

Inter-Agency Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

Overview

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Inter-agency prevention and response in emergency settings

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) directly contradicts the principles upon which humanitarian action is based. SEA inflicts harm on the people that the humanitarian system is mandated to assist and protect and it compromises the trust of assisted communities in international assistance as well as the global credibility of humanitarian work, in turn reducing opportunities to access areas and populations in need and sustain all types of assistance initiatives through the support of governments and funding agencies.

No emergency response site or program is immune to SEA risks, and the media attention it can bring. Therefore, the abuse and exploitation of beneficiaries is a global concern, one that the entire humanitarian community – including IOM – must remain committed to fight. This commitment includes responsibilities that all staff and affiliated personnel, including contract workers and consultants as well as implementing partners, are obligated to follow. For more on IOM's institutional commitments see the [Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(PSEAH\)](#) page.

Just as for every other aspect of a humanitarian response which relies on coordination among different entities within and across sectors and levels, inter-agency collaboration and accountability are crucial to effectively prevent SEA, respond to incidents, and provide victims with appropriate assistance. A single incident of sexual exploitation or abuse is sufficient to undermine the impact of humanitarian work across an entire response site, as it breaks the trust that humanitarian actors require from assisted populations and host governments to fulfill their mandate. Hence, inter-agency coordination for the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) activities has a direct impact on IOM emergency operations.

Key Points

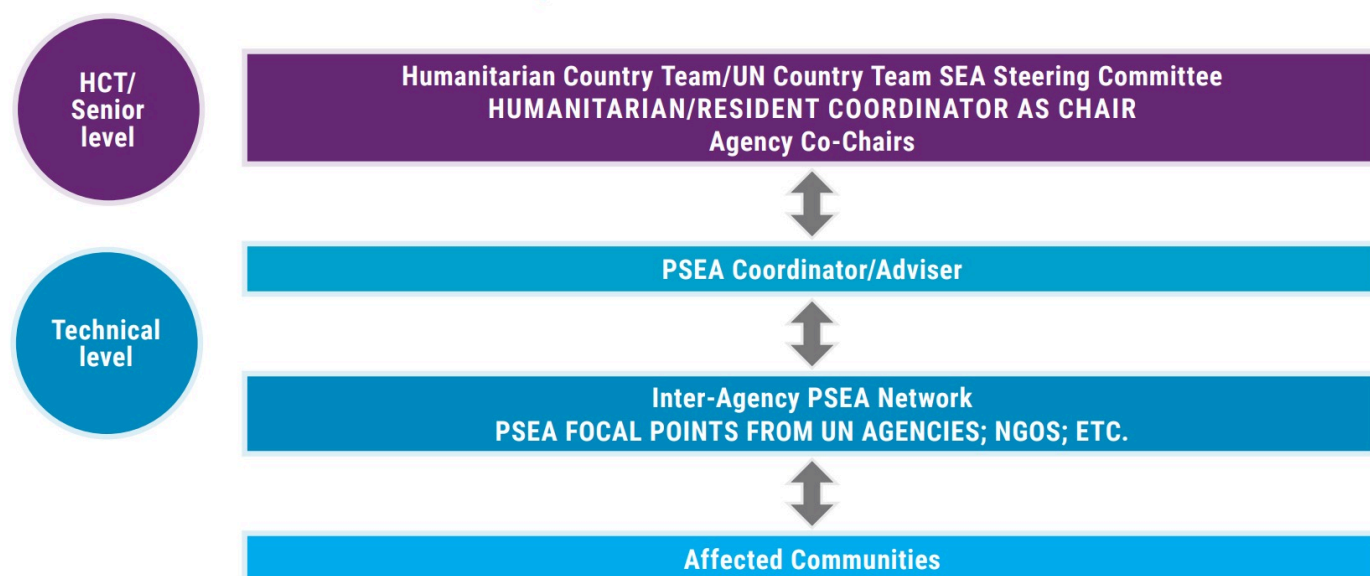
- Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by aid workers directly contradicts the principles upon which humanitarian action is based and represents a protection failure on the part of the aid community.
- Abuse and exploitation of beneficiaries is a global concern, one that the entire humanitarian community – including IOM – has committed to fight.
- Ensuring a systematic and cohesive response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in emergency operations requires strong coordination between humanitarian actors.

Description

The PSEA Coordination Structure In Country

PSEA is not a cluster or sector, but a cross-cutting issue that needs to be integrated in all sectors and clusters. While everyone has a PSEA role, there are actors in-country who are specifically responsible for implementing collective PSEA initiatives.

Diagram 1 below depicts a [PSEA structure at country level](#), with a clearly delineated role for senior leadership, technical support and implementation, and community participation to coordinate PSEA work. Not every in-country inter-agency PSEA structure must look exactly like this diagram, but the senior and technical roles must be filled by the appropriate bodies, and communities must be engaged.



The PSEA In-Country Program

The PSEA Program is the collective in-country prevention and response approach to SEA at both the technical and strategic level (see Diagram 2 below). It encompasses the work of the PSEA Network and the senior-level body overseeing collective PSEA. The purpose of the country-level PSEA program is to strengthen collaboration between agencies to build capacity on PSEA within organizations. IOM Country Offices support the inter-agency PSEA Program through our own efforts to mitigate risk, raise awareness, and respond to allegations – see the [Toolkit and Checklist for Advancing the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Harassment within IOM \(2022\)](#) for the implementation of PSEA activities within IOM missions.

The inter-agency PSEA Coordinator advises the Humanitarian Coordinator on PSEA and supports the PSEA Program in-country. The role was standardized in the [Generic PSEA Coordinator TORs](#), developed by IOM for the IASC. IOM also produced a [short video](#) providing an overview of the role of inter-agency Coordinators, their work, and related challenges thanks to the testimonies of PSEA Coordinators working in emergency responses around the world. Where there is no PSEA Coordinator in place, the role is taken up by co-chairs at the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and PSEA Network level. IOM often acts as this co-chair, especially where a dedicated IOM PSEA Officer in-country. Whether IOM's PSEA Officer or Focal Point is co-leading the Network, or is an active member, the [Deployment Package for PSEA Coordinators](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) on Inter-Agency PSEA: IOM lessons learnt from PSEA implementation in-country](#) can help in this role.

A foundational step towards the implementation of a response-wide PSEA Program is the development of an Inter-Agency Action Plan to monitor progress at the strategic level and outline technical deliverables. While contextualization is essential, the following are three key deliverables to be found in each inter-agency action plan:

1. Joint SEA Risk Assessment

Joint SEA risk assessments are a collective exercise building and expanding on the existing evidence base to draw a comprehensive picture of SEA risks and response capacities in an emergency. Joint assessments involve the collaboration of multiple actors, including but not limited to members of the PSEA Network, the protection-mandated sectors that are also gathering data for safeguarding, the working groups/clusters performing risk assessments within their sectors, and individual organizations (e.g. IOM's internal SEA Risk Assessments). The main objectives of a joint SEA risk assessment are understanding the risks of SEA in a given context and how the humanitarian response as a whole is addressing SEA risks, to then provide findings and recommendations to enhance SEA risk reduction and mainstream PSEA considerations across programs. For more information on this activity, please consult the [Technical Note: Preparing a Joint SEA Risk Assessment \(2022\)](#).

2. Coordinated Capacity-Building Initiatives

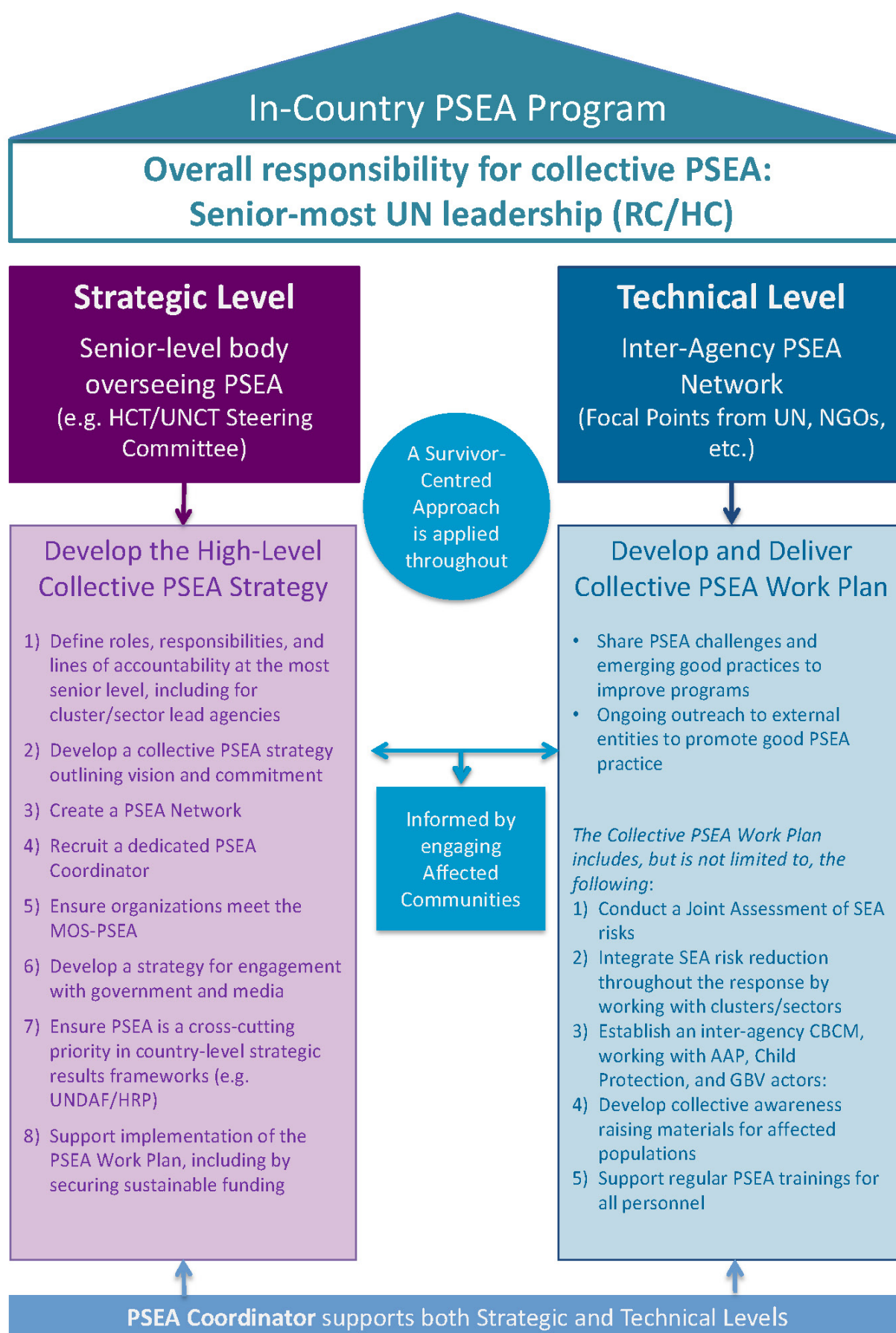
It is essential that PSEA Networks and dedicated actors such as in-country Coordinators and Focal Points are consistently

capacitated to lead or support inter-agency PSEA efforts. Capacity-building is a key contribution of IOM to PSEA inter-agency work, thanks to the expertise matured by IOM since 2015 and the resources developed for the humanitarian community (please consult the Emergency Manual page Inter-Agency PSEA: Guidance, Documents and Platforms). IOM Country Offices are ideally also collaborating with fellow members of the in-country PSEA Network to raise awareness of the affected community on PSEA – their rights, appropriate behavior of aid workers, and reporting options when misconduct occurs. It is good practice for agencies to join forces on awareness raising, both the disperse efforts of staff and to present consistent messaging to beneficiaries. Key messages and guidance on awareness raising can be found in the [2016 Best Practice Guide](#), and examples of collective messaging initiatives can be found on the [PSEA Community Outreach and Communication Fund](#), for which IOM is on the advisory board.

3. Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms (IA-CBCMs)

An IA-CBCM is a system blending both formal and informal community structures, built on engagement with the community where individuals are able and encouraged to safely report grievances – including SEA incidents – and those reports are referred to the appropriate entities for follow-up. Every Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator is responsible for having this response-wide system for complaint and assistance referral in place, and IOM is committed to participating in them.

An inter-agency CBCM links the various complaint and feedback mechanisms (CFMs) of agencies through agreed- upon Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) working in a response to ensure that complaints are safely and efficiently referred to the appropriate agency for follow up and potential investigation and survivors are referred for assistance services, regardless of who receives the complaint. IOM led the IASC initiative to define [good practices](#) when implementing an IA-CBCM, resulting in a 2016 agreement on [SOPs for cooperation under IA-CBCMs](#) that are the basis of the IA-CBCM in most countries.



* Credit: Manisha Thomas and IOM

For guidance on achieving deliverables of the PSEA Program, see the [FAQs on inter-agency PSEA](#)

Relevance to IOM's Emergency Operations

IOM upholds PSEA commitments for inter-agency coordination to prevent and address SEA incidents, including active participation in PSEA Networks at the country-level. The integration of measures to reduce SEA risks at the onset of technical responses is increasingly becoming a standard practice, resulting in PSEA indicators being embedded in Cluster/Sector-level action plans. [[Link to IOM PSEAH Page: Toolkit](#)]

Besides sectors and sub-sectors such as Protection, Gender-Based Violence, Child Protection, and Accountability to Affected Populations which have strong interactions with PSEA priorities and activities, other programmatic areas and fora such as the IOM-led Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCCM) Cluster should engage with PSEA stakeholders at the inter-agency level to mainstream SEA prevention and risk reduction in coordination with all humanitarian response actors. Finally, as PSEA remains a crosscutting issue and a system-wide responsibility, all IOM staff actors can expect and encourage collaboration with PSEA stakeholders to integrate PSEA monitoring indicators into their sectoral action plans.

DOE's Inter-Agency PSEA Project

Since 2015 the Department of Operations and Emergencies (DOE) has implemented a program to support inter-agency PSEA in-country, thanks to long-standing funding from the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) of the US Department of State. IOM's program supports PSEA efforts as the only team under the IASC and the UN-wide system dedicated solely to advancing collective PSEA initiatives at the country level.

Through this program, IOM provides global guidance and tailored support to HCTs/UN Country Teams and PSEA Networks in-country on inter-agency PSEA initiatives. The team provides assistance to PSEA Coordinators and Networks in-country, and continues to promote the deployment of PSEA Coordinators through capacity-building and advocacy for sustainable PSEA Coordinator positions across responses worldwide.

IOM country colleagues working on collective PSEA initiatives can reach out to request assistance – remote or in person - from this project by writing PSEA-CBCM@iom.int.

Links

- [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\) PSEA Website](#)
- [United Nations PSEA Website](#)

Other Entries in this Topic

- [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\)](#)
- [Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(PSEAH\)](#)
- [Inter-Agency PSEA Guidance, Documents and Platforms](#)

Contacts

For more information in inter-agency PSEA, contact: PSEA-CBCM@iom.int.

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