

Accelerating PSEA in Humanitarian Responses: A Proposal for Advancing PSEA at Country-Level

The following proposal outlines a scale-up plan on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) through a call for collective action and investment by IASC members in all countries with Humanitarian Response Plans or Refugee Response Plans.¹ It is based on a review of the existing IASC commitments on PSEA, and where these commitments can be further strengthened through collective implementation at country level. The proposal focuses on achieving three key outcomes on PSEA in the areas of 1) safe and accessible reporting, 2) quality SEA survivor assistance and 3) enhanced accountability, including investigations. To deliver on these outcomes, an enhanced PSEA structure at country level is proposed that builds upon existing good practice in the field and contributes to a broader accountability strategy.

This proposal is the product of extensive IASC technical consultations and will be presented at the upcoming meeting of the IASC Principals on 3 December 2018 for endorsement. A gap analysis is currently underway with Humanitarian Country Teams. On this basis, IASC members at country level can step forward to implement the contextualized interventions for PSEA in this proposal, and support the HCT to serve as a steering committee of the collective endeavor.

1. INTRODUCTION

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and sexual harassment (SH) is a core commitment of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, as reflected in a number of actions taken to reinforce these commitments since 2002.

- In 2002, the IASC adopted Six Principles on PSEA, with clear standards for humanitarian workers and a plan of action on PSEA.²
- In 2010, the IASC conducted a Global Review on PSEA by UN, NGO, IOM and IFRC Personnel that found gaps in how PSEA was prioritized among agencies, calling for joint commitments and the pooling of resources to deliver on them.³ To support these efforts, an IASC Champion on PSEA was appointed in order to push for stronger PSEA policies and efforts within, and between, humanitarian response agencies.⁴

¹ <https://interactive.unocha.org/publication/globalhumanitarianoverview/>

² <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/focal-points/documents-public/iasc-plan-action-and-core-principles-codes-conduct-protection-sexual>

³ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/PSEA%20Global%20Review%20Overview%20Publication%2015%20Sept.pdf

- The IASC AAP/PSEA Task Force was established in 2012, based on a recommendation from the Global Review, in order to provide technical support to humanitarian agencies on PSEA. Also in 2012, IASC members developed Minimum Operating Standards (IASC MOS-PSEA) in order to support agencies to institutionalize PSEA within their respective organisations at HQ level.⁵
- The IASC further affirmed the roles of PSEA Senior Focal Points, Humanitarian Coordinators, and Humanitarian Country Teams to implement these commitments in 2015.
- The 2017 Terms of Reference for Humanitarian Country Teams placed PSEA as a mandatory responsibility of HCTs that requires a collective mechanism and approach.⁶
- At the technical level, the IASC Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)/ PSEA Task Team continues to provide a forum for humanitarian agencies to address PSEA, and has taken forward initiatives to support PSEA action at country-level. These include, but are not limited to 1) the roll out of the simplified and translated principles, and 2) the development and roll out of the IASC PSEA Best Practice Guide on Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms, by IOM and key Task Team partners, with work ongoing to support HCTs and PSEA Networks in this area.⁷ The IASC AAP/PSEA Task Team is currently working on practical actions for linking PSEA and AAP at country level.

The IASC’s work on PSEA is informed by, and taking place in tandem with, related actors, including the UN, donors, and civil society organizations. In 2016, the UN appointed a Special Coordinator to strengthen a UN system-wide approach to PSEA. The UN Secretary-General’s 2017 Strategy on PSEA prioritized greater transparency in reporting, civil society engagement, and awareness raising, and led to the establishment of a UN Victims’ Rights Advocate.⁸ When more allegations of SEA came to light in 2018, many humanitarian agencies re-committed to more ambitious reform within their respective agencies. The recent International Safeguarding Summit, held in London in October 2018, produced a series of sectoral commitments to bolster action on PSEA, including within the donor community and the UK NGO sector.⁹ The Summit was convened in part as a follow up to an inquiry by the UK International Development Committee, which found that while the aid sector collectively has been aware of sexual exploitation and abuse by its own personnel for years, “the attention that it has given to the problem has not matched the challenge.”¹⁰

In May 2018, IASC Principals reaffirmed their commitment to bolstering efforts on PSEA, and OCHA committed \$1 million towards an Investigations Fund as part of these efforts.¹¹ In September 2018, UNICEF’s Executive

⁵ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/3_minimum_operating_standards_mos-psea.pdf

See also: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/26.%20PSEA%20Work%20Plan.pdf

⁶ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc_tor_for_hcts_final_0.pdf

⁷ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/best_practice_guide_-_with_inside_cover_online.pdf

⁸ A/71/818

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safeguarding-summit-commitments>

¹⁰ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmintdev/840/840.pdf>

¹¹ The On 31 May 2018, IASC Principals iterated their commitment to collectively strengthen the humanitarian sector’s approach to preventing to SEA and sexual harassment and abuse against aid workers. They agreed on measures to strengthen the investigative capacity of agencies; share good practices on how IASC agencies prevent, investigate and respond to SEA and sexual harassment; and prevent perpetrators from moving through the sector (see Chair’s statement of 1 June 2018). 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 and to convene a meeting of the heads of their investigatory bodies to discuss challenges, how to address gaps, and further strengthen investigative capacities across the humanitarian sector.

Director as the newly appointed IASC Champion on PSEA/ SH took forward these commitments through a letter to IASC Principals that laid out key priorities for action, and has committed \$11 million of internal funding to scale up PSEA in 16 humanitarian countries.¹²

Collective, joined-up action is essential for the IASC to effectively deliver on its PSEA commitments. Where even a single agency scales up action to strengthen PSEA at country level, the interventions put in place – whether it be a hotline, a women’s centre, or a medical facility - help the humanitarian community to go one step further towards realizing their collective PSEA and broader accountability commitments. Whenever possible, this should build on efforts at country level to strengthen collective approaches to accountability, particularly around complaint mechanisms. The following proposal is a call to action for IASC members to dedicate the resources, expertise, and support necessary to deliver on a core set of outcomes on PSEA for children and adults across all humanitarian countries.¹³

2. ADVANCING PSEA AT COUNTRY-LEVEL

The IASC Champion on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH) supports the vision of a humanitarian environment in which people affected by crises are safe and respected, and can access the protection and assistance they need without fear of exploitation or abuse by any aid worker, and in which aid workers themselves uphold an environment that prevents SEA and where they are supported, respected and empowered to deliver such assistance and protection in a manner that is free from sexual harassment.¹⁴ Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH) must not be tolerated; they are an unacceptable breach of the fundamental rights of the people we serve and of those with whom we work as well as a deep betrayal of our core values.¹⁵ The IASC Championship Strategy sets out three priorities through June 2020, including those in UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore’s 24 September letter.¹⁶

The proposal is an implementation plan for key components of the IASC Championship Strategy at country level that UNICEF Executive Director Fore is putting forward for the humanitarian community, in collaboration with the IASC Emergency Relief Coordinator.¹⁷ The proposal sets out to build upon the existing IASC

¹² UNICEF’s internal funding is dedicated towards scaling up UNICEF’s work on PSEA in 16 UNICEF Country Offices, as well as 3 Regional Offices. At present, the resources allocated will support UNICEF to enhance internal capacity to contribute to achieving the three priorities outlined in Part A, as well as support to strengthen inter-agency PSEA Networks outlined in Part B. The UNICEF Country Offices that have received funding to scale up PSEA include: Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen.

¹³ For an overview of humanitarian responses underway, see:

<https://interactive.unocha.org/publication/globalhumanitarianoverview/>

¹⁴ Strategy: IASC Championship Role; Protection from and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH). 31 October 2018.

¹⁵ Strategy: IASC Championship Role; Protection from and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH). 31 October 2018.

¹⁶ The IASC Championship Strategy was presented by ERC Lowcock to the IASC PSEA/SH Senior Focal Points, on behalf of UNICEF and UNHCR as current and future Champions. The Strategy provides an overview of key priorities and a joint vision for the IASC’s work on PSEA/ SH that the Championship role will support.

¹⁷ See Strategy: IASC Championship Role on Protection from and response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH), which outlines the following priorities: 1) encouraging victims to come forward and a speak up culture; 2) improving quality, survivor centered support and protection; and 3) strengthened vetting, reference-checking, investigation processes and disciplinary measures.

commitments on PSEA, including its related work on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), with a focus on joint action at country level and consideration for progress made to date.

Given the efforts that have been undertaken at global level to strengthen the *prevention* of sexual exploitation and abuse, including through new developments in screening/ vetting, the development of global training that is underway, and related efforts, the current focus in the proposal on country-level aims to achieve practical, actionable measures that are necessary for both prevention and response.

The proposal focuses on achieving results for crisis-affected populations in three priority areas: 1) safe, accessible, gender- and child-sensitive reporting mechanisms 2) quality and accessible SEA survivor-centered assistance, and 3) enhanced accountability, including through prompt and respectful investigations. The three priority areas comprise critical outcomes needed to operationalize global-level commitments, such as the 2012 IASC Minimum Operating Standards on PSEA. They are put forward as part of an overall process to strengthen addressing PSEA within humanitarian contexts. To support the delivery of results, structural changes are proposed to clarify and further strengthen roles and responsibilities for PSEA at country-level, including those of the Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs).¹⁸ The steps towards implementation of the proposal are further outlined in Section 3, which sets out a timeline and next steps.

Part A: Priority Results for PSEA

What is being asked:

- The development of a country-level framework that prioritizes the three following outcomes on PSEA, led by the Humanitarian Coordinator with the support of the HCT.
- As a contribution to the collective work on PSEA through the SEA Steering Committee (HCT members) and PSEA Networks, IASC members at country level contribute to deliver these results, through their respective field-level operations. In addition, PSEA would be integrated within Humanitarian Response Plans (and similar) to contribute resources to the following PSEA outcomes.

Outcome 1: Safe and accessible reporting

Every affected child and adult in humanitarian contexts has access to safe, gender and child-sensitive and pathways to report SEA, through **existing or new community-based complaints mechanisms** that reach where humanitarian assistance reaches. Complaint mechanisms are to be appropriate to the context, developed in consultation with affected communities, particularly those most vulnerable to SEA, and linked to services for survivors.¹⁹

¹⁸ Countries/settings with Humanitarian Response Plans or Refugee Response Plans will be prioritized. For updated information see: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations>

¹⁹ This involves the strengthening of existing complaint channels, as needed, with the safeguards necessary for receiving and handling SEA allegations, as well as the expansion or implementation of additional channels where there are gaps. The outcome aims to provide safe, accessible, confidential, gender and child-sensitive pathways to report SEA to all members of affected communities. This includes the utilization of existing and/or new community-based feedback/

Proposed outputs include:

- Safe, accessible, child and gender-sensitive mechanisms are in place which allow for reporting SEA in all areas where assistance is delivered, including high-risk areas. Complaint channels would build upon existing mechanisms, where present, and be aimed to strengthen community-based reporting mechanisms.²⁰ An SEA risk assessment and a contextualized needs assessment integrating communications questions are recommended activities to inform the development of new complaint channels, and the reinforcement of existing channels, designed in consultation with communities as appropriate.²¹
- Training of humanitarian agencies (managers, staff, contractors, partners, consultants, etc.) on PSEA, including how to report allegations in a safe and confidential manner.
- Community consultation, mobilization and awareness raising on PSEA in each community receiving humanitarian assistance.²²

Outcome 2: Quality and accessible survivor assistance

Every child and adult survivor is offered quality assistance in line with the survivor's needs and wishes (such as medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, reintegration support);²³

Proposed outputs include:

- SEA survivor assistance is provided through ongoing programmes including Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Child Protection, and resourced through the Humanitarian Response Plan (or other funding mechanisms).
- Support services include community-based and school reintegration.

complaints mechanisms. The PSEA safeguards necessary for a complaint channel include, for example, protections of confidentiality, the option of anonymous reporting, and whistleblowing protection, as well as established referral pathways to GBV/CP service providers. For more information, see the IASC Inter-Agency PSEA Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms Best Practice Guide.

²⁰ In order for complaint channels to be accessible, the barriers to reporting that marginalized and vulnerable groups face must be taken into account, including related to age, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, religion, ethnicity, language and literacy level.

²¹ The types of mechanisms and targeted locations to be determined by each HCT based on an assessment of the context and linked where possible to, including a mapping of existing inter-agency feedback/complaints mechanisms. In instances where such a mechanism does not exist, the HCT should consider establishing an inter-agency feedback mechanism which includes a thorough referral system for SEA. *This may include, for example existing, training of front-line staff existing phone hotlines, SMS, PSEA focal points, including a referral mechanism to healthcare providers, and/or a combination of the above, as is culturally and linguistically appropriate for the local context.*

²² To be carried out as part of ongoing community engagement in humanitarian contexts. This could include the sharing of PSEA principles and codes of conduct (including what will be done in response to any complaint) in accessible formats (simplified texts, picture messages, audio recordings, graphics or videos) and languages affected people are known to understand, and disseminate them through the widest possible range of appropriate channels to reach all affected people.

²³ Assistance for survivors is guided by Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection standards, including GBV and CP Case Management guidelines: <http://gbvaor.net/resources/interagency-gender-based-violence-case-management-guidelines-training-package/> and <https://alliancecpha.org/en/online-learning-materials/cm-guidelines-101>.

- PSEA Networks have in place referral pathways for SEA survivor assistance, as part of an integrated approach with GBV services.²⁴

Outcome 3: Accountability and investigations

Cases of SEA are investigated in a prompt, safe and respectful way, consistent with the wishes and best interests of every child survivor.

Proposed outputs include:²⁵

- Investigations Fund is established for organizations without standing capacity.
- Clear standards and training on gender- and child-sensitive, survivor-centered investigations are developed and endorsed by IASC members.
- IASC members track and report on the number and outcome of investigations and support periodic reviews to ensure cases are handled promptly and effectively.²⁶

These proposed outcomes form the basis for a country-level Framework (See Annex: IASC PSEA Country-Level Framework), based on global-level commitments, that effectively strengthen the prevention of SEA, and enable humanitarian actors to better respond when SEA occurs. The country-level Framework is proposed as a global level framework that would be adapted at country level based on the needs of the particular context.

Part B: An Updated PSEA Structure at Country-Level to Deliver Results

What is being asked:

- IASC Members are asked to step forward to provide the support necessary in ensuring that a full-time PSEA Coordinator in the HC's office who is dedicated to supporting the establishment of functioning inter-agency PSEA Networks is established in *all* humanitarian contexts.²⁷
- IASC Members are asked to step forward as co-chairs, both at the level of the HCT/ UNCT SEA Steering Committee and at the technical level PSEA Networks, and to actively contribute to shared PSEA results.

²⁴ This would also include training on SEA survivor assistance referral pathways for inter-agency complaint mechanisms more broadly, as per the country context.

²⁵ The following outputs seek to reinforce the existing commitments in the 2012 IASC MOS-PSEA, and to address current gaps. See Section 6: Effective recruitment and performance management; Section 8: Internal complaints and investigation procedures in place.

²⁶ In accordance with their respective reporting requirements, which can include to governing or executive boards. For UN agencies/ entities, this would include the existing reporting requirements of SEA allegations on a quarterly basis to the UN Secretary-General.

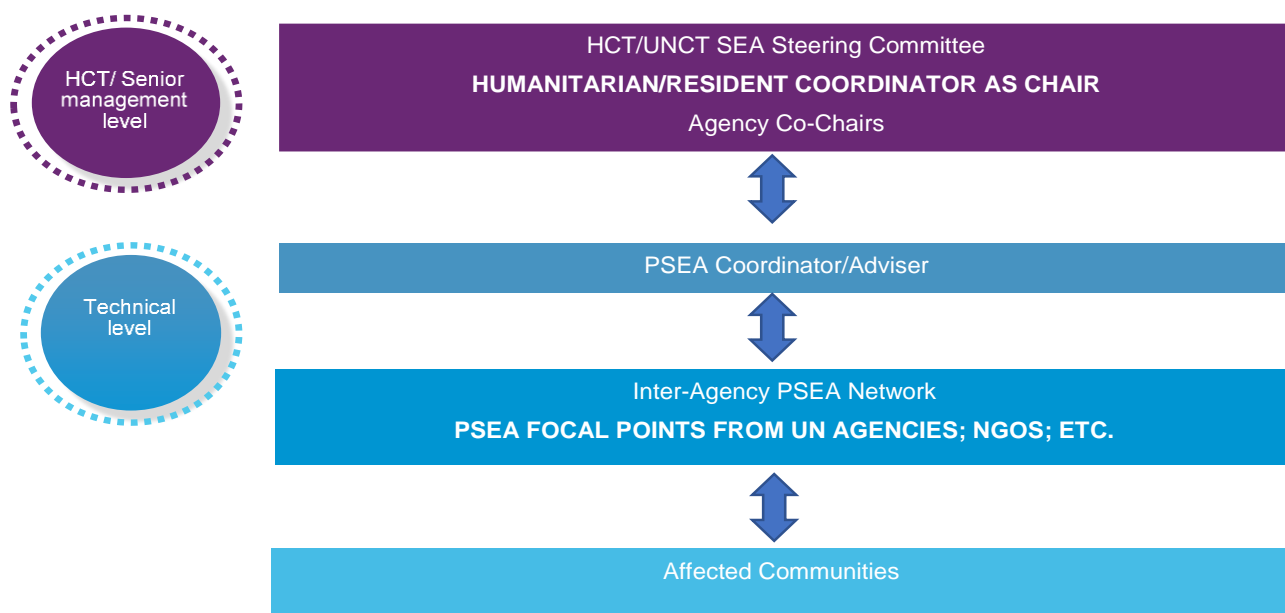
²⁷ The PSEA Coordinator would be a full-time, dedicated position. The "ask" is to ensure full coverage across all contexts. This could involve IASC Member(s) committing to supporting this position in specific humanitarian contexts, as is the current practice, particularly where there are gaps.

- A dedicated PSEA Focal Point from each IASC member/agency is deployed as part of every humanitarian response, to provide the technical support necessary to deliver on the three outcomes of above, as an active member of the PSEA Network.²⁸

In order to deliver on the above priorities, the inter-agency PSEA coordination structure under the auspices of the HCTs should be strengthened, with clearly defined PSEA roles and responsibilities at senior management and technical levels.²⁹

The Humanitarian Country Team, chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator and with the support of agency co-chairs will serve the function of an SEA Steering Committee, supported by a technical-level PSEA Network inclusive of all relevant partners. The HC will regularly/quarterly report to the Emergency Relief Coordinator – and through the ERC to the IASC - on the effectiveness of the PSEA Network and the actions taken to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, including in the above priority areas. This structure is proposed as a model for strengthened senior-level leadership and accountability on PSEA to be adapted as appropriate to each country context. Where a UN mission is in place, or where PSEA activities are coordinated under the leadership of the RC or a similar structure, for example, the proposed model would need to be adapted accordingly. The coordination of these activities should include strong collaboration with relevant actors, including AAP.

Proposed PSEA Structure at Country Level



²⁸ The 2012 IASC MOS-PSEA includes a commitment to designate a PSEA Focal Point. This “ask” further strengthens that commitment by extending it to field operations, so that IASC members actively contribute to PSEA results at field level.

²⁹ See the *IASC Global Standard Operating Procedures on inter-agency cooperation in CBCMs*, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-affected-populations-including-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/documents-51>

In the proposed PSEA Structure at Country Level, the existing HCT would serve as the senior-level body holding the primary accountability, decision-making authority, and oversight on PSEA activities at country level. In this capacity, the HCT would adopt a “SEA Steering Committee” function for the inter-agency PSEA Network. This function would enable HCT senior management to provide direction, review progress, address obstacles, engage relevant stakeholders, and provide the overall support needed to steer the technical-level PSEA Network. The Humanitarian Coordinator (and/or Resident Coordinator, depending on the context), would be responsible for leading the HCT (and/or UNCT) on PSEA, and would be responsible for overseeing the technical-level PSEA activities, which would be supported by a dedicated PSEA Coordinator that reports directly to the Humanitarian Coordinator. The PSEA Coordinator, is responsible for providing the day-to-day oversight and support of the inter-agency PSEA Network.

In some contexts, the proposed structure is already in place, or is close to being fully in place. Some HC/RCs have proactively allocated funding for a PSEA Coordinator, and a PSEA Network is in place with functioning systems. In other contexts, a technical-level PSEA Network may be in place, but without the oversight, proactive senior-level support and resources necessary to deliver effective systems. The proposed structure aims to systematize good practices in this area and address current gaps.³⁰

Based on the above, the HCT (and/or UNCT) on PSEA would report to the Emergency Relief Coordinator through the HC, with global guidance and support provided by the IASC Results Group.

A collaborative review of this approach should take place to assess its effectiveness. The outcome of the review would become the basis for recommendations for implementation in any new emergency response, as a standard approach for the IASC going forward.

3. PROPOSED TIMELINE AND NEXT STEPS

2 November 2018 - IASC PSEA/SH Senior Focal Points Meeting: The IASC PSEA/SH Senior Focal Points review and discuss the Proposal.

23 November 2018: Mapping of IASC PSEA systems in 34 countries to be circulated to Humanitarian Coordinators to provide a baseline on current systems in place and gaps.

26 November 2018: The IASC-CEB Conference on Investigations will take forward the proposed IASC Investigators Fund, and development of IASC child-sensitive, survivor-centred investigation standards.

3 December 2018: The IASC Principals endorse the Proposal.

January 2018: A “country-level framework”, including a set of indicators and related process for monitoring results, is developed based on the priorities outlined in this Proposal. The results of the mapping are circulated to IASC Principals, with a gap analysis based on the “country-level framework” outlined in the Proposal.

³⁰ A HCT mapping on PSEA is currently underway and will be used to identify current gaps in PSEA systems across humanitarian contexts.

March 2019 - IASC PSEA/SH Senior Focal Points Meeting: IASC Principals, through their designated PSEA/SH Senior Focal Points, report on how their agencies will fill gaps identified in the mapping at the country level, to support the implementation of the Proposal.

May 2019: The IASC Principals review progress on the implementation of the PSEA priorities at country-level, and endorse a monitoring system to track results.