



**IASC** Inter-Agency  
Standing Committee

# APPLYING POLICIES IN PRACTICE: PREVENTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS



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## Images

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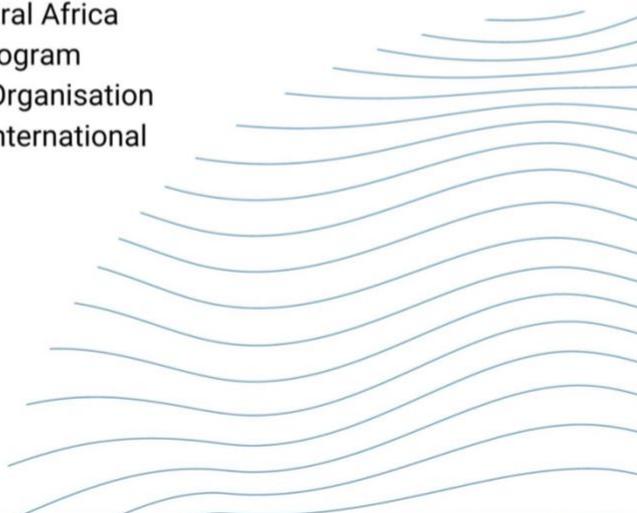
## Authors:

Clara Satke  
Madison Jansen  
Nina Lacroix  
Noor Lakhdar-Toumi



# Acronyms

<b>CBCM</b>	Community-Based Complaints Mechanism
<b>CHS</b>	The Core Humanitarian Standard
<b>CoC</b>	Code of Conduct
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>HC</b>	Humanitarian Coordinator
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>IOM</b>	International Organisation for Migration
<b>IP</b>	Implementing partners
<b>KI</b>	Key informant
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interview
<b>LSE</b>	London School of Economics and Political Science
<b>MOS</b>	Minimum Operating Standards
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OIG</b>	Office of the Inspector General
<b>PSEA</b>	Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
<b>RC</b>	Resident Coordinator
<b>SA</b>	Sexual abuse
<b>SE</b>	Sexual exploitation
<b>SEA</b>	Sexual exploitation and abuse
<b>SH</b>	Sexual harassment
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operating Procedure
<b>TWB</b>	Translators Without Borders
<b>UNCT</b>	UN Country Team
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
<b>ROWCA</b>	West and Central Africa
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Program
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>WVI</b>	World Vision International



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## THE IASC SIX CORE PRINCIPLES RELATING TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE<sup>1</sup>

1. "Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defence.
3. Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
4. Any sexual relationship between those providing humanitarian assistance and protection and a person benefitting from such humanitarian assistance and protection that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
5. Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, he or she must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.
6. Humanitarian workers are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment."

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) represents an abominable failure of the humanitarian system to operate in accordance with its fundamental principle: to do no harm in the delivery of protection and assistance to crises-affected populations. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)'s mission to prevent SEA has been seminal the past two decades, particularly following the 2002 publication of the IASC Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse,<sup>1</sup> which were revised in 2019. Though the Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse are the basis for IASC policy, grave failures by humanitarian staff to abide by these principles persist, reiterating an immediate need for improved application of the Principles.

This report was commissioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the IASC in collaboration with the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) with the overarching aim of identifying areas where more policy or

clarity is needed in the prevention of SEA. Findings inform a series of 9 recommendations to the IASC designed to help strengthen its global mission against SEA.

Researchers extensively reviewed IASC members' publicly facing policy guidance related to protection from SEA (PSEA), including codes of conduct (CoCs), and standard operating procedures (SOPs). To glean a more comprehensive understanding of PSEA in practice, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants (KIs) comprising various roles and regional expertise within core IASC members. Research was guided by the following 3 questions:

- *How are the "Six Core Principles" adopted, interpreted and applied across the core IASC members?*
- *Which areas are less well understood or more difficult to implement in order to better focus the IASC's efforts?*
- *Where are there potential areas of differences in interpretation of*

*Core Principles related to the prevention of SEA and what does or could this mean for implementation?*

From this research emerge the following key findings:

Though the commitment to PSEA is clear across all members, the way in which the IASC's Six Core Principles are interpreted, adopted and applied within internal policies, CoCs, and SOPs varies. One challenge that emerged in the application of the IASC Six Core Principles is directly related to the lack of capacity within the PSEA Focal Point system.

Other findings point to 3 areas to be less well-understood by IASC staff, bringing about implementation challenges for the Core Principles. Firstly, uncertainty surrounding how cultural norms and national law conflict with the Six Core Principles engenders implementation challenges when the cultural context and national law may warrant misconduct according to the IASC's guidelines. This is particularly evident in relation to Principles 2<sup>2</sup> and 3<sup>3</sup> in contexts where

early marriage and the hiring of sex workers is both culturally and legally acceptable.

An additional area that may benefit from further clarification are the inherent power asymmetries that exist in humanitarian settings. This less well-understood area among local staff lends to confusion surrounding to whom the term 'beneficiary' applies – making it difficult for the IASC to implement prohibitions on sex with beneficiaries.

Finally, confusion surrounding complaint mechanisms and reporting channels lead to implementation challenges of Principle 5.<sup>4</sup> KIs revealed it is not always clear at country-level what the reporting channels are, or what the investigation process entails. Additionally, a persisting challenge is that beneficiaries do not know where to report.

Concerning differences in interpretation, the 2019 revision of Principle 4<sup>5</sup> has in some respects proved to be insufficient. Indeed, several IASC members have not yet updated their internal policies to reflect the prohibition of sexual relationships between humanitarian

workers and beneficiaries, an interdiction local IASC staff found challenging to implement at field-level. Another finding showed the IASC Six Core Principles are misinterpreted to pertain only to behaviour within working hours, enabling staff misconduct in the private sphere, and the non-disclosure of pre-existing relationships.

These findings come together to inform the following summarised recommendations:

### **I. Consider the extent to which national laws and cultural norms differ from IASC Policy and how this might be addressed in guidance**

- Based on national laws, provide context-specific clarification for Core Principles and stress that staff will be held accountable regardless of national law.

### **II. Continue viewing the Core Principles, particularly Principle 4, as a living document**

- Revise Principle 4 to include a definition of what the term “sexual relationship” entails and specify its scope.

### **III. Strengthen complaint mechanisms and clarify reporting channels**

- Support better the beneficiaries by making them aware of the existing reporting channels and professionalise complaint mechanisms to make them more efficient.

### **IV. Enforce training materials**

- The importance of the training material needs to be reemphasised, and PSEA mechanisms need to be better supported by context specific training that is repeated and mandatory.

### **V. Ensure that all PSEA training is approached through the key entry point of power dynamics**

- Consider power dynamics as an entry point to the conversation around PSEA.

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## VI. Clarify the PSEA network in the field and increase capacity for PSEA

- Reinforce the importance of involving all staff in the prevention of SEA and ensure that strong communication and coordination are established by PSEA Focal Points and Coordinators in the field with PSEA Network.
- Dedicate more full time staff to PSEA.

## VII. Increase multi-level engagement

- Restate the importance to involve all stakeholders and ensure that beneficiaries are taken into account in the design and implementation of PSEA activities.

## VIII. Reinforce inter-agency coordination

- Encourage the adoption of a joint investigation mechanism, share materials across the PSEA network, and assign leadership to SEA.

## ABOUT

This report was commissioned by OCHA and the IASC in partnership with the LSE. Research was conducted by 4 LSE graduate students, and supported by Amal Hussein, Moira Reddick, Eva Modvig and Wendy Cue at OCHA, and teaching staff at the LSE. Research was conducted between October 2021 and March 2022, and was presented to the LSE and IASC members to fulfil the requirements of the Master of Science (MSc) degree program in International Development and Humanitarian Emergencies.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2021, 51.1% of PSEA Networks reported receiving allegations of SEA.<sup>6</sup> This percentage shows that despite the IASC's substantial efforts over the past 20 years, SEA remains a serious occurrence that needs to be addressed. Such abuses have a detrimental impact on those affected, leaving lifelong scars, and detracting from the humanitarian sector's chief ambition to protect and provide assistance to the most vulnerable populations worldwide. However, the IASC remains committed to strengthening the Six Core Principles and solidifying its global mission against PSEA. Thus, the overarching aim of this report is to make a series of recommendations to the IASC based on the identification of areas where more policy or clarity is needed in the prevention of SEA.

Section 1 will outline findings on how the Core Principles are adopted, interpreted, and applied by IASC members. Section 2 will discuss areas of the Core Principles that are less well-understood or more difficult to implement. Section 3 will

demonstrate potential areas of differences in the interpretation of the Core Principles. Finally, the paper draws a conclusion and offers recommendations to the IASC.

## BACKGROUND ON THE IASC AND PSEA

Established in 1992, the IASC is the only humanitarian coordination forum that brings together a powerful combination of 18 UN agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) to formulate policy and operationalize a strategic and unified response to humanitarian crises.<sup>7</sup> Towards this end, the IASC endeavours to protect the fundamental rights of those affected by disaster or conflict through promoting a humanitarian environment in which beneficiaries feel safe and respected and are able to access protection and assistance without fear of exploitation or abuse by any humanitarian aid worker. Additionally, aid workers themselves

should feel safe and empowered within their workspace to provide such assistance in an environment free from sexual harassment.<sup>8</sup> Although individual agencies had been working on PSEA individually, in 2002 the IASC implemented a unified response to PSEA with the publication of the IASC Six Core Principles Relating to PSEA, hereinafter the 'Core Principles'.<sup>9</sup> The Core Principles support Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) in their PSEA efforts by outlining what constitutes SEA, and the obligations of humanitarian agencies and staff towards PSEA. The Core Principles provide clear standards by which all IASC members must abide and implement into their respective (CoCs).

The prevention, response and awareness raising in regards to PSEA is organised through a wide system of PSEA Focal Points, PSEA Networks and PSEA Coordinators at country level. The PSEA Network directs the technical-level coordination and oversight of PSEA activities. It is tasked with implementing activities in a coordinated manner to prevent SEA to be committed, ensuring

an appropriate and effective response when sexual misconduct does take place, and raising awareness on PSEA. All UN agencies, INGOs, and Cluster Coordinators involved in the humanitarian response are entitled to become members of the Network, and one PSEA Focal Point from each member organisation is designated to the PSEA Network.

The PSEA Focal Point is in charge of putting together a variety of tools and activities in their organisation in order to help community members be aware of their rights; promote a wide understanding of SEA; ensure staff sign a CoC that prohibits SEA, are trained on PSEA, and know what their reporting obligations are; and act as a channel to receive complaints and manage cases. The PSEA Focal Point has an overarching responsibility to inform the Network on what the organisation s/he is representing is doing in terms of internal and external coordination of PSEA activities. The PSEA Coordinator reports to the (HC)/Resident Coordinator (RC) and (HCT)/UN Country Team (UNCT) on the Network's activities and provides anonymized SEA trends.

The PSEA Coordinator works both with senior leadership and the PSEA Network to support the PSEA in-country program, strengthen PSEA within organisations, and establish inter-agency community-based complaints mechanisms (CBCM).

The Core Principles, and more broadly the IASC's overarching global mission against PSEA, have not remained static since 2002. In 2003, the Core Principles were incorporated into the Secretary General Bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13,<sup>10</sup> shortly after the General Assembly resolution 57/306 of 15 April 2003, "Investigation into sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers in West Africa." Due to the nature of the bulletin, all staff of the United Nations are obliged to abide by the special measures for PSEA defined by the Secretary General, reinforcing the work accomplished by the IASC a year prior. Later, in 2012, the IASC developed the Minimum Operating Standards (MOS) - PSEA, which are in part based on the Core Principles. Together, the MOS-PSEA and Core Principles set the standard for IASC agencies and the humanitarian sector in regards to PSEA.<sup>11</sup> In acknowledgement of the fact that many core IASC members

collaborate with Implementing Partners (IPs) in the field, in 2018 the United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners<sup>12</sup> was published, outlining the PSEA obligations of all UN staff and contractors in regards to IPs. Following this protocol in 2020 was the common UN-IASC Implementing Partner PSEA Capacity Assessment tool,<sup>13</sup> which was created with the aim of standardising the IP vetting process and avoiding duplication in UN efforts to approve partners. Recently, in 2019, the Core Principles underwent a revision in an effort to strengthen the language surrounding Principle 4.<sup>14</sup> Since 2019, efforts to incorporate the Principles into guidance and training is under consistent review to accommodate new experiences – making the Core Principles a living document.

## METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using qualitative methods, including primary data collection through key informant interviews (KIIs), and secondary data analysis through a desk-based review of IASC member PSEA policy guidance, CoCs, and SOPs. These methods were carefully selected to gain insight into the interpretation, implementation, and challenges of the Core Principles relating to PSEA. By complementing the desk-based review with KIIs, researchers were able to form a comprehensive understanding of how the Core Principles are interpreted, adopted, and applied across participating IASC members both in policy, and in practice. Data from KIIs was analysed thematically to identify emerging themes and patterns.

21 semi-structured interviews were carried out in February and March of 2022, with KIs comprising various roles and regional expertise with IASC member agencies. Semi-structured interviews were selected to allow for both comparability of the data, and flexibility for comments to be fully

explored. Interviews took place virtually via Microsoft Teams or Zoom, and were between 30 minutes and 1 hour in duration. Two researchers attended each interview to ensure accuracy and mitigate any unforeseen technical difficulties. To foster engagement and ensure KIs were not obliged to rely on memory alone, the Core Principles were displayed via screen sharing throughout the interview. Interview questions<sup>15</sup> were carefully designed to address the following research questions:

- *How are the “Six Core Principles” adopted, interpreted and applied across the core IASC members?*
- *Which areas are less well understood or more difficult to implement in order to better focus the IASC’s efforts?*
- *Where are there potential areas of differences in interpretation of Core Principles related to the prevention of SEA and what does or could this mean for implementation?*

KIs were selected using a combination of convenience and referral-based sampling methods. The client selected and facilitated all initial contact for interviews, occasionally requesting referrals. Interviews were carried out based on KIs availability and willingness to take part. Primary inclusion criteria consisted of organisational membership in the IASC, and an expert knowledge of PSEA and the Core Principles. KIs held positions within IASC member organisations including CHS Alliance, IOM, OCHA, OCHA ROWCA, Oxfam, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNRWA, WFP, WHO, and WVI, at both headquarters and in field locations. Within this report, 'members' refers only to those who participated in this study. Positions of KIs within the IASC members included but were not limited to: PSEA Focal Point, Gender and Protection Officer, Humanitarian Affairs Officer, Investigator, Safeguarding Advisor, Task Force Coordinator, and PSEAH manager. To protect the identity of KIs, names and job titles have been concealed, and in some cases organisational affiliation has also been kept confidential.

## ETHICS

All research is in accordance with the LSE's Research Ethics Policy and approved by LSE's Research Ethics Committee. Prior to interviews, all KIs received a participant information sheet<sup>16</sup> outlining what the study entailed, and how their data would be managed. A consent form ensuring privacy and confidentiality was also distributed, and all KIs either gave written or verbal informed consent prior to the commencement of the interview. Only researchers were allowed access to collected data, which was stored in Google Drive. Data will be destroyed upon finalisation of this report.

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## LIMITATIONS

The findings of this research must be seen in light of some limitations. As several IASC members preferred to keep key policy documents internal, the researchers' overall understanding of PSEA practices and procedures of these members were limited. Additionally, due to time constraints and delays in response to interview requests, the primary limitation to the generalizability of these findings was a limited capacity to select a representative sample of IASC members. Thus, the interview sample lacks sufficient representation from all 18 IASC members, and NGOs and NGO networks in particular are under-represented. Therefore, this sample should not be seen as reflective of the IASC as a whole, and findings from one KII should not speak to the entire organisation. Further, all but one KI identified as women. It is critical in this space to acknowledge the value of a gender-balanced interpretation of PSEA to ensure a non-biased reflection of the core principles. Finally, as is characteristic of using interviews to collect primary data, the researchers

cannot rule out the possibility that KIs engaged in self-censorship. Due to the critical nature of this topic, KIs may have felt compelled to cast their organisation's PSEA measures in a more favourable light, or refrain from transparency. Despite these limitations, the researchers are confident the recommendations made in this report can be used to strengthen the IASC's global mission against PSEA.

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# I. HOW THE “SIX CORE PRINCIPLES” ARE INTERPRETED, ADOPTED, AND APPLIED ACROSS IASC MEMBERS

## I.i. Interpreted

Since all IASC members and standing invitees incorporate the exact definitions<sup>17</sup> of the Core Principles provided by the Secretary-General’s Bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13<sup>18</sup> into their SoPs and CoCs, it appears that to some extent the Core Principles are similarly interpreted across members. Supporting this claim is the finding that, across all KIIs, there were no challenges in the interpretation or implementation of Principle 1. Notably, OCHA<sup>19</sup> has further outlined certain definitions of terminology related to SEA in an effort to clarify the Core Principles. Indeed, while some IASC members<sup>20</sup> include key definitions of “sexual exploitation and abuse”, OCHA’s 2021 Standard Operating Procedures on Sexual Misconduct<sup>21</sup> provides the definition of ‘abuse of authority’ in accordance with the Secretary-General’s Bulletin ST/SGB/2019/8.<sup>22</sup> Ensuring a consistent definition in line with the Secretary-General’s Bulletin may be particularly

useful to enhance understanding of Principle 4, which seeks to prohibit “improper use of rank or position”.

## I.ii. Adopted

The unanimous adoption of the Core Principles is visible across IASC members since they were incorporated into the Secretary General Bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13.<sup>23</sup> Widespread consensus regarding the importance of PSEA has resulted in the adoption of policies in accordance with key IASC documents, including the Annual Strategy: Protection from and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment<sup>24</sup> and the IASC Plan for Accelerating Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Response at Country-Level.<sup>25</sup>

### I.ii.i. CoCs

IASC members have reinforced their incorporation of the Core Principles into

their CoCs, and developed policies specific to their organisations. For instance, while WFP redirects staff to its Policy on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse,<sup>26</sup> which provides more detail on how to adopt the Core Principles, UNHCR includes the reasons outlined in Secretary-General Bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13<sup>27</sup> in its annex to reiterate appropriate behaviours. These varying measures of adoption emphasise that IASC members are taking measures to adopt the Core Principles into their organisation's policy guidance in line with their needs.

Additionally, comparing the IASC members' CoCs reveals that organisations have engaged in reducing the Core Principles to plain language to make them more clear for staff. In Oxfam's CoC,<sup>28</sup> the mandatory reporting requirement in Principle 5 is rephrased as "best endeavours to report". In CHS Alliance's CoC,<sup>29</sup> "beneficiaries" transform to "members of crisis-affected populations" or more broadly, "target group in the context of development and humanitarian work". Rephrasing certain terminology of the Core Principles in

IASC members' CoCs clarifies the language to facilitate improved understanding among staff.

To ensure more effective communication of Principle 3, IOM and WHO incorporated a special provision regarding the relationship between professional health workers and beneficiaries, which is not explicitly mentioned in the Core Principles. WHO incorporates a clause in its CoC,<sup>30</sup> which states: "Staff who deliver professional health services directly to beneficiaries have a duty (...) to abstain from having sexual relationships with the people who receive their services." Similarly, IOM outlines in its 2016 Policy Procedures for Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse<sup>31</sup> a prohibition regarding a "sexual relationship between staff members who deliver professional health services directly to beneficiaries and such beneficiaries." To better incorporate these alterations and ensure the appropriate adoption of Principle 3, IOM explicitly mentions prostitution as prohibited behavior.<sup>32</sup> The adaptation of the language used by the organization contrasts the IASC's version of Principle 3, in which 'prostitution' is not mentioned.

### I.ii.ii. Policies

Some IASC members have also developed policies specific to their organisation which includes unique strategies towards addressing PSEA. In better support of Principle 2, which prohibits sexual activity with children under the age of 18, both UNICEF and UNFPA have supplemented the SG bulletin by adopting the 2016 Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.<sup>33</sup> While WFP has not adopted the policy guidance of UNICEF related to early marriage, it is currently in the stages of doing so.<sup>34</sup>

### I.iii Applied

In order to bolster the application of the Core Principles, extensive initiatives have been taken by IASC members. For instance, WHO created a dedicated investigation team within its staff and has established a benchmark of 220 days for an investigation to be completed. Additionally, WHO has prioritised survivor support through the creation of a multi-level framework that is designed to raise awareness, and increase accountability.<sup>35</sup> UNICEF

reinforced their reporting channels and ensured that they were safe and accessible in all program sites.<sup>36</sup> This initiative allowed them to reach over 61 million women and children in 2021, as opposed to 6.2 million in 2017.<sup>37</sup>

For WFP, collaboration with Translators Without Borders (TWB) has been instrumental to the application of the Core Principles, as TWB ensures the meanings and nuance of the Core Principles are not lost when applied in a non English-speaking context.<sup>38</sup> Additional tools utilised by WFP in the application of the Core Principles are radio dramas in local languages, visual images, and incorporating the Core Principles into songs. These mechanisms not only enhance accessibility, but also provide creative ways to simplify and contextualise the Core Principles.<sup>39</sup>

The PSEA Network, the PSEA Coordinators, and the PSEA Focal Points' duties are in line with the IASC-MOS<sup>40</sup> on PSEA and are organised around 4 pillars: Management and Coordination; Engagement with and support of the affected population;

Prevention and Response. While this system insists on collaboration among staff and across agencies, collaboration takes time, and currently, the IASC TOR<sup>41</sup> in relation to PSEA Focal points defines the position as a role or a “hat”, which does not have to be full-time. This has been highlighted as a serious issue in KIIs, who feel the prevention of SEA lacks dedicated capacity:

“We have a system of PSEA Focal Points... who this isn’t their main job... so often they have at least one if not two other roles within that office, they are hugely overworked, they are not necessarily protection or gender experts. We have all the tools, there is simply not enough capacity in many of these settings”.<sup>42</sup>

That phenomenon can directly impact the strength of the reporting mechanisms, leading to underreporting or mishandling of the complaints that do come through<sup>43</sup> as one KI articulated:

“Monitoring is a bit challenging for us. We have three complaint channels that can be used by

anyone, being able to systematically and regularly monitor what comes through these complaint channels I think is a bit more challenging because it does require capacity”.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, KIIs revealed communication challenges between HQ and country-level staff, resulting in diverse applications. These differences further heighten implementation challenges across the Core Principles, especially Principles 2, 3, 4, and 5 which are often misunderstood because of complex language or because they contradict local jurisdictions. To better apply the Core Principles, organisations such as CHS Alliance<sup>45</sup> and UNICEF<sup>46</sup> have created training programs to better ensure a unanimous understanding of the SOPs in practice. In terms of training material, IOM, with support from UNHCR and WFP<sup>47</sup> and other partners have put together an interactive learning package for the IASC “Saying No to Sexual Misconduct”<sup>48</sup> which is now used across all IASC members. These findings highlight the varying ways in which the Core Principles are applied across IASC members.

## II. AREAS LESS WELL-UNDERSTOOD OR MORE DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT

### II. i. How cultural norms and national law conflict with IASC Policy

One key area that is less well-understood among IASC members is how the Core Principles conflict with cultural norms and national law. Specifically, when what is acceptable culturally and legally warrants behaviour classified as misconduct in accordance with the Core Principles. This tension can be seen particularly in relation to Principle 2, which prohibits sexual activity with staff under the age of 18 “regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally.” Though this Core Principle explicitly addresses the potential for regional differences concerning the age of consent, Principle 2’s exemption, which allows under UN staff rules to be legally married to a child under the age of 18 but above the age of majority or consent in both the UN staff and spouse’s country of citizenship, highlights the differential understanding of the weight the

principles hold in light of local laws and regulations.<sup>49</sup> Since this exemption can be understood to completely undermine both the clarity and validity of Principle 2,<sup>50</sup> it follows that implementation challenges arise in its enforcement:

“In the Middle East. . . where there is quite a bit of child marriage and it’s acceptable . . . we’ve had situations and incidents recently where contracted workers working for us in the field are marrying 15 to 17 year old girls, and because within the country it’s not frowned upon it’s very hard to, at times, get the national office to take it as seriously as we take it”.<sup>51</sup>

Further emphasising the challenges implementing Principle 2 in this context:

“We do not encourage early marriage as an organisation, but we cannot actually prohibit personnel from getting married to someone who is younger because it is allowed by the local

laws. In the courts here [the Occupied Territory of Palestine], the age [of consent] is 14 years and 9 months..."<sup>52</sup>

Evident from these quotes and highlighted across several other KIs,<sup>53</sup> is the notion that when it comes to engaging in relationships with children under 18, in contexts where this conduct is culturally acceptable, local staff may implicitly proceed in accordance with their rights set out by national law as opposed to the guidance set forth by the IASC member agency in which they are employed.

Another Core Principle evidently in disaccord with national law is Principle 3, which prohibits "Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour." In respect to this Core Principle, several KIs highlighted the particular confusion from local IASC member staff around the sanction imposed on soliciting a sex worker, especially in contexts where this conduct is considered both legal and normatively acceptable.<sup>54</sup> Even during PSEA training

sessions in which participants generally affirm the presence of power asymmetries between aid workers and beneficiaries, and agree that they should not exploit such power, confusion in relation to hiring sex workers persists.<sup>55</sup> Illustrated by one KI,

"For example, when you are talking to enumerators who are going to be away from their families for 6 months or a year, they are really puzzled and they say to me, genuinely, well what do you expect me to do go without sex for a year?"<sup>56</sup>

Thus, while staff may generally agree to uphold the Core Principles, there still lacks comprehensive understanding surrounding the interaction of what is accepted culturally and is legal at a national level, and the conduct enforced by the Core Principles. This indicates the need for a wider, more comprehensive discussion around power dynamics in PSEA training sessions, an idea which will be further developed in the subsequent section.

## II.ii. Power Dynamics

Another area less well-understood is to whom the term ‘beneficiary’ applies; a confusion stemming from the lack of a wider awareness of the power asymmetries that exist within the humanitarian sector.<sup>57</sup> Confronting power dynamics is an important, yet complex task in the context of today’s humanitarian action, in part because of the transformation that has occurred in the past decades. While humanitarian response was traditionally delivered by foreign nationals travelling to the crisis-affected communities, the majority of response is now from local organisations and individuals who may be from the crisis-affected community themselves.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the line between humanitarian staff and beneficiary becomes much more blurred, and the power dynamics that arise in the position of someone delivering aid, especially if they are part of the local community, may not be so obvious, creating challenges in implementation of the Core Principles. Exemplifying this is despite IASC awareness raising efforts related to PSEA, there remained a common lack of understanding among local staff

surrounding to whom the term ‘beneficiary’ applies. Indeed, in order to seek clarity around this issue, local IASC member staff reportedly requested a clear line drawn to demarcate the beneficiary so as they could effectively travel beyond the “affected zone” and engage sexual relations with local persons without sanctions. Further highlighting the implementation challenges:

“Tackling [PSEA challenges] really shows us that we are still missing the point of the rules based system, and its far more about attitudes and an analytical framework that we need to explain, where power derives from and the way we can be abusing that power and privilege by the very nature of the persons within the humanitarian response”.<sup>59</sup>

This quote emphasises that the current approach to some PSEA training sessions, a rule-based approach, may not sufficiently address the existence of power dynamics in the humanitarian sector. The confusion particularly results

in challenges implementing Principles 3 and 4, which respectively prohibit bribery for sex, and any sexual relationship between humanitarians and beneficiaries. In regards to the latter:

“Employees of a vendor or contractor working in a UN compound for example UN staff member claiming that this person is also UN so there is no issue, its not prohibited for me to have sex with this person, whereas this person was considered [by UNFPA] as a beneficiary and member of the community”.<sup>60</sup>

This not only demonstrates an area of confusion surrounding the identification of beneficiaries, but amplifies the need for a wider conversation to be reinforced regarding the power asymmetries that exist between humanitarian workers and beneficiaries.<sup>61</sup>

While there may be areas less understood regarding the nature of the beneficiary, it is not simply through strengthening the language or policy that will engender clarity and strengthen the implementation of the Core Principles;<sup>62</sup>

a deeper discussion of power dynamics must ensue.<sup>63</sup> As some KIs indicated current PSEA training sessions can be too strongly centred around rules and obligations,<sup>64</sup> training material must more effectively communicate that anyone with a UN/INGO logo has power, whether that be a driver, enumerator, or field monitor – even if they are from the community themselves.<sup>65</sup>

One way this conversation is being approached in IASC PSEA training sessions is through the use of the ‘power walk concept’, which is utilised to start a conversation around what power is, and where power lies. This encourages people to understand this in their own lives, and within their own contexts. Role plays are also used with different identities to relate this concept in a broader spectrum before narrowing it down to the humanitarian sector.<sup>66</sup>

In sum, because in reality such relationships happen, PSEA activities and training sessions must be communicated in a way that is less focused solely on compliance, and more focused on stopping abuses of power, which is fundamentally what the Core

Principles aim to address. This can happen by encouraging people to reflect on their own behaviour and the impact that they are having, and the perception of them within the affected communities. As SEA and sex can be context specific, power is a better entry point into these discussions.<sup>67</sup>

### II.iii. Complaint Mechanisms & Reporting Obligations

Principle 5 outlines the requirement for humanitarian workers to report any SEA-related allegations using established reporting channels. Despite the seemingly straightforward nature of this Core Principle, several KIs revealed that SEA remains grossly underreported, in part due to confusion and a lack of trust on behalf of beneficiaries surrounding complaint mechanisms, but also in part due to uncertainty from staff regarding the mandatory obligation to report,<sup>68</sup> and what investigations entail.<sup>69</sup>

While this may not be true in all contexts,<sup>70</sup> underreporting in some areas is at least in part due to beneficiaries' lack of understanding about where to file a complaint.<sup>71</sup> According to one KI, this is

attributed to the quantity of channels in place.

“Sometimes when we have too many channels, the population can get lost. It’s really important at the country level that organisations and humanitarian actors work in a much more quality way to ensure that the population has fewer, and good channels regarding the type of people they trust. . . what we should look for is 3 to 4 key entry points”.<sup>72</sup>

This point is supported by empirical data collected by WFP in various initiatives, webinars, meetings with different regional and country offices, and a survey conducted with IASC member staff across various agencies and task forces.

“When we ask [IASC member agency staff] . . . [W]hy do you think this is a problem, why is SEA underreported? Surprisingly, there’s still a very high number of people that don’t know where to report, despite everyone’s efforts”.<sup>73</sup>

Additionally, in a 2020 PSEA Poll for Afghanistan, it was reported that 84% of the population indicated they have no knowledge on available complaint mechanisms for SEA.<sup>74</sup>

Further, community level lack of confidence in the system was a significant barrier to reporting.<sup>75</sup> While some KIs emphasised this lack of confidence to stem from survivors' fear of retaliation<sup>76</sup> other findings underscored survivors' suspicion around the system's overall ability to provide them justice.<sup>77</sup> Regarding survivors' fear of retaliation, some KIs highlighted insufficient protective measures for survivors as a driving factor behind this concern.<sup>78</sup> In the words of one KI representing the WHO,

“Are there systems of protection in the country? If someone is raped there is no protection, no judicial system. Therefore, there is no point in raising a complaint.”<sup>79</sup>

Further, two factors KIs understand to strongly influence a survivor's perception of justice are the length of investigations<sup>80</sup> and a survivor's

perception of a precedent of inaction on the part of staff.<sup>81</sup> According to one anonymous KI,

“Investigations taking a while and it taking months before doing a follow up [because of due diligence] is a huge loss of trust, it needs to happen swifter and more publicly.”<sup>82</sup>

This call for investigations to happen more publicly relates to a survivor's perception of a precedent of inaction on the part of the investigative team. Underscoring this perception is a KI from OCHA:

“People do not trust in the system because they do not see management doing anything about misconduct. They do not feel the environment is safe to report if the management isn't doing anything”.<sup>83</sup>

However, it is not just confusion among beneficiaries that results in implementation challenges for Principle 5; several KIs reveal that certain aspects of reporting are also unclear among staff.<sup>84</sup> For instance, first-responders to

emergency sites are unclear about their obligations to PSEA without a PSEA network:

“The PSEA Coordinator at the offset of an emergency is not the first person to hit the ground . . . these people [the first responders] need to be trained on what they can do without a PSEA system.... How can we have some measures that are already implemented once we hit the ground?”<sup>85</sup>

Additionally, the term “mandatory reporting” seems to be ambiguous and difficult to implement. Dubiety surrounding the term arises under the circumstance that staff believe reports submitted must be based on solid evidence. Therefore, underreporting occurs when staff are unsure about the validity of their complaints, either due to being unsure of what they saw or heard; or because they feel they must have a witness or evidence to substantiate the claim.<sup>86</sup>

The “failure to report” arises when staff consider that there is a valid reason not to report. It may appear that this “failure

to report” evidence a lack of policy execution, but in reality, interviews showed that some of them could be attributed to appropriate use of discretion.<sup>87</sup>

Another factor that inhibits reporting is the lack of adequate training and the lack of staff’s knowledge on reporting obligations. This is exemplified by the fact that out of CHS Alliance’s nine commitments, the one concerning complaint mechanisms scores the lowest.<sup>88</sup>

The investigation side to reporting is another aspect of Principle 5 shrouded in uncertainty.<sup>89</sup> In one instance, there was initial confusion surrounding what measures an IASC member must take before and after filing a report.

“We never know what to expect from the OIG. [T]he first time we sent a report, we understood that you must only inform the situation and wait, now we know we need to take initial measures but that's not clear [...] we only learned that after doing things wrong.”<sup>90</sup>

Further underscoring the confusion of IASC member staff concerns necessary reporting channels. Specifically, to whom are reports supposed to go.

“People continue to sometimes not report to the established channels, but inform others who should not know, before they finally find the right reporting channel [...]. [I]t's an entry point challenge”.<sup>91</sup>

Across some KII interviews, it can be derived that part of this uncertainty around handling complaints can be attributed to a wider lack of understanding surrounding the roles and responsibilities related to PSEA among IASC member staff.<sup>92</sup> As a result, information about a report or investigation is shared too widely, raising concerns regarding confidentiality. This is exemplified in one KI's account of Incident Report Calls, where the need-to-know principle upheld across all investigations can be difficult to implement:

“When incidents come up in offices, lots of people, particularly managers can decide that they

want to be part of these calls because they are a manager and should be told what is going on. However, when it comes down to it you can find 15 people that turn up to a call that haven't been invited, but have had the messages forwarded to them”.<sup>93</sup>

This highlights a need to strengthen understanding among IASC member staff of the different roles within handling complaints, minimising the risk for confidentiality breaches.

In sum, this section brings to focus the implementation challenges which arise for Principle 5 that may stem from a less well-understood area by both IASC member staff and beneficiaries: complaint mechanisms and necessary reporting channels.

## III. POTENTIAL AREAS OF DIFFERENCES IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE CORE PRINCIPLES

### III. i. Specific Terminology

As evidenced across several KIs, one key area of difference in interpretation stems from the 2019 revision of Principle 4, which aimed to both strengthen the language and interpretation of this principle.<sup>94</sup> Yet, in a sentiment echoed across some KIs, this revision has produced the opposite effect in many respects:

“When [Principle 4] was revised it wasn’t in any way simplified, it is just the same level of complicated, but with different words”.<sup>95</sup>

Language complexity resulted in interpretation differences by IASC members regarding which connections between staff and beneficiaries are prohibited:

“The new language has some complexities in its application, particularly when we have ambiguity around the relationship

whether it’s direct, or indirect, between the humanitarian worker and the beneficiary”.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, Principle 4 may benefit from a more explicit articulation of what a prohibited relationship entails, whether it is between staff delivering a specific type of assistance and a beneficiary receiving that assistance, or if the prohibition extends to a more indirect connection, such as a relationship between an aid worker and a beneficiary benefitting from, but not directly receiving, assistance. Finally, clarifying the language of the principle must be followed by stricter reinforcements to ensure a cohesive interpretation of the principle.

Potential areas of misinterpretation within Principle 4 engender challenges for its implementation. This is because following the 2019 revision, it implies local staff are prohibited from engaging with members of their own community:

“[The revision of Principle 4] makes it very difficult because of the realities of the field. [W]e have WFP staff, we have partner staff [in] affected communities, so to have a prohibition where they cannot be involved with members of their own community, its difficult optically and presentationally”.<sup>97</sup>

Conversely, organizations face interpretation differences because staff are unclear whether community relationships are prohibited if they were previously considered consensual. Therefore, the interpretation differences surrounding the language of Principle 4 raise uncertainty regarding its implementation.

Another potential area of differences in interpretation is related to Principle 2. Specifically, members may interpret differently at what point sexual misconduct begins. In the words of one anonymous KI in direct reference to Principle 2,

“Does [sexual misconduct] start with dowry discussions? Does it

start when dowry’s exchanged? Or does it start when the marriage, or sexual conduct, happens? That’s a misunderstanding we are constantly having to navigate”.<sup>98</sup>

This quote highlights that another area that may benefit from clarification is what exactly constitutes sexual misconduct in accordance with the Core Principles, and at what point that begins.

In sum, this section demonstrates that despite the 2019 revision of Core Principle 4, there still remains misinterpretations among staff and different IASC members. As further elaborated on in the recommendations, this principle should therefore remain open to future adjustments.

### III.ii. Contracts Implications

Another difference in interpretation of the principles related to PSEA is the significance of IASC guidelines outside of work hours:

“Working for the UN doesn’t have to adhere to the national laws or

workings. Working for someone is a choice, not a right. So, to work at a company or organisation, you have higher standards than the national law. What the UN does in the sense of prostitution or engaging in transactional sex regardless of the law is misconduct, and you can lose your job for that”.<sup>99</sup>

The argument emphasises the influence contracts have over the actions of individuals once employed by IASC members. By interpreting the principles solely as a means to maintain employment, staff may behave according to IASC guidelines during working hours, but fail to do so in the time beyond.<sup>100</sup>

The difference in interpretation regarding whether the conditions stated in the contract apply outside of work hours within societies that legally allow certain behaviours raises implementation concerns regarding establishing a safe environment for SEA survivors. To clarify these misinterpretations, organisations including CHS Alliance clearly highlight in their CoC the necessity for employees to

follow PSEA regulations regarding Principle 3 even outside of working hours.<sup>101</sup> Yet, there are inconsistencies between the IASC members, which further heightens implementation challenges. Interpretation differences of behavioural requirements outside of working hours further raises implementation challenges for organisations with individuals in prior relationships. For instance, a KI at the UN claims that:

“Because there is an exception in the UN SGB for child marriage, [...] if in a country a child is legally married to someone, it’s not SEA. So that means our national staff may marry a 13- or 14-year-old, and that would not be SEA in that country”.<sup>102</sup>

These findings highlight that staff may be in prior relationships that contradict their contract. To ensure that these relationships align with the organisations’ values Oxfam requires staff to disclose pre-existing relationships in their CoCs.<sup>103</sup> Yet, even with reporting mechanisms in place, employees fail to report pre-existing

relationships out of fear of termination.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, this raises implementation challenges because it raises uncertainty regarding the nature of the pre-existing relationship. According to a KI at the UNHCR:

“There is no analysis as to pre-existing relationships of nationals in non-conflict or non-humanitarian crisis-affected states. There is no consideration of temporality, age of consent, pre-existing nature of the relationship. [...] [Thus,] you cannot restrain relationships without any context of time or the situation”.<sup>105</sup>

This section overall illustrates a potential area of differences in interpretation around the implications of a staff contract. KIs revealed staff do not interpret the Core Principles outlined in their contracts to extend beyond the hours of employment, leading to nondisclosure of previous relationships and misconduct in the private sphere.

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## CONCLUSION

This report focuses on strengthening the IASC's global mission toward PSEA by identifying the areas where more clarity is needed. To this end, researchers conducted a desk-based review of the IASC members' CoCs, SOPs, and policy guidance as well as 21 semi-structured interviews with KIs representing CHS Alliance, IOM, OCHA, Oxfam, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRWA, WFP, WHO, and WVI. Though this research illuminates an overarching commitment to PSEA across participating IASC members, findings also reveal potential areas of weakness, which should be seen as entry points to strengthen PSEA.

Findings revealed a variation in how the Core Principles are interpreted, adopted, and applied. To ensure more effective adoption of the Core Principles, IOM, UNICEF, and WHO have incorporated additional policies to support needs specific to their respective organisations, while WFP is in the preliminary stages of following suit. Additional findings reveal members including CHS Alliance, Oxfam, and WHO simplifying the language within

certain Core Principles in their documents to promote understanding. Finally, members are applying extensive initiatives to strengthen PSEA, including the employment of investigation teams, independent translators, and regional PSEA focal points.

While IASC members' commitment to adopting the Core Principles is clear, there remains areas that are less well understood. Significant confusion exists among local staff surrounding the interaction of IASC policies with municipal law, specifically which takes precedence. This was seen mainly in reference to Core Principles 2 and 3, where municipal law and contextual norms may encourage behaviour such as the use of sex workers and early marriage, which is prohibited and classified as misconduct under the Core principles. Other findings indicate a lesser well-understood area is the power asymmetries that exist within the humanitarian sector, resulting in implementation challenges particularly for IASC Principles 3 and 4. Finally, establishing safe and effective complaint mechanisms and the necessary reporting channels is a final

area found to merit attention. Here, the roles and responsibilities relating to PSEA reports among IASC member staff and the responsibilities of the IASC agencies within an investigation are two particular areas that require clarification.

The findings also highlight two key areas of differences in interpretation of the Core Principles. First, confusion concerning Principle 4, even following its revision in 2019, which has resulted in diverse interpretations and implementation challenges. Finally, there are differences in the interpretation of the application of the Core Principles outside working hours, leading to underreporting of pre-existing relationships and misconduct in the private sphere.

Based on these findings, this report makes 9 recommendations to strengthen the implementation of the Core Principles and PSEA. Recommendations are pointed at clarifying how cultural norms and national law conflict with IASC Policy, continuing to view Principle 4 as a living document, clarifying the PSEA network in the field, increasing capacity for PSEA,

approaching PSEA in training through the key entry point of power dynamics, reinforcing training material, strengthening complaint mechanisms and reporting channels, increasing multi-level engagement, and facilitating more inter-agency coordination. The researchers encourage the IASC to consider these recommendations in order to further strengthen its efforts against SEA.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### I. Consider the extent to which national laws and cultural norms differ from IASC Policy and how this might be addressed in guidance

- Articulate to all IASC personnel in CoCs that the commitment holds personnel accountable to PSEA regulations regardless of national law. CoCs should stress that failure to comply will risk employment termination where national law permits, otherwise organisations may risk wrongful termination charges.
- Based on national law, provide context-specific examples in training sessions demonstrating contradictions between legal age of consent and Principle 2, and the legality of prostitution and Principle 3.
- To minimise the amount of undisclosed relationships prior to employment in humanitarian emergency context, build trust

on disclosure of pre-existing relationships.

- Clearly articulate to employees that non-discriminatory analysis tools are implemented to evaluate whether these relationships align with the values of IASC members. Retain awareness that this must be rediscussed during the contract.

### II. Continue viewing the Core Principles, particularly Principle 4, as a living document

- Revise Principle 4 and include explicit provisions as to the meaning of “sexual relationship”, albeit an explicit definition of what the latter entails to enhance implementation and understanding among field staff and programme beneficiaries.
- Revise Principle 4 to better incorporate the meaning of pre-existing relationships as they relate to SEA.

- Specify in the guidance notes the scope relating to its applicability outside field staff work hours and the duration of aid programmes.

### III. Strengthen complaint mechanisms and clarify reporting channels

- Strengthen continuous awareness-raising activities that target beneficiary understanding of the available reporting mechanisms in place to combat under-reporting of SEA.
- Limiting the people involved in receiving and investigating complaints to the ones who have the training and the sensitivity to be involved.
- Boost PSEA staff confidence in its capacity to tackle complaints and increase its understanding of the available reporting mechanisms.

### IV. Reinforce training materials

- Tailor training material to ensure that at country-level

personnel are informed and resilient to respond to new humanitarian crises, such as new laws and policies or developments in conflict situations.

- Reinforce training materials that ensure IASC member personnel are more acutely aware of their role in handling complaints should a report of SEA arise to help minimise the risk of confidentiality breaches and ensure complaints are handled by personnel more efficiently.
- Ensure that the implementation of every new policy and PSEA mechanism is supported by contextualised and repeated mandatory training. Organisations should reinforce training for first responders and other personnel following the implementation of PSEA survivor hotlines and other CBCM.
- Coordinate with local organisations and representatives to tailor training material for field

workers to educate them on local culture, regional context, and the necessary tools to evaluate relationships.

#### **V. Ensure that all PSEA training is approached through the key entry point of power dynamics**

- Consider power dynamics as an entry point to the conversation around SEA.
- Promote the understanding of Principle 4 through a discussion of power dynamics between humanitarian workers and beneficiaries to justify why those undermine humanitarian action and are therefore prohibited.

#### **VI. Clarify the PSEA network in the field and increase PSEA capacity**

- Ensure all personnel at every level of the PSEA network are cognisant of the role and responsibility they have to play in the prevention of and response to SEA, and that it

does not only concern the organisational leadership.

- Monitor that PSEA Focal Points and Coordinators are communicating the Core Principles to the PSEA Network in the field and that all communications reach all personnel regardless of their contract length or position.
- Dedicate more full-time personnel to PSEA to ensure more comprehensive trainings and effective complaint mechanisms.

#### **VII. Increase multi level engagement**

- Ensure the engagement of all stakeholders, including beneficiaries, as a first step to guarantee a common and homogenous understanding of policy decisions across all IASC agencies.
- Conduct regular bottom-up victim-centred reviews to better identify the main areas of difficulty by reflecting on previously successful local

strategies and effectively sharing them. Adopting such an approach will allow the IASC to use the country's experience to extrapolate and share the lessons learned in the field while strengthening a victim-centred approach.

- Monitor that beneficiaries are consulted on how the Core Principles are being communicated and the process of designing/implementing PSEA activities.
- Implement assessment practices to ensure consultation and coordination with local personnel/lps

- Promote data collection and information sharing across the PSEA network.
- Adopt a joint investigation mechanism across IASC members with a time benchmark, a dedicated investigation team, and an accountability framework.
- Adapt the existing IASC structure and assign leadership to SEA to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for coordination.

## **VIII. Reinforce more inter-agency coordination**

- Encourage sharing materials and exchanging viewpoints about the adoption, interpretation, and application of the Core Principles between IASC members at country level to unify the understanding of goals and enhance values.

## ENDNOTES

1. See Annex 3
2. "Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defence."
3. "Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries."
4. Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, he or she must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.
5. Any sexual relationship between those providing humanitarian assistance and protection and a person benefitting from such humanitarian assistance and protection that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
6. IASC (2021) *Global Report 2021*. Available at: <https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/global-report-2021>
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8. IASC (2022) *IASC Strategy*. Available at: <https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-strategy>
9. See page 5 for a full list of the principles.
10. UN (2003) *Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse*. ST/SGB/2003/13. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/550/40/PDF/N0355040.pdf?OpenElement>
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12. UN (2018) *United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners*. Available at: [https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/UN%20Protocol%20on%20SEA%20Allegations%20involving%20Implementing%20Partners%20-%20English\\_Final.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/UN%20Protocol%20on%20SEA%20Allegations%20involving%20Implementing%20Partners%20-%20English_Final.pdf)
13. IASC (2020) *UN Implementing Partner PSEA Capacity Assessment*. Available at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-accountability-affected-populations-and-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/un-implementing-partner-psea-capacity-assessment>
14. See Annex 3
15. See Annex 5 for a full list of interview questions
16. See Annex 6 for the participant information sheet
17. IASC (2015) *IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action, 2015*. Available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/working-group/iasc-guidelines-integrating-gender-based-violence-interventions-humanitarian-action-2015>
18. Op. Cit
19. OCHA (2021) *OCHA Standard Operating Procedures on Sexual Misconduct: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment*. Available at: [https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/OCHA\\_SoP\\_Sexual\\_Misconduct\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/OCHA_SoP_Sexual_Misconduct_FINAL.pdf)
20. IOM (2020) *Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: IOM Awareness-Raising and Reporting Procedures*. Available at: <https://emergencymanual.iom.int>; Oxfam (2022) *One Oxfam Misconduct Reporting Operating Procedure*; UNHCR(2019) *Policy on a Victim-Centred approach in UNHCR's response to Sexual Misconduct*. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/5fdb345e7.pdf>
21. Op. Cit
22. Op. Cit
23. Ibid
24. IASC (2021) *Annual Strategy: Protection from and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment*. Available at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-champion-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment/strategy-protection-and-response-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment-2021>
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  33. UNICEF and UNFPA (2016) *Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/GPECM%20Evaluability%20Assessment.PDF>
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  36. UNICEF 1. (2022) Interview with Noor Lakhdar-Toumi. 25th February, via Teams
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## ANNEX 1: IASC Members

### **The Members of the IASC:**

UNDP  
UNICEF  
UNHCR  
WFP  
FAO  
WHO  
UN-HABITAT  
OCHA  
IOM

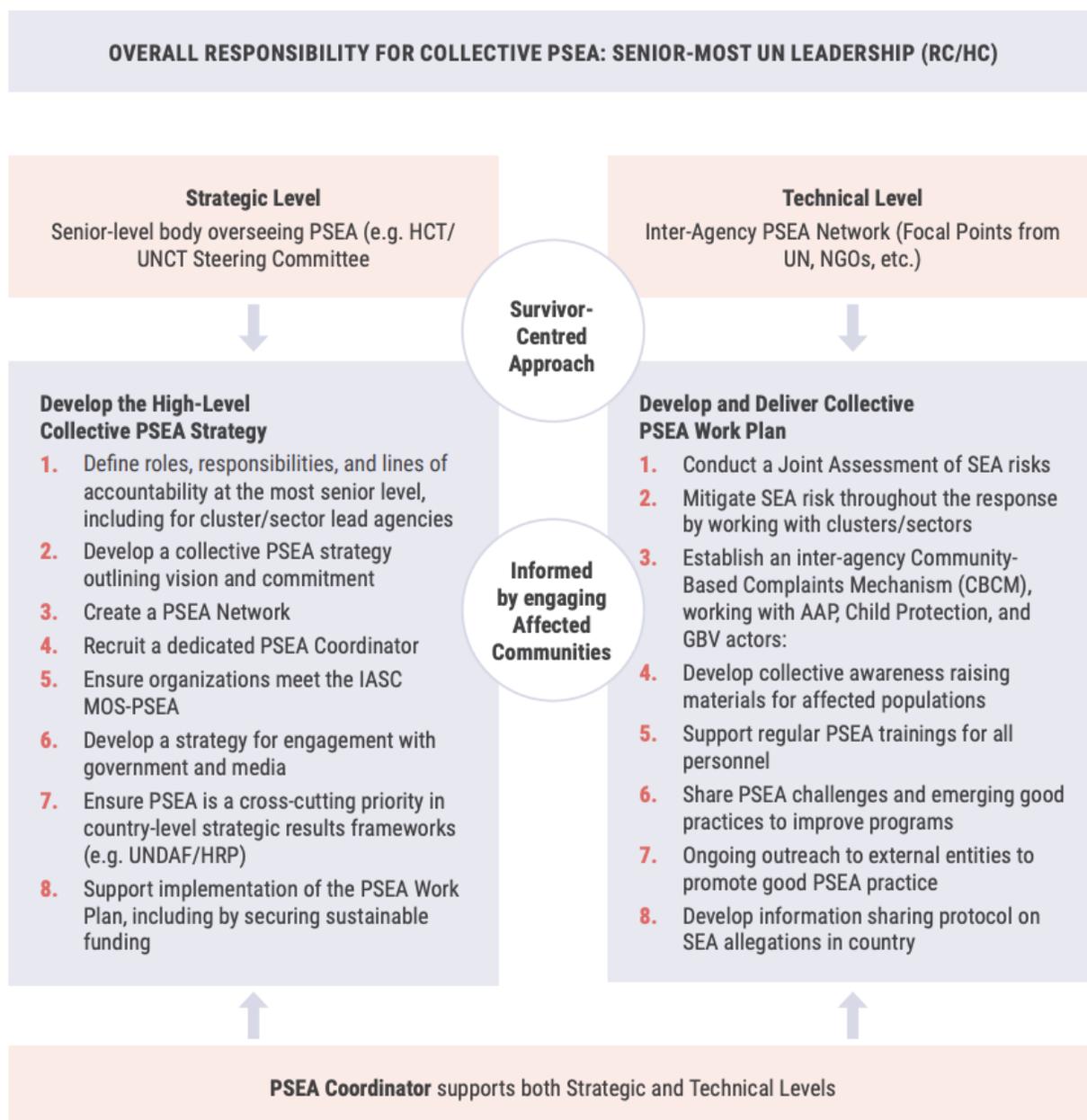
### **Members with Standing Invitations:**

ICRC  
IFRC  
OHCHR  
UNFPA  
The Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs  
The World Bank

### **Invited NGO Consortia:**

ICVA  
InterAction  
SCHR

## ANNEX 2: Country-Level PSEA Responsibilities



## ANNEX 3: IASC Core Principles (Since 2019)

**IASC** Inter-Agency  
Standing Committee

12 September 2019

### IASC Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

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1. "Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defence.
3. Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
4. Any sexual relationship between those providing humanitarian assistance and protection and a person benefitting from such humanitarian assistance and protection that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
5. Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, he or she must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.
6. Humanitarian workers are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment."

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## ANNEX 4: 2002 Version of the IASC Core Principles



### **IASC Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse<sup>1</sup>**

1. “Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defence.
3. Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
4. Sexual relationships between humanitarian workers and beneficiaries are strongly discouraged since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
5. Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, he or she must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.
6. Humanitarian workers are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.”

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<sup>1</sup> See Report of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises of 13 June 2002, Plan of Action, Section I.A.

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## ANNEX 5: List of Interview Questions

1. Which, if any, of the core principles have been challenging to implement due to being unclear, ambiguous, or difficult to define and operationalize?
  - a. (Prompt question if 3 and 4 not the focus of the response): In your experience, where do you see challenges in the interpretation/implementation of core principles 3 and 4? Could you provide an example?
  - b. Have implementation challenges led to any changes or adaptations in your organization's PSEA policies to better support the core principles? Could you provide an example?
  - c. Can you think of an instance when there was a misinterpretation on the part of the staff of the meaning of the core principles in the field? Do you have an example? How did you resolve the situation? (For example, meaning of transactional sex, who is a beneficiary...)
  
2. How do you ensure that the organization's understanding of the core principles is communicated and understood the same way in the field? Has this changed over time?
  - a. Can you think of an instance when there was a misinterpretation on the part of the staff of the meaning of the core principles in the field? Do you have an example? How did you resolve the situation? (For example, meaning of transactional sex, who is a beneficiary...)
  - b. Do you disaggregate and monitor management understanding and ability to communicate separate from staff understanding?
  
3. Does your organization take steps to ensure that communication around the core principles is customized to the beneficiaries to address any contextual, cultural, or language barriers? Do you have examples?
  - a. Are there any steps your organization currently takes to overcome these barriers?
  
4. What have been the most challenging aspects of addressing and documenting complaints at the field level and why?
  
5. Lastly, do you have any other comments around the 6 core principles or PSEA that would be helpful for our project but have not been addressed thus far?

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## ANNEX 6: Participant Information Sheet

### Applying policies in practice:

#### Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian settings

Department of International Development, London School of Economics

Thank you for considering participating in this study which will take place in January and February, 2022. This information sheet outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant, if you agree to take part.

#### What is the research about?

The research is aimed at identifying areas where more policy or clarity is needed in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The researchers aim to find entry points to strengthen PSEA where weaknesses are acknowledged, and make recommendations to the IASC in order to solidify its global mission against SEA.

#### Do I have to participate?

Participation is completely **voluntary**. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do decide to take part we will orally ask for your consent which we will record through audio.

#### What will involvement look like?

Participation will involve no more than 1 one-hour long interview per key informant, and interviews will be held exclusively online through Zoom or Microsoft Teams at a mutually convenient time. Interviews will also be recorded and transcribed upon consent.

#### How do I withdraw?

You are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice and without providing a reason, simply notify one of the researchers given the contact info provided below. If you decide to withdraw, you will be given the option to have any information they have provided thus far removed from the study.

#### How will my data be used?

Data will be used to analyze and establish a cohesive image of how different members addressed the core principles. The data gathered for this project will not be used for further research and will be destroyed at the end of April 2022 when the project will be finalized

**How will my data be stored?**

Data will be stored in a secure and password-protected platform such as Dropbox, with only the following LSE researchers having access: Nina Lacroix, Madison Jansen, Clara Satke, and Noor Lakhdar-Toumi. All data will be anonymized before sharing it with IASC members and LSE.

**Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The LSE Research Privacy Policy can be found at:

[https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-RecordsManagement/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.2.pdf?from\\_serp=1](https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-RecordsManagement/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.2.pdf?from_serp=1)

**Will interviews be confidential?**

Yes. Strategies for maintaining confidentiality include storing data in a secure and protected data storage platform with restricted access. Names will be anonymized in the final report.

**How do I contact the researchers?**

Please contact the researchers at:

- Clara Satke: [c.satke@lse.ac.uk](mailto:c.satke@lse.ac.uk)
- Madison Jansen: [jansenm2@lse.ac.uk](mailto:jansenm2@lse.ac.uk)
- Nina Lacroix: [n.c.lacroix@lse.ac.uk](mailto:n.c.lacroix@lse.ac.uk)
- Noor Lakhdar-Toumi: [n.h.lakhdar-toumi@lse.ac.uk](mailto:n.h.lakhdar-toumi@lse.ac.uk)

**How do I file a complaint?**

Should you have a complaint, please reach out to: [research.ethics@lse.ac.uk](mailto:research.ethics@lse.ac.uk)

**Can I request a copy of the data?**

Participants can request a copy of the data about themselves at [glpd.info.rights@lse.ac.uk](mailto:glpd.info.rights@lse.ac.uk)

**Who has reviewed this study?**

This study has undergone ethics review in accordance with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and Procedure.

Thank you for your participation!

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