

VISION

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) supports a vision of a humanitarian environment in which people caught up in crises feel safe, respected, and can access needed protection and assistance without fear of sexual exploitation or abuse (SEA) by any aid worker and in which aid workers themselves feel supported, respected and empowered to deliver assistance free from sexual harassment.

APPROACH

The IASC is the mandated global forum that facilitates coordination among humanitarian actors, bringing together United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and non-governmental organizations. The IASC will support scaled-up, predictable and accountable protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) to amplify prevention and response at community level.

The IASC upholds a policy of zero tolerance of SEA and sexual harassment. The IASC recognizes that PSEAH activities and investment may not lead to zero cases of SEA and sexual harassment, but IASC members will demonstrate zero tolerance of inaction on PSEAH. The IASC will always exhibit respect for victims/survivors, complainants, and whistle-blowers.

The IASC affirms that SEA and sexual harassment are driven by many of the same underlying causes, including unequal power relations, lack of gender parity, disrespect and hierarchical organizational structures. The IASC will drive and support change in organizational culture to address these issues.

Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) are committed to ensuring protection from sexual exploitation and abuse¹. The most senior representative of the UN at country level holds the primary accountability, decision-making, and oversight authority.² The HC provides the overall direction, reviews progress, addresses barriers, engages stakeholders, and provides the support and resources needed to implement PSEA effectively.³ These activities are supported by a dedicated PSEA Coordinator, reporting directly to the HC.⁴

¹ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/humanitarian-leadership-strengthening-section/leadership-humanitarian-action-handbook-un-resident-and-humanitarian-coordinator>

² <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/management-and-accountability-framework-un-development-and-resident-coordinator-system>

³ https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/principals_statement_on_psea_2015.pdf

⁴ Where UNHCR is leading the refugee response: if there is no HC, UNHCR shall be accountable for coordinating PSEA; where an HC is appointed, the UNHCR/ERC Joint Note on Mixed Situations Coordination (2014) applies and the PSEA coordinator has a shared reporting line to the HC and the UNHCR Country Representative.

The IASC will monitor whether capacity is in place in all humanitarian responses to meet these commitments at country level, that models are adapted to context, prevention and response are in accordance with agreed victim-centered approaches, and following investigation, leaders and managers are provided with appropriate, timely information to support management decisions on accountability in accordance with guidance provided⁵.

This multi-year Strategy articulates the IASC ambition and expected results. It sets out the change required, reaffirms earlier commitments of the IASC, sets targets and determines how results will be monitored and measured. From 2022, a SEA risk index will be available to the IASC to support it to identify high-risk contexts and evidence-based decision-making. Enhanced monitoring will ensure that HCs will have the information and evidence they need to fulfil their responsibilities at country level and will make global prioritization more effective.

The IASC will drive change in organizational culture and attitudes. IASC Principals will clearly, and continuously, communicate their collective and individual commitments for increased accountability⁶. Realising the IASC vision will be the responsibility of all levels of management within IASC member organizations. All humanitarian actors will share responsibility for implementation of IASC PSEAH commitments, particularly the personal responsibility of ‘speaking up’ when aware of any act of sexual misconduct.

Securing and retaining the trust of affected people are critical to the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance. The IASC will listen to victims/survivors and affected communities and ensure their experience informs PSEAH priorities and will monitor feedback provided.

The IASC will dedicate resources to meet agreed strategic outcomes and commitments. IASC members will deploy global level PSEA expertise, including from the PSEA Field Support Team⁷ to support inter-agency activities in prioritized high-risk contexts.

IASC PSEAH CHAMPION

The IASC PSEAH Champions set the tone for all entities, convening IASC and external stakeholders around the shared vision and a cohesive multi-year approach to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. They promote long-term cultural and attitudinal change to all forms of sexual misconduct, and bolster the implementation of IASC policies and commitments.

⁵ See Guidance Note: Requirements and procedures for all United Nations entities on information on allegations of sexual exploitation and/or abuse related to United Nations staff and related personnel with the most senior United Nations official in country, Nov 2021

⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/58j6rtwt>

⁷ <https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/psea-field-support-team>

STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS, TARGETS AND RESULTS

The embedding of sustainable and accountable PSEAH actions within all humanitarian contexts and transformative culture change across the humanitarian sector will require significant effort, building on what has already been achieved, and dedicated human and financial resources.

The prioritized strategic commitments for 2022 to 2026 are:



Commitment 1

Operationalization of a victim/survivor-centered approach including, but not limited to:

- 1.1. Safe, accessible, appropriate reporting
- 1.2. Quality support and assistance for victims/survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment
- 1.3. Enhanced accountability, including through trauma-informed investigations, vetting and reference checking



Commitment 2

Promote lasting change in organizational culture, behavior, and attitudes towards all forms of sexual misconduct in humanitarian organizations.



Commitment 3

Support country capacity prioritizing identified high-risk contexts, ensuring that PSEA capacity is a systematic part of scale-up in response to crises.

- 3.1. Establish a mechanism to deploy dedicated inter-agency PSEA Coordinators to priority contexts.
- 3.2. Strengthen tracking of progress of HCT PSEA Action Plans through the IASC PSEA global dashboard.
- 3.3. Prioritize resourcing of PSEA at country level and identify suitable funding sources and modalities.
- 3.4. Ensure emerging crises have immediate surge or scaled-up support for PSEA activity.
- 3.5. Develop an updated IASC PSEA technical guide for inter-agency PSEA coordinators and focal points, based on the latest global guidance and informed by best practices in the field.

COMMITMENT 1: OPERATIONALIZATION OF A VICTIM/SURVIVOR-CENTRED APPROACH



The IASC is committed to a victim-centered approach in all aspects of PSEAH activity. The IASC will adopt a shared definition and understanding of the elements of a victim-centered approach and related responsibilities⁸. The 2022 IASC Champion for PSEAH will lead a process to agree upon an inter-agency definition of VCA, its main principles, and the entities and actions involved in implementation and resourcing at country level.

This will include agreement on application and support within different contexts, processes for required changes to policies and approaches as a result of learning, an articulation of what this means for partnerships, and consideration of the resourcing implications of a victim-centered approach.

The 2022 IASC PSEAH Champion will further clarify how an inter-agency victim-centered approach can be operationalized and how identified barriers can be overcome. It will also support the establishment of an IASC monitoring framework. This will include ensuring that quality and comprehensive inter-agency multifunctional assistance and services for victims/ survivors of SEA is available and accessible, in line with the UN strategy⁹. IASC members will ensure that appropriate, accessible, quality support and services compliant with agreed interagency standards for sexual harassment survivors are available, in line with the principles agreed by the High Level Committee on Management in July 2021.¹⁰ Accountability mechanisms will be required to be victim-centered, provide for feedback to victims, and effective protection mechanisms will need to be in place for those who have experienced or witnessed sexual misconduct.

As part of the IASC's overall monitoring of acceleration of PSEA across humanitarian response, implementation of the IASC VCA will be tracked on the IASC global dashboard. The IASC will carry out a semi-annual mapping of progress against IASC PSEA indicators. This reporting will be amplified by monitoring including by the IASC PSEA Field Support team

The IASC will seek to identify and address any constraints which affect members and/or their implementing partners and will aim to articulate and define the complementarity between a victim/survivor-centered approach and human rights approaches and policies.

⁸ This will build upon the work of individual IASC members, including the 2020 UNHCR Policy on a Victim-Centred Approach www.unhcr.org/victim-care.html

⁹ United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel (General Assembly, 2008) digitallibrary.un.org/record/614563?ln=en and on

¹⁰ Advancing a Common Understanding of a Victim-centred Approach to Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations (HLCM, 2021) <https://unsceb.org/victim-centred-approach-sexual-harassment-united-nations>

Time-bound targets

Q1 2023	A clear consensus on the application of the United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse within the IASC will be agreed and in place. This will take account of the 2021 Technical Note on the Implementation of the UN Protocol. A mechanism for monitoring application and gathering examples of contextual challenges to compliance for consideration by the IASC will also be developed.
Q1 2023	A consensus related to the application of the victim-centered approach to addressing sexual harassment will be articulated as part of the IASC victim-centered approach, commitments, and shared minimum standards for addressing sexual harassment will be agreed.
2024	The IASC will have evidence gathered through monitoring documentation and country-based examples of the effectiveness of the agreed inter-agency victim-centred approach, understand how risks and barriers are addressed in operationalizing the approach, and know that course correction has been undertaken where required. The capacity and funding required to support this approach will be articulated and clearly monitored during the development of the VCA consensus to ensure predictability and sustainability.
2026	The IASC leadership will be provided evidence demonstrating that an IASC inter-agency victim-centred approach is embedded and followed in every humanitarian response.

1.1. Safe, accessible, appropriate, reporting

The IASC has been committed to the principle and delivery of an inter-agency community-based complaints mechanism since 2016. The current IASC approach, while adhering to agreed operational principles, will be reassessed to determine how implementation gaps and barriers, resourcing challenges, and contextualization can be addressed more effectively. The IASC will also consider how good practices in the IASC's joint SEA complaint handling approach at the country level can be replicated.

This exercise will allow IASC members to determine how best to meet their collective commitment to joint inter-agency community-based complaint mechanisms across diverse contexts, consider the cost effectiveness of the current model, and determine the budget and support required to operationalize the current model in a range of contexts. Based on these findings, the current IASC approach and guidance will be revised, updated, and disseminated at country level. The process will prioritize consultation with affected communities, and include practitioners, management, and leadership. Consultations will also consider resourcing, coherence with cluster/sector community engagement and mechanisms for accountability to affected people, and sustainability.

The IASC members are committed to removing barriers to reporting sexual harassment and recognize that formal reports are not a prerequisite for management action. This will be addressed under the commitment to cultural change, which will build on previous IASC Champions' initiatives to encourage 'Speak up, speak out' and will involve outlining commitments to joint standards.

Time-bound targets

Q1 2023 IASC members will complete an assessment to overcome barriers to the effective implementation of an inter-agency CBCM in diverse humanitarian contexts and collect evidence of the systemic and individual implementation challenges. IASC members will articulate steps to mitigate and manage operational challenges and propose how a revised approach to joint inter-agency community based complaint mechanism would be more effective at country level. IASC commitments to define the victim/survivor-centered approach will be incorporated in the revised CBCM model and include an effective global monitoring mechanism. The resources required to deliver a sustainable CBCM will be articulated. Additional targets for 2024-26 will be agreed.

2026 HCTs will be able to demonstrate that a fully resourced joint inter-agency community based complaint mechanism is in place and fulfils the IASC aims to provide affected communities with means to report allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in a safe and accessible way, enable affected communities to come forward in line with their reporting preferences, standardize the means of referral of SEA allegations to the appropriate organization for investigation, and of victims/survivors to the appropriate assistance and services.

1.2. Quality support and assistance for victims/survivors of SEA and sexual harassment¹¹

Collective IASC adherence to the agreed victim/survivor-centered approach includes ensuring availability and delivery of appropriate, safe, timely and accessible quality services for victims/survivors of SEA through gender-based violence (GBV) and Child Protection services for survivors of all forms of GBV.

Sustaining these services is a shared responsibility amongst all IASC members. IASC members will develop a strategy to address the deficit of GBV and Child Protection services in high-risk contexts as part of the operationalization of an IASC VCA. IASC members will adopt a coherent approach to provision of GBV and Child Protection services.

Provision of services for victims of sexual harassment will be provided by the responsible individual IASC member. Minimum standards for this will be agreed.

¹¹ This Strategy will primarily use the term "victim", while acknowledging that the term "survivor" is also appropriate and preferred in certain contexts (for instance, in the context of responding to gender-based violence). While the two terms are interchangeable, "victim" is often used in the legal and medical sectors, whereas "survivor" is generally preferred in the psychosocial support sector to refer to a person who has experienced gender-based violence in its various forms as reference documents state it implies resilience. "Victim" is in accordance with terminology used across the United Nations system.

Time-bound targets

Q2 2022	The IASC leadership will have agreed on a revised collective approach on support for assistance to victims/survivors. All IASC members will share agreed victim assistance responsibilities, agree on targets for increased provision, and support GBV service providers. Minimum standards for provision of services to victims of sexual harassment will be upheld and monitored.
2024	The IASC global dashboard provides evidence that there is increased availability of safe, timely and accessible services for victims/survivors of SEAH and all GBV against agreed indicators.
Q3 2022	Accelerated implementation of the UN Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse with a focus on supporting 15 high risk countries to implement the Protocol and technical note.
Q4 2023	All HRP contexts supported to implement the UN VA Protocol, technical note and training package

1.3. Enhanced accountability, including investigations, vetting and reference checking

The IASC will support and enforce a comprehensive set of enhanced accountability mechanisms. The focus is on additional and meaningful accountability actions and levers for change to be instituted over this multi-year Strategy.

1.3.1. Investigations

IASC members have learned from SEA investigations and sexual harassment investigations over the last decade. The operationalization of an IASC VCA (Commitment 1) will consider common standards to further improve and harmonize SEA investigations. The overarching purpose of harmonizing SEA investigations is to encourage victims, affected people, and affected personnel to trust our accountability processes. Consistent, harmonized approaches will be encouraged, recognizing the independence of investigations¹², as well as the different legal frameworks of individual IASC members¹³.

The commitment to a VCA approach will apply to both SEA and sexual harassment investigations, with a recognition that informal routes to resolution are available to victims of sexual harassment cases.

Informed by the strategic expertise of representatives of investigative services (UNRIS) and the CEB Taskforce, the IASC will agree steps to ensure enhanced capacity, harmonization of standards and collective accountability. The IASC will support its members to overcome constraints in delivering efficient, effective, timely and transparent investigations.

¹² The IASC has guidance on managing the provision of sharing data and information to senior management at country level.

¹³ <https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/resources/un-protocol-sea-allegations-involving-implementing-partners>

IASC leadership will mandate research and consultation, led by a senior panel drawn from investigatory services and management, to consider whether the current standards governing investigations meet the IASC VCA. The process will consider how joint or pooled investigation mechanisms could function, how duplication can be avoided, how harmonized standards and key performance indicators (KPIs) can be agreed, and the level of supporting evidence required for managers to make accountability decisions and, where required, implement disciplinary measures. As SEA investigations by IASC members are administrative investigations, cases should be referred for criminal investigations in accordance with applicable national laws where necessary and as appropriate.

The process will also consider efficiency and cost effectiveness and recommend appropriate operational models. Proposals will be informed by analysis of investigations conducted over the past decade, trends, numbers of cases and discussion of perceived obstacles based on anonymized and non-confidential information provided by IASC members.

Time-bound targets

Q1 2023 IASC leadership consider the findings and recommendations of a Panel which has been convened to determine how to (i) retain the independence of SEA and sexual harassment investigations while (ii) reaffirming the responsibility of leadership to ensure the effectiveness of organizations' SEA investigations and to recommend new harmonized standards and KPIs for SEA and sexual harassment investigations by IASC members. The panel should propose a mechanism for system changes to support the operationalization of proposed approaches, and a strategy for risk management of any pilots. The KPIs will be primarily driven by the IASC commitment to a victim/survivor-centered approach and the Panel will work in alignment with the IASC PSEAH Champion and individual members. An initial meeting to convene the Panel and to draft initial KPIs should be conducted in mid-2022.¹⁴

Q1 2025 IASC proposals to adjust the parameters governing investigations, such as the set-up, structure and profile of investigative offices and procedures are followed up with respective governance structures as considered appropriate by the member. Based on reports and evidence on the approach(s) piloted, consider recommendations for harmonized standards, course correction and feasibility.

Q4 2026 IASC members will be able to demonstrate significant progress in meeting KPIs which speak to enhanced collective accountability.

1.3.2. Vetting and reference checking

Considerable progress has been made on vetting and reference checking. This will now be accelerated through setting clear and monitored targets for enhanced participation and application of Clear Check

¹⁴ The research should be informed by work being undertaken in parallel on the implications of an IASC victim-centred approach for all members and partners.

and the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme (MDS), and consideration of ways to promote vetting and reference checking at country level.

Time-bound targets

Q2 2022	IASC members will meet agreed targets for their participation in the MDS and Clear Check.
Q4 2022	IASC members will meet agreed targets on their participation in the MDS and Clear Check and will determine how to address the issue of vetting and checking the references of staff members who have moved between United Nations and non-United Nations IASC member organizations.
Q4 2022	400 organizations will be participating in the MDS.
Q4 2022	IASC members will determine how to support improved vetting and reference checking at country level.
Q1 2023	United Nations IASC member organizations will produce a report analyzing their use of Clear Check and any lessons identified for consideration by the IASC ¹⁵ .
2023	Pilots on vetting and reference checking will be established at country level.

COMMITMENT 2: PROMOTE LASTING CHANGE IN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE, BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS ALL FORMS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT



The IASC is committed to sustaining the direction set by previous PSEAH Champions on altering the culture of the humanitarian sector and maintaining a spotlight on the pledge to prevent and respond to all forms of sexual misconduct, recognizing the inherent power differentials, including gender inequality, that enable SEA and sexual harassment¹⁶.

As part of this recognition, the IASC will shift its mindset from expecting that PSEAH activity and investment will lead to zero cases to aiming for creation of a culture of respect for victims/survivors, complainants, and whistle-blowers and zero tolerance of inaction on SEA and sexual harassment.

¹⁵ MDS already produces such reports.

¹⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/3ffjhc23>

The 2022 IASC PSEAH Champion¹⁷ and future Champions¹⁸ will further this agenda by adopting priorities that lead to visible change around policy, wider management and leadership culture, internal communication and organizational behavior including but not restricted to the following:

- Cultural assumptions within the sector about abuse in humanitarian contexts, and how tolerance and inactivity of this relates to our values.
- How the sector recognizes that the power asymmetry between humanitarians and affected people is a result of their respective positions and the bias that this may cause.
- How those in the sector talk about our knowledge of abuse and use the knowledge we have on abuse to motivate change.
- How the sector perceives and expresses relative risks, and on whom they impact, as well as action and inaction related to SEA and sexual harassment.
- The culture of silent bystander.

The IASC will agree common standards to be adopted by all members regarding workplace misconduct. Leadership and management at country level will be provided with clear guidance from the IASC on prevention and response to all forms of sexual misconduct in the workplace and while off duty. Where required, additional support and training will be provided, including on management responsibilities on performance appraisals, staff training, the provision of safe spaces and safer reporting, and redress mechanisms.

Time-bound targets

Q3 2022	A collective baseline of perceptions of culture and acceptance by staff in IASC agencies will be established, building upon already existing perception surveys conducted by IASC member agencies where commonalities allow.
Q4 2022	Specific additional guidance for country-level leadership and management on the operationalization of the IASC commitments on sexual harassment will be issued.
Q2 2023	Specific concrete actions to further change by IASC members will be agreed and initiated.
Q2 2026	There will be a measurable positive shift from the 2022 baseline.

¹⁷ Mr. Andrew Morley, Chair SCHR (President and CEO World Vision International)

¹⁸ Recognising that the entire IASC continues to benefit from, and build upon, the leadership of past Champions: Ambassador William Lacy Swing, the Director General of the IOM; Henrietta Fore, Executive Director UNICEF; Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director UNFPA

COMMITMENT 3: PROVIDE SUPPORT TO INTER-AGENCY PSEA COUNTRY STRUCTURES, PRIORITIZING IDENTIFIED HIGH-RISK CONTEXTS



The IASC is committed to supporting inter-agency PSEA country structures, with priority for high-risk contexts and ensuring that cooperation frameworks are in place with key partners, including national partners. Dedicated support to Humanitarian Coordinators will be strengthened through the IASC PSEA Field Support Team. This work will contribute to organizational culture change in members, leading to stronger commitments to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct.

3.1. Establish a mechanism to deploy dedicated inter-agency PSEA Coordinators to priority contexts

Progress has been made in establishing PSEA Networks and PSEA Coordinators at country level. The IASC will ensure predictable and sustained capacity in identified high-risk contexts where Humanitarian Country Teams face challenges in meeting their obligations. The IASC will work with donors to provide predictable financial support to establish and maintain PSEA coordination capacity in high-risk contexts to support change of practice and culture.

Time-bound targets

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| Q4 2022 | A host has been identified for a PSEA Coordinator roster, and a proposal has been developed and supported by the IASC. Predictable resourcing has been secured for countries where the HCT cannot directly resource the inter-agency Coordinator and Network activity. Results monitoring has been agreed. |
| Q1 2023 | PSEA Coordinators are deployed for a minimum two years to the top ten high risk contexts identified by the SEA Risk Index. |
| Q4 2024 | The effectiveness of the PSEA Coordinator and Network models has been monitored and evidence of results is available. |

3.2. Strengthen tracking of HCT PSEA Action Plans through the IASC PSEA global dashboard

Time-bound targets

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| Q2 2022 | An SEA risk index will be available to the IASC to support decision-making. |
| Q1 2023 | Monitoring the performance of the PSEA Coordinator roster will be harmonized with IASC PSEA global dashboard data in a monitoring framework. This will be enhanced by information from IASC technical support missions. |

2025 Evidence of change resulting from the establishment of the PSEA Network model and the presence of PSEA Coordinators is available. Indicators will include the number of PSEA Coordinators deployed in high-risk contexts, longevity in post, embedding of inter-agency PSEA activity, and aggregated performance monitoring of PSEA Coordinators.

3.3. Prioritize resourcing of PSEA at country level and identify suitable funding sources and modalities

Q3 2022 A mapping of needs and opportunities for resourcing PSEA to inform humanitarian leaders at country and global level how they can best meet their obligations to support inter-agency PSEA models and activities will be undertaken.

Q4 2022 Agreement will be reached by the IASC on inclusion of inter-agency PSEA activities in humanitarian and refugee response plans for 2023, 2024 and 2025. Achievement will be tracked through monitoring in the global dashboard and other reporting.

3.4. Ensure emerging crises have immediate surge or scaled-up support for PSEA activity

Q4 2022 IASC scale-up procedures revised to ensure that PSEA is implemented from the outset of a response and is fully embedded through all phases of the response.

2023 PSEA will be implemented from the outset of a response and consistently supported by humanitarian and refugee response plans and appeals.

3.5 Develop an updated IASC PSEA technical guidance for inter-agency PSEA coordinators and focal points, based on the latest global guidance and informed by best practices in the field

Q2 2022 A consultation and review process prioritizing country-based knowledge and experience are undertaken.

Q4 2022 The review and quality assurance of PSEA guidance and products is completed and the best practice field guide is endorsed.

Q4 2022 Quality assurance procedures are agreed and endorsed including the protocol for how new technical initiatives will be collectively prioritized and sequenced.
