



Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

in the context of the COVID 19 crisis and response in Afghanistan

1. Risks of PSEA

Sexual and gender-based violence, including risks of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), do increase during times of crisis. There is rapid influx of humanitarian workers, and other service-related providers in affected areas, thus creating increased risks of SEA.

The response to the COVID 19 appears to be quite different in some ways to other epidemics like the Ebola, given the social distancing requirements and the consequent movement restrictions imposed on the whole population, including on humanitarian workers. However, in the COVID 19 context, risks of SEA are likely to be posed by:

- Restriction of movements and lockdown are also posing risks of Gender based Violence (GBV) and domestic violence among the most vulnerable.
- As well as overburden on health facilities might cause a lack of responsive ability to respond to case of abuses that fell behind as less urgent.
- Inadequate access to social services, especially healthcare, or political influence;
- limited or no access of communities to information and technology.
- Increased vulnerability of families by the economic impact of the public health crisis
- Increased dependence on humanitarian aid of most vulnerable communities
- Lesser (or not possible) external monitoring of centers where separated children are placed (e.g. transit centers, detention centers).
- Increased stress coupled with isolation, of humanitarian workers who may resort to clandestine exploitation of domestic workers or neighbors.
- live in informal settlements or refugee/IDP sites;
- Are professionally (e.g. frontline health workers) or culturally (women) engaged in taking care of the sick;

By understanding these barriers, we can support the ability of the beneficiaries or people in need, by applying the (AAA frame work) *Acceptable, Accessible and Available*. Give priority aid and engage the beneficiaries in decision-making processes. Additionally, the COVID-19 outbreak and response accompanied by an enormous 'infodemic' - an over-abundance of information – some correct and some not – that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it.

2. Preventative measures

In view of the existing risks of SEA, the following 5 actions can help prevent SEA and can help identify SEA cases, to rapidly assist victims and take corrective measures.



a. Include key PSEA activities in sectors' projects

Projects linked to the COVID 19 response to include **key PSEA activities**, as essential part of project activities, hence budgeted and monitored.

Key PSEA activities would be:

1. Conduct a SEA risk assessment of the project (a programming SEA risk assessment checklist is available in the IP Toolkit attached, *see Tool 6*).
2. Conduct sensitization on SEA of communities/beneficiaries that are targeted by the project.
3. Establish (safe and accessible) community reporting channels to report SEA. In many communities there exist already “community feedback/complaint mechanisms”, “Child Protection committees”, Women Centers, PSEA focal points”, protection Desk or other protection reporting channels (e.g. Hotlines). These existing focal points and channels need to be sensitized to be able to identify and report SEA.

To enable the above actions, PSEA taskforce leads would need to train on PSEA for staff involved in the project (if not done already).

b. Include PSEA messages in organizational level community awareness and in public information campaigns.

Messages on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse need to be part of C4D messages. Also, in coordination with governmental bodies dealing with mass communication campaigns, ensure PSEA messages are included.

Key PSEA messages to be passed are:

- All categories of humanitarian aid are free. No sexual or other favor can be requested in exchange of humanitarian assistance.
- The UN and the humanitarian community have a policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse
- Any case or suspicion of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN or humanitarian workers can be reported to **XXXX**. (*Provide a free telephone number or the contact of PSEA focal point/s*).

c. Include PSEA in all training and implementation manuals/guidelines for partners involved in the COVID 19 response.

Ensure a PSEA module is included in all (online or eventually face to face) training being organized for personnel from Government and partners involved in:

- WASH and Community sensitization
- Protection (SGBV, CP, MHPSS)
- Health
- Nutrition
- Emergency shelter and Food distribution
- Public information



d. Set up a protection monitoring and reporting mechanism that includes contact numbers for interagency reporting of SEA – Attached self-auditing tool aimed to better inform your

1. REPORTING AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS		A	B	C
a	The agency has set up, together with beneficiaries, a confidential and safe SEA reporting system suitable for staff and beneficiaries.			
b	All beneficiaries and staff, regardless of designation and work location know where and how they can make a complaint.			
c	A means to make anonymous SEA complaints is also available e.g. complaints box / telephone hotline.			
d	Staff who receive complaints trained how to deal with complainants/ how to fill in the complaints referral form and recommend on support services available.			
e	The IASC Model Complaints Referral form, or a similar form, is in use for receiving initial complaints.			
f	The agency has a clear and documented guideline on reporting cases to management.			
g	The agency promotes a culture and environment in which children and women are listened to and respected as individuals.			
h	The actions taken by the agency when a SEA case reported are satisfactory.			

agencies as to where it stands in relation to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. The process will enable you to find gaps and to provide guidance on the next steps the agencies may need to take to strengthen its ongoing work in protecting those with whom we work.

Coordinate with the interagency PSEA Network in-country to disseminate amongst Clusters’ members and amongst PSEA Network members the contact numbers of PSEA Focal Points, to report allegations or suspicions of SEA.

e. For Donors - Inform all implementing partners on mandatory reporting of SEA.

Provide the telephone number and E-mail address of PSEA Focal Point/s, for implementing partners to use, in case they become aware of SEA allegations or suspicions. This reporting is mandatory in case of SEA arising from a project financed by a specific Donor or UN Agency.