



# GENDER EQUALITY

## UPDATE 21: PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSEA)

14 AUGUST, 2020



### INTRODUCTION

Previous emergencies and crises, including public health emergencies, have shown that the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) increases as humanitarian responses scale-up. Therefore, the effective implementation of zero tolerance policies on preventing SEA is imperative. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates power dynamics and makes communities more vulnerable to violence. The unequal access to food and health supplies can further exacerbate situations of vulnerability. Moreover, SEA response systems are greatly challenged due to the limited access to information on SEA, the shifts in social safety nets and the disruption of support services for victims/survivors of violence.

On 25 June 2020, a Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Team (GiHA TT) meeting was organized on PSEA to re-iterate the message of zero tolerance both in principle and practice, understand emerging issues, share resources among civil society organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and development partners and dialogue on ways to further strengthen prevention, response and accountability.

### SEA DURING COVID-19 IN NEPAL

On 8 July, the UN Nepal and Development Partners<sup>1</sup> issued a joint press statement on integrating Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) into the COVID-19 response. The press release called on all actors involved in the COVID-19 response to continue to respect the right of all people, especially women and girls, youth, and those from minority and marginalized groups, to be safe from discrimination and SEA while receiving assistance, including when receiving health services/treatment and whilst staying in quarantine and isolation centres.

International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and NGOs report<sup>2</sup> that due to the lockdown they

have been unable to adequately ensure monitoring and support to victims/survivors of SEA. A key challenge for victims/survivors during the lockdown was limited access to support services and law enforcement.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has fully diverted government responses to disease control. With this backdrop, violence against women and children, including the disabled, has increased, thereby impacting the human rights situation on the ground.

- Mohna Ansari, Member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

### EMERGING SAFETY ISSUES FOR WOMEN IN QUARANTINE SITES

Women staying in quarantine centres in Dang (Province 5) have expressed that they feel unsafe following the gang rape of a woman staying in a quarantine centre in Lamkichuha Municipality, Kailali District (June 2020). During the GiHA TT meeting, women's groups raised the need to urgently address the absence of monitoring and security mechanisms to ensure the safety of women and girls in quarantine facilities. Civil society organizations monitoring quarantine sites in Bardiya District also report that women feel unsafe due to the absence of female security personnel, lack of proper locks, separate toilets for women and boundary walls around the quarantine facilities<sup>3</sup>.

“The Ministry has strongly advocated for home quarantine of women who have been returning to Nepal to ensure their safety and well-being.

- Manamaya Pangoeni - Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen

<sup>1</sup> Embassy of Australia, Department for International Development, Delegation of the European Union, Embassy of Finland, Embassy of France, Embassy of Germany, Embassy of Japan, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Embassy of Norway, Embassy of Switzerland and USAID.

<sup>2</sup> As presented during the Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Team meeting on 25 June.

<sup>3</sup> The eighth Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Task Team meeting was held on 25 June, focusing on PSEA during the COVID-19 response. Representatives from civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and the UN shared situational and organizational updates related to PSEA.

## INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN PSEA MECHANISMS

---

### Online learning package and guidance to strengthen PSEA mechanisms

To guide and support efforts to strengthen prevention and response to SEA, IASC<sup>4</sup> endorsed the Interim Technical Note: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during COVID-19 Response and the Checklist to Protect from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during COVID-19 (see key resources below). Both documents identify priority areas for intervention and provide guidance on how to reduce risks, strengthen prevention, establish safe and accessible reporting channels and provide support.



Source: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-learning-package-protection-sexual-misconduct-un-partner-organizations>

The IASC has also launched a Learning Package on Protection from Sexual Misconduct for UN partner organizations. The package is also available for INGOs and NGOs, and aims to raise awareness amongst staff and ensure that they have the skills and tools to define, detect and respond to sexual misconduct.

### Funds for civil society organizations to strengthen PSEA

#### PSEA outreach and communications materials:

In April 2020, the Interagency Community Outreach and Communications Fund on PSEA launched rapid, targeted financial support for

NGOs to develop and disseminate PSEA outreach and communications materials. Additionally, the materials developed through the fund will be made available to the wider development sector for further use and adaptation.

#### Fund for investigation:

The IASC and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Fund for investigations into sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment targets IASC entities and affiliated partners that do not have dedicated investigations capacity, or have limited investigations capacity; the organizations must commit to adhere to, follow-up and implement findings. The Fund aims to support quick and competent investigations into SEA and sexual harassment allegations.

### UN PSEA working group

The PSEA Working Group is an inter-agency mechanism consisting of 20 UN agencies working to strengthen prevention, response and assistance in relation to SEA in Nepal. The Working Group is currently co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) and UN Women. Guided by a victim/survivor-centred approach, the PSEA Working Group aims to ensure a UN system-wide coherent, coordinated and collaborative approach to PSEA and sexual harassment.

In light of the current pandemic, the PSEA Working Group has adapted its prevention and response efforts, including through: strengthening its collaboration with the Protection Cluster and Gender-based Violence Sub-cluster to develop referral pathways and trainings; establishing a Provincial PSEA Focal Point system; and organizing learning sessions for all staff and the UN Country Team (UNCT), with the support of the Ad-Hoc PSEA Interagency Task Team for COVID-19 of the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. Having learnt from the experiences of other countries and in recognition of the importance of investing in PSEA, the UN in Nepal will have a dedicated PSEA Coordinator supporting the UNCT.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is the longest-standing and highest-level humanitarian coordination forum in the UN system, bringing together the executive heads of 18 UN and non-UN organizations to ensure coherence of preparedness and response efforts, formulate policy, and agree on priorities for strengthened humanitarian action.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) emphasizes the importance of ensuring a safe environment for all individuals while receiving humanitarian aid, including health services and medical treatment, and recommends confidential reporting channels and services for cases of SEA.

### IASC Core principles related to SEA

1. Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken beliefs regarding the age of a child is not a defense.
3. Exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behavior is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
4. Any sexual relationship between those providing humanitarian assistance and protection and a person benefitting from such humanitarian assistance and protection that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
5. Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, he or she must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.
6. Humanitarian workers are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.

## EXPERIENCES FROM THE PAKISTAN PSEA NETWORK

**S**trengthening Prevention and Response of SEA during and beyond the COVID-19 context demands partnership and coordination across all organizations involved in providing assistance. Collaboration and joint efforts between these organizations are crucial for a coherent approach and common standards, allowing to share information and have harmonized messaging.

The Pakistan PSEA Network works across the humanitarian and development nexus, and is comprised of 18 INGOs and NGOs and 12 UN agencies. The establishment of the Pakistan PSEA Network has allowed for a joint approach and has led to significant progress in addressing SEA, including the establishment of a Community-based Complaint Mechanism (CBCM). The mechanism enabled reporting of allegations of SEA through a unified system in a way that is accessible, effective, safe, confidential and transparent. Additionally, the groups has hired a dedicated PSEA coordinator, and mainstreamed PSEA across the sectoral working groups.

## KEY DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES

---

1. Press release on PSEA from UN in Nepal and development partners:  
[http://un.org.np/headlines/press-statement-joint-press-statement-integrating-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse?fbclid=IwAR2Q8rKhiOjkuhDJ4\\_X2WckznOQ79I4x44zNiOzpCVhqaQEduYfLGzoz8](http://un.org.np/headlines/press-statement-joint-press-statement-integrating-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse?fbclid=IwAR2Q8rKhiOjkuhDJ4_X2WckznOQ79I4x44zNiOzpCVhqaQEduYfLGzoz8)
2. GESI Monitoring Checklist for Quarantine Centres, Nepal:  
<https://mowcsc.gov.np/uploads/uploads/w6zktY8PZq5imcjW2Nc4IYwjpp2coT22R0wlzPYs.pdf>
3. UN PSEA web page:  
<https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/>
4. SG Bulletin on SEA:  
[https://conduct.unmissions.org/file/2912/download?token=iGpOM\\_q3](https://conduct.unmissions.org/file/2912/download?token=iGpOM_q3)
5. IASC Interim Technical Note:  
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/other/interim-technical-note-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-psea-during-covid-19-response>
6. IASC Learning package:  
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-learning-package-protection-sexual-misconduct-un-partner-organizations>
7. IASC Checklist to Protect from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during COVID-19:  
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/other/checklist-protect-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-during-covid-19>
8. IASC Strategy: Protection from and response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, 2018:  
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-champion-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment/strategy-protection>
9. IASC Saying No to Sexual Misconduct - Training Package:  
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-champion-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment/saying-no-sexual>

This Gender and Equality Update has been consolidated by UN Women on behalf of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Team (GIHA TT). The Task Team is chaired by UN Women and organized in close cooperation with the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MOWCSC), Development Partners and Civil Society Organizations that includes diverse women and excluded groups and their wider networks.

For more information, contact:

**Sama Shrestha** ([sama.shrestha@unwomen.org](mailto:sama.shrestha@unwomen.org))

**Rachana Bhattarai** ([rachana.bhattarai@unwomen.org](mailto:rachana.bhattarai@unwomen.org))

**Oda Misje Haug** ([oda.haug@unwomen.org](mailto:oda.haug@unwomen.org))

Contact point in UN Resident Coordinator's Office for PSEA:

**Aino Efrainsson** ([aino.efrainsson@one.un.org](mailto:aino.efrainsson@one.un.org))