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# Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

## 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

## Overview

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

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) 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. SEA inflicts harm on the people we are obligated to protect, as well as jeopardizes the credibility of our assistance work.

SEA is a problem in all emergency response sites, not just those that receive media attention. As such the abuse and exploitation of beneficiaries is a global concern, one that the entire humanitarian community – including IOM – has committed to fight. This commitment includes responsibilities that all staff (including contract workers and consultants) are obliged to follow.

In recent years it has become apparent that coordination between agencies is necessary to effectively prevent SEA and respond to the incidents that do occur. Even one incident of sexual exploitation or abuse can undermine the humanitarian aid work in an entire response site, because it breaks the beneficiary trust needed to fulfill our mandate. For this reason agencies have been working collectively to take action to coordinate Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) activities, which has a direct impact on IOM staff when providing assistance.

## Relevance to IOM's Emergency Operations

IOM has a mandatory Instruction, entitled: Policy and Procedures for Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, IN/234, which binds staff members to standards of behavior at all times and especially when working with beneficiaries of assistance, including during emergency response. Sexual exploitation and

abuse of affected populations constitutes gross misconduct and is grounds for disciplinary action, including summary dismissal and referral for criminal prosecution, where appropriate. In addition to IOM's PSEA Instruction and the Standards of Conduct, IOM has also made PSEA commitments that include inter-agency coordination to prevent and address SEA incidents, including active participation in in-country PSEA Networks. This coordination is especially important in emergency response sites, where the efficiency of joint PSEA efforts is necessary to ensure that activities are not undermined by the taint of abuse by staff of any agency.

## Description

Inter-agency coordination in PSEA activities may take several forms in an emergency response setting. It can involve collaboration in activities to raise awareness of the community on PSEA and their right to assistance without exploitation or abuse. It can include agencies operating in the response site nominating Focal Points to regularly meet and share PSEA lessons learned and good practices. It can also include coordinating referrals to victim assistance providers, so that SEA survivors have access to appropriate assistance. One prominent joint PSEA action is to establish and participate in an inter-agency complaint mechanism.

**Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms (CBCMs):** A CBCM is a mechanism for receiving complaints from beneficiaries that is designed based on the input of the affected community and allows reports (including SEA) to be made safely and confidentially. An inter-agency CBCM links the various complaint mechanisms of agencies working in a response to ensure that complaints are safely and efficiently referred to the appropriate agency for follow up and potential investigation, regardless of who receives the complaint. While complaint mechanisms have been around for a long time, the inter-agency aspect of a CBCM makes reporting simpler for beneficiaries who may not know the agency that employs their abuser. Because of the proven efficiency of inter-agency CBCMs and the global attention on sexual misconduct with media and donors today, emergency response staff can expect joint mechanisms to become increasingly common in the future, and should be prepared to receive training on CBCM functions and how they will be expected to contribute to inter-agency PSEA activities..

## IOM's Role

All humanitarian staff have the responsibility to perform their duties in a manner that is consistent with the fundamental principles of human rights, respecting the dignity and integrity of those they serve. IOM as an institution has played a key leadership role in promoting stronger safeguards, standards, and inter-agency cooperation at the global level. Director General (DG) Swing was the IASC Champion on PSEA from 2011-2018, working with senior leadership from IASC member agencies to implement PSEA standards and international commitments on the issue, and reporting biannually to the IASC Principals on the PSEA accomplishments and challenges of all member agencies. Additionally, IOM has worked in close collaboration with humanitarian assistance agencies to develop tools on inter-agency complaint mechanisms (see Guidance Documents and Tools for PSEA

) and plays an active role in the Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and PSEA, and its technical assistance helpdesk for in-country PSEA networks. Since 2016 and ongoing, the inter-agency PSEA capacity-building team in DOE has provided technical assistance to Humanitarian Country Teams and PSEA Networks on setting up or strengthening joint PSEA initiatives, including joint CBCMs. Given IOM's global leadership role, all IOM staff bear a heightened responsibility to remain at the forefront of efforts to prevent SEA.

## Links

IASC Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (AAP/PSEA)

PSEA Task Force Website

IOM Policy and Procedures for Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (IN/234)

## Media

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfMKMCYFgPo>

## Entry Links

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: IOM Awareness-Raising and Reporting Procedures

## Contacts

**Contact** For more information in inter-agency PSEA contact:

PSEA-CBCM@iom.int

or helpdesk-aap-psea@unhcr.org

For more information on IOM PSEA Policy contact the Gender Coordination Unit (GCU):gcu@iom.int

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