

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE

PRINCIPALS BI-ANNUAL MEETING

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENT: DRAFT PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF THE IASC
EXTERNAL REVIEW OF PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND
ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARRASSMENT**

Prepared by UNFPA

Geneva, 20 October 2021

<i>Review Scope:</i>	Global. Focus on humanitarian contexts. Focus on IASC members, invitees, and partners. Not including peacekeeping or development actors.
<i>Review Timeframe:</i>	Last 10 years but with particular focus on the last 3-5 years.
<i>Review Approach:</i>	Desk review, key informant interviews (KII) with global and country level actors, a few focus groups with PSEAH networks, selected country case studies on thematic issues, validation visit to Haiti at the end of the data gathering phase. Majority of the data gathering done through KIIs (more than 100).
<i>Next steps:</i>	Draft report with Advisory Group for review by 22 October. Final draft to be ready by end October. IASC Principals to meet at 23 November roundtable in Geneva, to prioritize accepted review recommendations to improve the collective way forward; and to commit to a pragmatic program of implementation including the resources necessary for timely and effective completion.

Emerging findings and conclusions:

Vision and leadership

- The IASC leadership and RC/HCs at country level have evidenced a new level of knowledge, engagement, and commitment on this issue than existed in 2010. In addition, they have consistently delivered a balanced articulation between the dual drivers of the need to place victims front and centre while also continuing to manage risk to agencies and ultimately wider service delivery. This has not – yet – resulted in predictable resourcing. RC/HC have also expressed consistent frustration about resourcing and occasionally about the reluctance of agencies to provide them with the information to effectively represent the UN.
- IASC stakeholders cannot articulate the medium to long term vision for PSEAH. The sector is not (yet) at the point where SEA is commonly accepted to be an inherent and operational management issue on a par with security.
- The myth that SEA will be eradicated is still prevalent and dominates the narrative. This undermines a recognition amongst leaders and managers that ongoing monitoring and risk management is required. This messaging also provides a barrier to cultural change within the sector and an acceptance that power and gender dynamics need to change.

- Now that initial progress has been made but reports are still not being made at the expected levels it is time to challenge and change some more structural elements related to accountability in particular the effectiveness and transparency of investigations and abusers moving between positions in the sector.
- There are very few examples where efforts have led to sustained PSEAH Networks and Coordination at field level even in high-risk contexts which have been the focus of sectoral and public attention.
- Progress is being made on accelerating PSEAH coordination at field level. There are some strong examples of system wide coordination mechanisms in place, working to a coherent plan of action, and even with predictable support for activities. In almost every case this achievement is described as contingent upon committed and effective individuals.
- The revolving IASC PSEAH Championship is widely welcomed and respected and should continue. IASC Championships should support the plan of action which would underpin the vision.

Coordination

- There must be funds available globally when the HCT cannot prioritize PSEA as an inter-agency commitment. Any such global funds should also allow for additional surge for emergency response and scale up. The fund should be predictably resourced and ensure coverage of high-risk contexts.

Victim Centred approach

- Coherence as to how a victim centred approach can be ensured and evidenced has not been a priority until now as reporting levels globally remain low.
- Interviewees agreed that services, articulated in referral pathways, were either not available now or would not cope should case numbers increase. This was said to primarily be due to underfunding of such services.
- There continues to be a tension understanding on how cases should be pursued, whether or not a victim offers consent. If HCT members cannot clearly evidence that they are appropriately sharing information, promptly responding to complaints, satisfactorily investigating, and providing services this tension will continue to escalate.
- Failing to provide timely and effective investigation – when required by complainants – is a second injustice to victims. It is a barrier to trust in the system for victims and communities and therefore reporting.

Workplace Culture

- Leaders and managers hold a diverse set of opinions on whether workplace culture is an appropriate – or feasible - issue to be tackled at inter-agency level or supported through coordination mechanisms.
- Several RC/HCs interviewed believed that accepting responsibility for setting or adjusting the tone on workplace culture could pose them relationship challenges with UNCT/HCT peers.
- Many leaders and managers requested more research to evidence that there is a connection between the workplace culture, how the UN is countering abuse of power in the workplace, and staff ability to trust in our PSEA commitments and advocate to communities to also trust us.
- Where UN leadership at country level felt that workplace culture and broader power dynamics should be discussed at and inter-agency level, they believed this would be more effective within the UNCT than the HCT.

Community Engagement

- Despite experience we are still not responding to rumours or effectively putting in place mechanisms to collect community level information and feedback.
- The current PSEAH CBCM is over engineered and needs to be reviewed and tailored for field adaptation.
- In all countries interviewees stressed the need to adapt mechanisms to the context while providing examples of how seldom this was the case.
- Local and national actors interviewed consistently explained the challenges victims have in reporting through systems currently provided. They emphasised the importance of including trusted womens organisations within these mechanisms.
- There are very few examples of effective sustained community-based complaints mechanisms working at scale in partnership with the AAP community. Addressing this is a matter of urgency.