Progress and Actions to Protect from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment in Humanitarian Responses

Co-Sponsors: OCHA, UNICEF, World Vision International and the UK mission

Monday, 24 June 2019 from 13:15 to 14:45
Room XXII, Palais des Nations, Geneva

This is one of the side-events to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS), which builds on this year’s HAS theme: “Promoting action to save lives, reach those in need and reduce humanitarian risk, vulnerability and need: looking towards the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and the climate summit called for by the Secretary-General”.

Background and objectives

Protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, and sexual harassment is critical to the effective delivery of aid to people in need, but also to the integrity of humanitarian organizations and workers and the upholding of humanitarian principles. Organizations that do not protect their own staff and beneficiaries from, and respond appropriately, to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment endanger delivery of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals and related targets.

Over the past year, the United Nations and its partners have taken broader, system-wide efforts to tackle the causes of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The overall aim is to create a humanitarian eco-system in which people caught up in crises can access the assistance they need without fear of exploitation, abuse or harassment by any aid worker and feel safe if they report when abuses occur.

In December 2018, the IASC Principals agreed a plan for accelerating protection from SEA designed to:

1. Encourage victims/survivors to come forward by providing safe and accessible reporting;
2. Improve the quality of assistance and protection provided to victims/survivors; and
3. Enhance accountability by strengthening vetting, reference-checking, investigations and disciplinary measures.

This side-event will focus on how to accelerate progress in these three areas.

Discussion point

- What concrete actions should we (as delivery organizations, the humanitarian system as a whole and Member States) take over the next 12 months to deliver on these three IASC priority outcomes?
Concrete action points

• Identify three commitments in each of the three areas for the next 12 months with progress being fed back to the IASC Principals’ meetings as part of those updates.
• Create a mapping by June 2020 of all protection from sexual exploitation and abuse initiatives (e.g. training, safe services for victims/survivors, information tools on investigation) to reduce overlap and improve efficiency and transparency.
• Commitment to provide updates on progress of implementation of the IASC Plan (at a minimum every six months)?

Format

The 90-minute event will be chaired and moderated by Peter Taylor, Head of the Safeguarding Unit at the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development. It will consist of a short video of voices and testimonies from victims and survivors, followed by an interactive “Power Walk” exercise, facilitated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and World Vision International to highlight the structural causes of SEA in the humanitarian system. A moderated panel will feature 3-5 min interventions by select panelists on current and future PSEA commitments, and an open discussion between the moderator, panelists and audience members.

Chair and moderator:

• Mr. Peter Taylor, Head of Safeguarding Unit, DFID

Panel composition:

• Ms. Jane Connors, Victims’ Rights Advocate for the United Nations (video statement)
• Ms. Meritxell Relano, Deputy Director, Office of Emergency Programs, Geneva, UNICEF
• Mr. Ben Kabagambe, Deputy Country Director at Rule of Law Initiative, American Bar Association, Bangui, Central African Republic
• Ms. Elysia Nisan, Global Safeguarding Director at World Vision

Background Material

New mechanisms have been, or are being, put in place to protect and assist victims/survivors, enforce internal justice mechanisms, prevent transgressors from moving across organizations and improve mandatory training. On 3 December 2018, Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals endorsed an “IASC Plan for Accelerating PSEA in Humanitarian Response at Country-Level”, building upon the existing IASC commitments on PSEA, and including its related work on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP).

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