeguarding Team*

[safeguarding@actionaid.org](mailto:safeguarding@actionaid.org)

## 12. Annex D: ActionAid International's Child Safeguarding Policy



### **ActionAid International's Child Safeguarding Policy and Covid-19**

ActionAid is committed to upholding the rights of the children and young people we come into contact with through our work and ensuring that they are not simply free *from* harm but free *to* realise their rights and become active agents of change. Recognising that *children and young people are an at-risk group in the COVID-19 pandemic*, ActionAid is committed to ensuring that all principles in the **Child Safeguarding Policy**, applies throughout the pandemic response. The **Child Safeguarding Policy** outlines our commitment to protecting all children from abuse, exploitation, or other harm resulting from our programming or other activities or carried out by ActionAid staff or representatives.

#### *Key policy positions:*

- All aspects of our work must be carried out in a way that ensures the **rights, dignity and empowerment of children and young people**, including young people who are working as volunteers and frontline responders in the COVID-19 response.
- All staff and other representatives have a **duty to protect the rights of children** and ensure that our SHEA and Safeguarding approach is embedded into all areas of our work.
- We will engage with children in a way that recognises their agency, individuality, and value – with a focus on upholding the voice and rights of children from marginalised or oppressed groups, in a safe and hygienic way.
- ActionAid **strictly prohibits staff and other representatives from engaging in or promoting any form of abusive, exploitative or harmful behaviour** towards children.
- Action Aid **strictly prohibits staff and other representatives from engaging in any kind of sexual activity with children** (defined as anyone under the age of 18, or older if the local law indicates this). Mistaken belief of age is no defence.

*If you have any questions or you want to report a SHEA and Safeguarding concern please contact your SHEA and Safeguarding Focal Point or the Global SHEA and Safeguarding Team [safeguarding@actionaid.org](mailto:safeguarding@actionaid.org)*

*This policy is binding for all offices and working locations of ActionAid and for all ActionAid staff members and representatives (partner staff, volunteers, consultants, etc.).*



## **ActionAid International's Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy and Covid-19**

The purpose of **Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy** is to ensure that procedures are in place to protect the rights holders and communities we work with, including adults at-risk from sexual abuse or exploitation carried out by any member of the ActionAid Federation or other representative. Under the ActionAid Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy, ActionAid knows that its staff and representatives have power and privilege and therefore the need to ensure measures are in place to safeguard all people who come into contact with ActionAid from.

Key policy positions:

- ActionAid **strictly prohibits staff and other representatives from engaging in any form of sexual activity with rights holders or adults at-risk**, or any form of abusive, exploitative or harmful behaviour. These prohibition remains applicable during the Covid-19 pandemic response.
- Sexual activity with community members who are not rights holders (i.e. not receiving direct assistance from ActionAid or involved directly in any programming activities) are not prohibited but staff must ensure the relationship is not and could not be perceived to be exploitative or abusive. Staff are also encouraged to ensure that interactions with community members do not place them at risk of contracting the virus.
- ActionAid **strictly prohibits staff and other representatives from buying sex**. ActionAid does not make judgements on people who sell sex but in recognition of the potential for sexual exploitation and abuse ActionAid has prohibited this activity.
- All staff and other representatives have a **duty to protect the rights holders and communities we work with, including adults at-risk** and ensure that ActionAid's SHEA and Safeguarding approach is embedded into all areas of ActionAid's work and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*If you have any questions or you want to report a SHEA and Safeguarding concern please contact your SHEA and Safeguarding Focal Point or the Global SHEA and Safeguarding Team [safeguarding@actionaid.org](mailto:safeguarding@actionaid.org)*

*This policy is binding for all offices and working locations of ActionAid and for all ActionAid staff members and representatives (partner staff, volunteers, consultants, etc.)*



## **ActionAid International's Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse (SHEA) at Work Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that ActionAid  
**provides a safe working environment**  
and that procedures are in place to  
**protect staff and other representatives**  
**from any form of sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse**  
carried out by any member of the ActionAid Federation or other representative.

ActionAid is committed to ensuring that all ActionAid staff and representatives can operate in an environment in which they are not simply *safe from* Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse but *safe to* realise their rights and work with dignity.

The policy states that staff and other representatives

- have a **duty to create a safe working environment** that respects the dignity and rights of all.
- are **strictly prohibited from carrying out any form of sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse** towards anyone they come into contact with through their work.
- are **prohibited from engaging in sexual activity with people whom they line manage or supervise** and, in the case of the most senior managers, any more junior staff.
- are **not prohibited from beginning peer-to-peer relationships** but all staff must behave professionally and conduct their relationships in a way that does not impact on ActionAid's work.

*If you have any questions or you want to report a SHEA and Safeguarding concern please contact your SHEA and Safeguarding Focal Point or the Global SHEA and Safeguarding Team [safeguarding@actionaid.org](mailto:safeguarding@actionaid.org)*

*This policy is binding for all offices and working locations of ActionAid and for all ActionAid staff members and representatives (partner staff, volunteers, consultants, etc.).*