GUIDANCE

Protection from and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

When working in humanitarian and emergency settings, all of us need to be aware of the huge power imbalances between different stakeholders and related inherent risks. When routines are changed, vulnerabilities increased and access to basic rights challenged, the most vulnerable are at high risk of being exploited and abused by the very people supposed to support them. Therefore, overall accountability mechanism overviewing and guaranteeing the respect and dignity of the most vulnerable in a fully inclusive way are key to prevent any form of misconduct, including sexual. When working remotely with very limited directed access, these transparent and participative control systems are even more important to safeguard the most vulnerable.

It has always been challenging to prevent and protect right holders from sexual exploitation and abuse. Such challenges are increased today when movements are restricted, but also when working in difficult security environments or very volatile and unstable contexts. Efficient protection and prevention starts with efficient complaints systems, but also transparent information sharing and very inclusive meaningful participation of all right holders into awareness raising and protection mechanisms.

REMEMBER:

When working remotely, accountability to affected population has become even more important. When many of our staff work remotely, meaningful and effective participation as well as transparent information sharing becomes even more challenging as often, our access to communities is limited and we depend on other channels for transmitting key information and collecting feedback. Therefore, the risk of an increase rather than a decrease in inappropriate behaviour is very real. Most of our organizations have necessary policies, procedures and processes in place; however, two major gaps are regularly identified across the sector and different geographical regions: There is a lack of knowledge and awareness of policies and rights, including the right to complain, not only within communities and refugee or IDP settlements, but also within our own staff. In addition to this first gap, there is very often as well a lack of efficient and robust complaints systems, not always established with contributions and voices from the communities. The lack of their participation often leads to systems in which there is little trust and, as a result, these systems are not used by potential complainants. It needs a high level of trust into complaints systems and the ability of the organization to handle sensitive complaints with discretion and efficiency, for affected persons to come forward and share their concerns.

Sharing best practice and finding creative and collaborative ways to support each other between international, national and grass-root big will contribute to improved knowledge and greater outreach to prevent and organizations. As we all work within the same framework and adhere to identical core

standards to prevent and protect from sexual exploitation and abuse, our community awareness raising messages and sessions are similar and can be shared for greater outreach.

Policies

A majority of organizations made very strong public commitments on prevention of and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. It is important to reiterate those public commitments, remind staff and communities what we want to implement and how, as well as our zero tolerance policy with regards to SEA. A lot of this can happen through simplified messages and ensuring that frontline staff and all the volunteers who are active during distributions or medical support have the right information to share with the community.

Ensure that everybody knows their own responsibility in regards to protection from and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Inclusion

With limited access, inequalities and vulnerabilities have become even more exacerbated. A commitment to inclusion of a wide set of different voices will significantly and positively influence long-term objectives and changes for the communities we work with. Risks of potential sexual exploitation and abuse might increase during the current sanitary crisis and we must include voices representing the different vulnerable groups into our consultations. Effective and efficient inclusion will help to proposing appropriate safeguarding measures and controls. Even if we have limited access, it is still possible to collect some input maybe in a more informal way during distributions, medical consultations, registrations, etc. We should also have the contacts with community leaders and focal points whom we can contact by phone to discuss these issues and ask for their suggestions.

Participation and Information

Transparent communication and meaningful participation have always been key and continue to be key with regards to prevention of and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Communities must continue to have a voice for them to make choices through inclusive participation, even in times of rapid responsiveness and restricted access.

A transparent and inclusive dialogue can only happen through participation of community members, which has become more difficult as outreach and accessibility are restricted. However, raising community awareness on the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse is critical to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and we must continue our efforts to reach the most vulnerable.

When reaching out to communities, it is important to include alternative communication materials such as visuals, drawings, videos, auditive, games or radio programs.

For example:

1. Providing effective, updated information on program activities, entitlements of right holders including the right to complain, selection criteria, programming, staff identities and

responsibilities as well as expected staff behaviour to actively decrease risks of exploitation and abuse

2. Create communication materials to popularize rules and protection of sexual exploitation and abuse such as health and security personnel in quarantine facilities or temporary shelters, volunteers during food distributions, printed messages on parcels or at distribution sites, community leaders, SMS's, social media and radio messages. Use simple language for core expectations, obligations and prohibitions (f.ex. *Food is for free*, *No sex against medical support* or *Vaccination is for free*).

3. Consider increased risks for areas under curfew, temporary settings and tailor communications to target populations, local contexts and traditions as well as operational constraints.

Awareness raising and Training

It is important to raise awareness on sexual exploitation and abuse within communities, even when access is very limited. Awareness raising sessions are best designed with contributions from the communities and need to be fully inclusive. They should assure a good understanding of concrete situations of exploitation and abuse even if such situations are seemingly well accepted by the different communities. A specific focal point for prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA focal point) working with staff and communities and identifying specific risks related to sexual exploitation and abuse (in regards to the COVID-19 response, but not only) should be designated for each program/country/region. Such PSEA focal points could be part of an existing Community of Practice or network for accountability or PSEA, in cooperation with other INGO's, NGO's, CBO's working in the same context.

Staff must know the commitments in regards to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and understand how to implement rules and regulations, but also how to report when concerns arise. Ensure your existing complaints and response mechanism caters for very sensitive complaints and is confidential, safe, accessible and transparent. It is equally essential that communities are aware of how we define sexual exploitation and abuse and understand in a very practical way what is prohibited behaviour and misconduct as well as how they can report any concerns.

Organizations need to ensure that new staff are properly inducted and all staff have regularly access to refresher trainings. It is also important to include first responders such as health care staff, medical doctors, security staff in quarantine and other temporary shelters, community members, volunteers, to ensure that they know how to identify potential situations of sexual exploitation and abuse. Ensure that they know how to respond to complaints or whom to inform when they identify a worrying situation.

KEY LEARNINGS:

Share best practice and find creative and collaborative ways to support each other between big and small organizations. As we all work within the same framework and adhere to identical core standards to prevent and protect from sexual exploitation and abuse, our community awareness raising messages and sessions are similar and can be shared for greater outreach.

USEFUL LINKS:

- Inclusive programming and COVID-19: ICRC's guidance video on Covid-19 and Inclusive programming ad related ICRC Guidance document

- ALNAP's COVID-19 RESPONSE PORTAL with resources on community engagement, information sharing and participation

- IASC Interim Technical Note, IASC Checklist PSEA during COVID-19

- Raising awareness and refreshing staff knowledge on sexual exploitation and abuse https://fabo.org/act/ACT_-_Code_of_Conduct_and_Expected_Staff_Behaviour, https://agora.unicef.org/course/info.php?id=7380, https://www.interaction.org/courses/sea101/

- Oxfam's verification list as well as practical tips for Community Engagement during COVID-19

- Establishing a dedicated hotline, ICRC's toolbox Hotline in a box

- Addressing safeguarding and SEAH in the COVID-19 response

- PSEA Implementation Quick Reference Handbook

- Awareness raising videos No Excuse for Abuse, To Serve With Pride

- Survey findings on COVID-19 language and information gaps