

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are acts perpetrated by aid workers or people associated with aid organisations against the people that they are supposed to protect or provide aid to. SEA is a form of gender-based violence and as such represents a violation of fundamental human rights.

THIS TECHNICAL NOTE

As organizational-level SEA risk assessments begin to happen more regularly, there is high demand for guidance on how joint risk assessments should be implemented to avoid duplication and enhance synergies with ongoing internal assessments. This Technical Note (here after “Note”) aims to fill gaps by sharing and promoting good practices to perform SEA risk assessments as a collective, joint activity. It is informed by lessons-learned, challenges, and experiences raised by practitioners, and consulted within the IASC, the UN Working Group on SEA, and select technical sectors.

This Note aims to facilitate implementing a joint risk assessment by providing step by step guidance on key issues to consider at the preparation and planning stages.¹ The Note is not a template, nor is it a prescriptive methodology for conducting the risk assessment itself

highly contextual; as such, risk assessment approaches, methodologies, and tools should be tailored to the unique realities, resources, and sensitivities of each response. Bearing this contextualization in mind, a selection of example risk matrixes and guides can be found in the Annex to the Note.

Where a **PSEA Coordinator** and/or **PSEA Network** are in place, these are the primary audience of this Note, as joint SEA risk assessments should be included under their TORs and the collective PSEA Action Plan in-country. Other target audience groups include individuals within organizations engaged in strategizing, planning, and implementing a collaborative, context-/response-wide risk assessment exercise, whether in a humanitarian or development setting

Given the highly sensitive and potentially life-threatening nature of SEA, any type of qualitative or quantitative assessment or survey must follow robust ethical and safety considerations, accepted international standards and “do no harm” principles.² A failure to do so places women and girls, GBV survivors, and staff at risk.

“SEA risk” encompasses:

1. The risk of SEA happening:

The risk of SEA occurring is closely linked to the operational context. Risk often increases when, for example: an emergency has exacerbated vulnerabilities of the population; aid workers interacting with community members are not informed of cultural and social norms; distributions are conducted unsupervised; local laws do not protect the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities, ethnic and sexual minority groups, etc. The realities of the context must be reflected and addressed in a joint SEA risk assessment.

2. The risk that organizations (UN agencies, (I)NGOs, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)) operating in-country cannot respond effectively when incidents occur:

For purposes of joint SEA risk assessments, Capacity to Respond to SEA (C2RSEA) (3.2 (es)20.6 (o)-3.6 sdr)

The UNCT or HCT, under the leadership of the RC/HC, should ensure such assessments are conducted as part of their UNCT PSEA Action Plan and/or PSEA Strategy. Even when there is no formal PSEA coordination structure in place, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators have the coherent “system-wide responsibility for developing collective PSEA strategies and ensuring that PSEA action plans are implemented and assist victims of SEA.”⁴

When an inter-agency PSEA Network exists in-country, this exercise should be explicit in the Network’s Terms of Reference (TORs) and/or in the Network’s technical Action Plan overseen by UN leadership. The PSEA Coordinator – if in place – should support the Network to coordinate the assessment.⁵ This is the best-case scenario, as the presence of a PSEA Coordinator and/or Network facilitates clarity on

respective PSEA Focal Points, just

- b) In humanitarian contexts, OCHA may be able to facilitate access to information, as it can offer a space in the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) and High-Level Group (HLG) coordination meetings for the PSEA Network to talk to organizations and sectors about the assessment, discuss entry points for collaboration in implementation and use of results, etc. In development contexts, a similar liaising role may be played by the Development Coordination Office.
- c) Cluster, Working Group and their corresponding Sub-Groups and Sub-Cluster (such as the GBV and Child Protection Sub-Cluster), or GIHA Working Group leads may be able to: facilitate access to information and resources by sharing existing reports or data; support opportunities for synergies between the SEA risk assessment and ongoing sector assessments; collaborate in the dissemination and adoption of recommendations in their respective sector, etc.
- d) Community-based actors, including women's groups, local leadership, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), etc. may be able to provide key information on SEA risks at site level

Once stakeholders are mapped, you can use this information to:

- a) Develop **advocacy messages** on why the PSEA Network is undertaking a joint SEA risk assessment, tailored to the specific interests/needs of each stakeholder group, in order to foster their buy-in. Start considering early on what may be the key products that will be generated from the assessment and how these can be useful to the various humanitarian actors present in the response; this will help encourage take-up of resulting recommendations at the end.
- b) Determine if the **timing** is right, especially if evidence suggests that there is currently low buy in for the assessment among certain stakeholder groups and that this may hinder its execution. In such case, the PSEA Network may consider delaying the exercise or implementing it in a pretwo t me o Tc 21-1.5 (Tw 1-6 (f)- (in)2.3 (d)2.3rflo)-6.7il 1.3 (u)rfie ce3 (s)-1.4(i)2.2 (e)

Profile of humanitarian and development actors present in the response – UN agencies, large INGOS, local/small NGOs, grassroots organizations, etc. – and how well-developed their internal PSEA systems are;
Existence, comprehensiveness and quality of SEA-relevant legal frameworks in-country including on issues related to women’s rights and women’s access to justice;
Coverage and quality of GBV/Child Protection response services,⁹ presence of functional assistance referral pathways, etc.;
Restrictions in mobility of women and girls that impact their access to relevant information, services and reporting mechanisms;
Lack of awareness on community-based reporting mechanisms, or absence of reporting mechanisms.

The above examples are non-exhaustive and merely illustrative of some of the aspects that you may consider to properly frame your assessment’s **approach** and the **focus of your analysis**. For example, if the response takes place in a conservative environment where women’s participation and physical mobility is restricted, your assessment may want to look more closely at whether/how SEA risks are addressed by organizations/sectors delivering humanitarian aid at household level, whether there are safe and context-appropriate platforms for women to voice SEA concerns, etc. Moreover, acknowledging the limitations of the context, you should also ponder whether it would be at all possible to directly engage women in discussions about SEA.

Based on your mapping of stakeholders and understanding of the context, you can develop a **joint risk assessment strategy** detailing the approach that will be taken. The strategy may capture aspects, such as, for example: a) roles and responsibilities, b) scope, c) methodology, d) data sources and/or e) data collection tools, and f) timeline, etc. This will ensure that the joint risk assessment process is properly documented and clear to all stakeholders involved, especially Network members who will be contributing to its execution.

Planning involves accessing existing sources of information and, if necessary, developing a strategy to generate additional data when the information you need cannot be obtained from existing sources.

The first step of planning entails collaborating with the relevant stakeholders identified in your original mapping to access their available information. This may require you to, for example:

- x Raise a call for data in the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) in a humanitarian response; engage with cluster leads to identify relevant reports and/or datasets produced by agencies and sectors; search the OCHA website for reports available for your response;), etc.
- x In a development context you might request data from the Gender Theme Groups (GTG); engage with in-country GBV specialists from various entities to identify relevant reports and/or datasets; search the DCO website for reports available for your response; etc.
- x In either context, you can engage with Information Management (IM) and M&E teams from the various UN entities (including those with expertise in gender statistics, analysis and indicators), as well as representatives of specific data/research programmes present in your response (e.g.: Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme – HNAP, or UN-SWAP).

⁹ As per [UN Protocol on the Provision of assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) the PSEA Network should monitor any gaps in assistance coverage and work with relevant gender-based violence and child protection actors to address them. See also the 2021 [Technical Note](#) implementing the Protocol.

Much information may already have been generated. For instance, it is likely that the GBV sector may have already completed a GBV risk assessment and a mapping of functional GBV/Child Protection services;¹⁰ UN agencies may have already undertaken PSEA capacity assessments of their implementing partners in fulfilling their obligations under the UN Implementing Partners Protocol;¹¹ sectors may have performed technical assessments that touch upon discrete SEA risks; organizations may have undergone voluntary audits against the Core Humanitarian Standards.¹² As SEA is linked to other types of risks, these assessments may contain useful information that can be built upon and expanded during your analysis.


Once you have compiled the data generated by your existing information sources, pull out the SEA-relevant information, review, and analyze it. Ask yourself:

- a) What is all this information saying about SEA risks and response capacities in this context?
- b) Is this information sufficient to understand the wide range of SEA risks in this response and actors' capacity to respond to SEA?
- c) Is it possible to draw conclusions and generate actionable recommendations?

additional first-hand data will probably be needed, especially in new humanitarian responses or in contexts where PSEA has not yet been taken on as a system-wide, collective priority.

Based on gaps identified during the desk-

While costs for a joint risk assessment are largely determined by the methodology chosen, these types of assessments are generally more human resource- than finance-intensive. If the joint risk assessment relies on secondary data or on self-assessments, then financial requirements will be



Joint SEA risk assessments are only useful if they serve to inform programming, thus, knowing from the beginning what will be done with the results of the assessment is key. Results should be used, for example, to inform the PSEA Network’s Work Plan and the UNCT/HCT country-level Action Plan, leadership’s PSEA Strategy and the Humanitarian Response Plan

To support UN Missions in identifying risks and mitigating measures, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance has shared with Secretariat entities, including peace operations, a [Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Risk Management Toolkit](#). The toolkit, developed in 2018, corresponds to an integrated approach to risk management based on a methodology that identifies and assesses risks, develops treatment strategies for risks and reviews the management approach as needed. Communication and coordination are also core elements of the SEA risk management toolkit, which is designed to be adaptable to the specific prevailing conditions in different types of peace operations or other Secretariat entities.

The [UNDP SEA Risk Management Tool](#) provides step-by-step guidance on how to identify and prevent SEA risks in the Country Office (CO). Among other things, it looks at the likelihood of UNDP personnel committing SEA in the CO environment, the impact it has on the CO's objectives, the effectiveness of internal controls to prevent SEA, further measures to take, and specific risks related to the CO's ability to receive allegations of SEA and provide victim assistance.

This [GBV Safety Audit Tool](#) is often used by the GBV sub-Cluster to assess GBV-related risks in a certain area/camp. It is similar to the [GBV community m 3.3 \(p\)5.2 \(a\)\(m\)1 \(a\)ty\(i\)-3.2 g aty\(i\)-3.2 \(b\)-0.7 \(o\)-9.6atyfe](#)