Title: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Promoting Coordination and Coherence

UNFPA and OCHA

Wednesday, 23 June 12:30 to 14:00 Geneva

Objective:

The objective of this side-event was to share progress made across the humanitarian community, including Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) members, donors, NGOs and national partners on strengthening Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) coordination and coherence as well as discuss current initiatives, good practices, and persisting challenges.

The final outcome aimed to facilitate discussion and awareness raising to inform future streams of work on PSEA by sharing best practices, lessons learned and current challenges.

Panel Members:

The event was chaired by Ms. Mervat Shelbaya - Chief of IASC Secretariat.

The number of participants that joined the PSEA side event was 99.

Opening remarks were made by OCHA Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, and the current IASC Champion, UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem, who provided a 3-minute video message.

The panel consisted of six speakers:

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Main points:

Ms Mervat Shelbaya highlighted that the IASC was created to better coordinate humanitarian assistance. Coordinated collective action has greater impact than working in silos and competing against each other. The IASC serves to ensure humanitarian action is appropriate, effective and reaches those most in need. Sexual exploitation and abuse breaks trust in the communities humanitarian action is supposed to assist, and directly undermines efforts for quality humanitarian action.

Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, highlighted the impact of the #aidtoo movement led to a realization, pushing greater awareness and attention to the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. This led to greater reflection within the humanitarian community, and to question how to better listen, promote equity, and change organizational culture and attitudes. COVID-19 made life harder for already vulnerable groups, including women and girls and as assistance scales up, so does risk of misconduct. Mr. Rajasingham highlighted his experience while working in the Syria operation. Hearing stories of extortion, women who are asked to provide “sexual services” in exchange for food only further highlight the difficulty in holding aid workers accountable in war zones. The IASC seeks to set standards and to close this accountability gap. This is why the IASC has recognized the need for a collective approach, he concluded by highlighting the efforts and achievements of the current and previous PSEA Champions in an effort to strengthen the humanitarian sector’s approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH).

Ms. Diene Keita, UNFPA provided an overview of the UNFPA PSEAH Championship, underlining the key initiatives:
1. The external review of the IASC’s approach to PSEAH will provide an independent assessment of progress made, and the overall impact and effectiveness of IASC’s PSEAH approach.
2. The establishment of a pool of trained and vetted experts to coordinate PSEA work on the ground.
3. UNFPA is the lead agency in the GBV AoR, and as such also facilitates assistance to survivors of SEA. UNFPA is currently developing a PSEA module to accompany GBV case management training materials for GBV case management personnel to meet the particular needs of survivors of SEA.
Lastly, in November, UNFPA will conclude its Championship with a roundtable event to reflect on opportunities for greater coherence among UN and non-UN actors. The top priority for UNFPA is to strengthen PSEA coordination and coherence and improve effectiveness on the ground building on the work and good practices of organizations, partners on the ground and other UN agencies.
For more details see UNFPA IASC PSEAH Championship.

Ms. Lisa Williams, OECD DAC highlighted the critical role and work of OECD-DAC including the production of the DAC Recommendation on Ending SEA and SH in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance: The 6th Key Pillars of Prevention and Response adopted on 12 July 2019. The DAC recommendation set out a first international standard (in line with the IASC standards) in PSEA for governments to apply to national aid agencies, and the wider international community, when working with civil society, charities, and other bodies running development programs or delivering humanitarian aid. The DAC recommendation brings a crucial level of coherence of approach both in the humanitarian and development programs.
The main points raised were:
- Improving the mechanisms in place and strengthening pathways of collaboration between humanitarian and development programs in a gender sensitive manner.
- Reinforce policy and programming on gender equality and GBV and ensure the collective efforts to end GBV is well translated into our efforts on ending sexual exploitation and abuse.
For more details see: OECD-DAC PSEAH recommendation.

Ms. Margaret Pollack, US Government, underlined that protecting beneficiary populations from being sexually exploited or abused by humanitarian staff is a longstanding priority for the United States, who remain a strong advocate.
in garnering donor and partner buy-in on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). The United States, through the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) has provided extensive assistance to partners to build their awareness of, and capacity to PSEA through a survivor-centered approach, and to support the PSEA capacity of local partners. (E.g. funded the PSEA global guidance and provided support to PSEA networks). PSEA interventions should extend beyond training, awareness raising, and rolling out of codes of conduct - all of which we consider to be the bare minimum of action and status quo - and should build on the concept of "protection by presence’ (including site monitoring visits, meaningful increase of presence of women aid worker staff, etc.). The issue of adequately preventing and addressing SEA is a matter of implementing a transparent and gender mainstreamed organizational culture, which falls under the stewardship of the highest management.

Ms. Tristan Burnet, IOM highlighted the IOM initiatives to harmonize policy and provide the required support to the humanitarian community on PSEA. IOM on behalf of the IASC led significant initiatives on translating PSEA policy into actions such as the standardization of PSEA coordinator Terms of Reference, developed and rolled out PSEA training package, CBCM guidance and workshops at the country level. Since 2019, 72 PSEA coordinators were trained and this year in July additional 24 PSEA coordinators (selected from the IASC established roster under the UNFPA IASC PSEAH Championship) will be trained in line with the IASC standards. IOM contributed to the innovative learning package “saying no to sexual misconduct” that aims to raise awareness among partners staff and ensure that they have the skills and the tools to define, detect and respond to sexual misconduct at the field level.

Ms. Tanya Wood, CHS Alliance provided reflections on the Core Humanitarian Standards and the work of the CHS Alliance. In October 2020, the CHS Alliance published an updated PSEAH Index as part of its verification tools, to give organisations verifying their performance against the CHS the ability to determine whether they have the policies and practices in place to protect people in vulnerable situations. The update clearly states the safeguarding requirements for the relevant indicators of the CHS Verification Framework. 150 humanitarian organizations are going through CHS scrutiny. Keeping the view of the people we serve and remaining flexible to their needs with a holistic approach is the main key message shared by the executive director of CHS Alliance. 
For more details on Core Humanitarian Standards see: Core Humanitarian Standards

Ms. Sandrine Lusamba, Executive Director of a DRC-based Women-led organization called SOFEPADI, highlighted the PSEA commitments of the organization, showing that beyond adopting PSEA policy and appointed PSEA focal points, SOFEPADI is strongly engaged in the PSEA country network and mainly in the establishment of CBCMs, in collaboration with other members, national and international organizations in DRC but also on GBV programming (including provision of services for children born of SEA). Ms. Sandrine highlighted that the CBCMs have a major role in sensitizing community members on what actions to take in the event of SEA. By working with ‘community animation units’ created for the Ebola response, SOFEPADI ensures PSEA messages are quickly disseminated throughout the community and community members are informed of complaints channels and referral pathways. Yet, challenges persist in regard to feedback mechanisms back to community and to survivors, and limited feedback/updates on PSEA processes jeopardize the trust with the community members. More efforts are needed to invest in holding perpetrators accountable and make sure community members are informed.

Key messages of the side event:

1. Coordination and Coherence: Inconsistency, duplication and fragmentation of efforts jeopardize the impact of our work on PSEA and can result in higher risks of sexual exploitation and abuse.

2. Capacity on the ground needs to be reinforced: Ensure sustainability of the newly built roster of PSEA experts is a collective responsibility.
3. PSEA interventions should be extended beyond training, awareness raising, and rolling out of codes of conduct and should build on the concept of "protection by presence" with the necessity to work with local partners including women-led organizations.

4. As SEA goes unreported, we must hold ourselves, our partners, and humanitarian leadership accountable to those survivors who are unable or unwilling to report, and to creating a safe and protective environment for all beneficiaries, even in the absence of quantifiable data.

5. Gender/GBV and PSEA: Reinforce policy and programming on gender equality and GBV, increase support in ending GBV and ensure the efforts to end GBV are well translated into our efforts on ending SEA.

6. Improving the mechanisms in place and strengthening pathways of collaboration between humanitarian and development programs in a gender sensitive manner.

7. Recognized the critical role of women-led organization and female aid workers to build the trust with the community, to ensure meaningful engagement of women and girls in preventing SEA.

8. Ending impunity: There has been progress in this regard, but a lot more needs to be done to strengthen support to survivors, end impunity and hold perpetrators accountable and make sure community members are informed. Upholding SEA survivors’ rights to access to justice is critical through the support of local legal services for GBV/SEA survivors.

9. Organizations with allegations "on hand" need to deal with it quickly and prioritize them.

10. PSEAH cannot be treated as stand-alone issue, but it is part of being accountable to the Core Humanitarian Standards and as such needs to be tackled in a holistic and accountable approach.

Additional points raised during the discussion:

The main questions raised from the audience were the following:

- The role of the national NGOs on PSEA coordination and coherence - what is the biggest challenge to engage with national NGOs on PSEA and what is the innovative way forward to better engage them on PSEA and overcome the power imbalance between international actors and national NGOs?

The question was addressed to:

1. Ms. Tristan Burnett, IOM highlighted the role of national and local NGOs to end SEA, including the critical role of legal service providers. It is important to make sure NGOs also co-chair PSEA networks and their positions are taken into consideration in the PSEA policies implementation and PSEA network meetings.

2. Ms. Margaret Pollack, US Government, the presence of women aid workers is essential. More women-led and women-inclusive organizations will contribute to overcome the power imbalance.

- What are the efforts underway to end impunity and holding perpetrators accountable?

The question was addressed to:

1. Ms. Lisa Williams, OECD DAC, the most effective way is to improve the exchange of information and coordination among organizations about the movement of perpetrators and this subject has been discussed in the OECD reference groups and other smaller groups with other donors.
2. Ms. Diene Keita, UNFPA, highlighted that the Rule of Law actors play a significant role in ending impunity and holding perpetrators into account such as UNDP and the OHCHR.

Ms. Tine Morch Smith, Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN and other International Organisations in Geneva highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic has now made more people vulnerable to exploitation and it has also made it more difficult for donors and partners to work closely together. Donors need to make sure that the “do no harm” principle is a cross-cutting consideration in the humanitarian responses.
PSEA coordination and coherence is a commitment also for donors and not only for organizations on the ground and UN agencies.
PSEA policies and procedures too often do not prevent new incidents from occurring. Donors need to make sure the availability of health, mental health, psychosocial support and case management services for SEA survivors is closely linked to the availability of services for other survivors of GBV in any given place.
Ending impunity is the most important challenge to be tackled and the international system is still struggling on how to do it.

Outcomes of the side event:

- Ms. Diene Keita, Deputy Executive Director, Programmes – UNFPA provided the final remarks highlighting that this event was a great opportunity to advance on the IASC PSEA strategy under the UNFPA PSEAH Championship.

- Women and girls need to remain at the center of PSEA efforts in prevention and response.

- Expanding safe and accessible pathways to report on sexual exploitation and abuse, as stressed by the UNFPA Executive Director and current IASC Champion on PSEAH Dr. Natalia Kanem in her statement, requires continuous collective effort and resources.

Conclusion:

Ms. Mervat Shelbaya thanked all the panelists and participants and highlighted the collective efforts by the community to address sexual exploitation and abuse, not only in terms of guidance and awareness raising but also in terms of capacities and the support on the ground. She thanked the donors and partners who make resources available to to make progress and put an end to these violations. She highlighted that this is not a problem that can be addressed by one or a few organisations but all organisations need to ensure coherence and coordination to make sure that we address not only how to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse but also how to better support victims by working with local actors, governments and organisations on the ground, and ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable and stopped from moving within the system.