



UNHCR's tenth meeting with NGO partners on preparedness and response to COVID-19 in refugee situations

Theme: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and on how to tackle this issue within the context of COVID-19

20 May 2020

Online

Participants:

UNHCR and IOM:

- Diane Goodman, Senior Coordinator on Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment
- Josephine Ngebeh, Senior Regional Protection Officer, Bureau of East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes
- Graine O'Hara, Director, Division of International Protection
- Arafat Jamal, Head, Partnership, and Coordination Service
- Theodora Suter, Head, IOM, The Gender Coordination Unit

NGOs:

- Sana Zulfiqar, Coordinator of the National Humanitarian Network Pakistan
- About 80+, mostly NGOs.

Arafat Jamal

- How the pandemic is impacted the way you are working on the prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse?

Theodora Suter

- Had a huge impact on the way we operated. A few years ago, in IOM after an internal assessment looking at the effectiveness of our PSEA trainings we completely redesigned our package so it became a face-to-face training focusing on a participatory approach where participant can feel and experience the important basic concept and developing the empathy needed to deeply understand that.
- Indeed, the behavioral change operate only when triggering the emotion to the participants, it was a challenge to quickly adapt to the remote working situation by imagining how they should adjust.
- Even though not ideal we did try to transform some of the exercises into activities that can be done during their virtual session, e.g. feeling the power difference between humanitarian workers and beneficiaries.
- Now we deliver PSEA a Webex two times per week from Geneva and we had mentoring our field PSEA focal point so that they can start using these new tools in their respective missions and regions.
- In some countries where restrictions are being lifted, e.g. in Greece we are going back to face-to-face sessions taking into consideration all the public health requirements and for assistance things remain exactly the same, the same services have not stopped and we would provide the necessary assistance to victim, adapting to the local health requirements.
- It is important to keep the issue high in the agenda despite the emergency situation to make sure the challenge of discussions around the issues of sexual misconduct remain always open.



- PSEA and sexual misconduct training is not a thick book exercise, it is a discussion that needs to be established and continue among all.

Sana Zulfiqar

- I am representing the first national local civil society network working in Pakistan and coordinating at the regional level.
- Not only in this COVID situation but even before or at the peace time, the PSEA issues are very common at the rural areas of a Pakistan but the irony is that the community they do not even consider it as an exploitation or abuse because they are facing such type of issues from the very beginning, from the childhood, they took it as a part of their culture or the context.
- I heard the pandemic refers to the possibility that a disease could affect everyone, but it has a special effect on some people or groups that have been more severely affected by the disease than others and the basic reason or the result is due to existing inequality.
- This one of the reasons of increasing of domestic violence.
- We have almost 170+ local civil society organization with us at the platform, we are working on the two streams at the national level we are engaged with the national PSEA Fora there we are advocating how the humanitarian stakeholders working in the country can support us in creating awareness among the communities at the ground level.
- We are working on the developing of awareness messages and with the support of the radio and local transmissions, especially the local influencers we are spreading that the information among the communities.
- We are also working with the non-governmental organizations and the researchers to look into the previous health crisis which happened in the country, what type of issues were reported during that crisis and what mechanisms were adopted to address those crises.
- From the lessons learned it will help us to device the strategy to address these issues at the local level.
- We are conducting sessions at the ground level with the support of local CBOs because even sometimes what happened that the people who are sitting with us and discussing all these issues in our offices and fora at the they then sense going back and doing same type of activities at the ground level.
- It is very important to analyze the situation that during national disaster and the emergency like COVID and see how the exploitation sexual exploitation and abuse cases are being reported.

Josephine Ngebeh

- Ensuring safeguards in reporting, response, accountability, and organizational culture will be challenging in COVID time.
- When looking at WHO guidance, it contributed to increase risk in humanitarian settings. However, it is important that UNHCR and partners ensure that population of concern access these services in safety and dignity particularly for women and children.



- If you look at a physical a distance in or social distance for an example this requires UNHCR to draw on its adaptive capabilities, leverage diverse channels of communication, and rapidly scale emerging practices of the organization and its partners.
- It is also working towards maintaining its proximity to forcibly displaced populations during this time as we are aware trust is a critical factor in PSEA particularly in terms of reporting with limited face-to-face interactions.
- We are rapidly testing new ways to maintain trust and establish pathways for sharing information pertaining to PSEA and opportunities to encourage safe and confidential reporting.
- If you take examples looking at a program safeguards there is economic hardship, closure of schools, loss of parental care as a result of a COVID, this increases children's risk of sexual exploitation.
- It is challenging at this time to monitor these children at risk with home visits or our usual protection monitoring activities.
- Before we used to go to the camps and meet a person of concern face-to-face, but this has become challenging in doing remote communication.
- Capacity building for stakeholders to ensure that there is zero tolerance is very crucial such as security forces or government health workers. Now this can be done only virtually, e.g. in Uganda you have security forces deployed in the border areas by the camp settlements these are people we entrust, and we need to strengthen their skills for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- We are looking at different strategies to engage and deliver our protection activities.

Diane Goodman

- My job is coordinating, talk to colleagues and see what their challenges are. We are rolling out a lot of learning packages.
- There are opportunities, because COVID-19 has challenged our assumptions, some are personals, and some are professional to rethink our approach on what works and what does not work.
- We would think that because of social distancing and isolation sexual exploitation and abuse would decrease but we know from other health emergencies that is not necessarily the case and in particular there can be greater risks for women and girls in context to the crisis.
- It forced us to be more creative, more responsive and hopefully more field oriented. Rethinking how we work around the new challenges presented by the situation, e.g. virtual launching of a number of tools and initiatives. We were also engaging more closely with the field to find ways to work around the lack of access and also, we are having more opportunities to have dialogues like this one.
- We need to work more closely and collaborating together to learn from each other to ensure that there is a harmonized approach. We hope it is reflected in some of the resources we have been developing together with you in particular the IASC COVID-19 guidance notes. We are working on a five-point checklist.

Arafat Jamal

- Josephine and Sana are both in the field; how you are working with the affected communities on PSEA in this new context?



Sana Zulfiqar

- We are encouraging members organizations to orient their staff on PSEA tools and related information and material, to add the components in their ongoing projects and have a mechanism of reporting cases as well by developing a reference system.
- In continuously struggling and advocating with the forum by engaging energetic members in their initiatives that will not only be the value addition, but we will be able to introduce the reference system and all the relevant tools at the areas where they do not have the access.
- We are also working with the district administration and the social welfare department which is basically present at the district at the local level. We are encouraging them to establish a desk in their offices which will help them to link with the community to easily come up and report to them.
- However, we have analyzed that so far cases reported are mainly related to the domestic disputes or as occurred from the clashes between family kids due to the joint family system which is our cultural component.
- We are creating an awareness in the communities about being patient during the lockdown and we are also advocating and discussing with the national forums.
- Because it is anticipated that women and children are facing an high ratio of domestic violence issues, we are engaging our member organizations but also the district and the local government that can play an important role in addressing such issues at the community level.

Josephine Ngebeh

- There is need to maintain a proximity with affected communities in the context of social distancing and as such we have seen an increase in the use of remote channels of communication. It is critically important to ensure that these remote channels are safely and appropriately adopted, particularly when working with third parties like a social media platform. It is important to understand the data protection, data privacy, and safeguarding implications of information being shared over these platforms and the considerations that we must take when managing sensitive complaints.
- We are developing guidance operations to support them with this data protection privacy and safeguarding considerations.
- We have been working closely with country operations to ensure that the global standards, the policies, and guidelines are contextualized in country operations.
- Additionally, we work closely with the ethics office at headquarters and also collaborate with other regional bureaus in developing simple guidelines, checklists, term of reference, messages, and info graphs in line with global policies.
- We ensure business continuity plans and operational plans are reviewed to ensure the integration of PSEA.
- The Bureau participated in pertinent coordination mechanisms such as the RCCE, the GP regional working group, to not only reflect what UNHCR does to prevent and mitigate protection risks but also understand and got good practices and information that we share with our field operations.
- We make sure that this information is not only shared with PSEA focal points but also the multi-functional team in the country operation because PSEA is not only for



the focal points, it is across all sectors and therefore we want to ensure that it reaches out to multi-functional teams.

- We support in the developing of these messages and translating them for country operations and situations in country operations are also monitored.
- We collectively with country operations developed risk-registers; there is clarity of roles and responsibilities between the regional Bureau and the different countries when it comes to PSEA.
- On a country perspective, there are different scenarios that have been developed in preparedness from the possibility of a face-to-face discussion, on prevention, response measures to working remotely.
- Government, counterparts, and communities are developed to training and showing that code of conduct is signed and adhere to.
- Communities are prepared to raise awareness, monitor and informed UNHCR and partners of any violation to means of communicating remotely both in confidence using hotlines etc.
- E.g. Burundi has integrated accountability to affected people and PSEA in the COVID-19 response.
- All of the country operations we have ensured that they have focal points and we are reaching out to the focal points to understand what the issues are, what is in place and what kind of support they need.
- We recently had a PSEA webinar to ascertain all of that and see where we can support them right through their work.
- E.g. Ethiopia has various community-based structures including volunteers and women communities and they are actively engaged in messaging and ensuring preventive measures are observed.
- E.g. Rwanda is part of the task force for community engagement and working closely with wash, health, food, and government counterparts to address this. They have deployed different types of communication tools such as a WhatsApp groups, hotlines, emails, megaphones which have also been used for education and sharing of bulk SMS system messages.
- E.g. Tanzania also has an online communication platforms WhatsApp group where volunteers are trained, they send messages, and receive feedback from communities
- E.g. Uganda has put in place measures to mitigate business continuity plan and reporting mechanisms. For example in Uganda the call center operators are now working and they are being trained or in South Sudan the call centers got the guidance on virtual a psychosocial support and telecom counseling for child protection cases etc.
- All of the country operations have systems in place and they work closely with the partners such as the IRC, HelpAge International, HIAS.

Arafat Jamal

- The HC is currently the IASC champion on PSEA and this is a role that he taken over from Henrietta Fore of UNICEF and he will handover to Natalia Kanem of UNFPA. Could Diane give us a brief overview on the priorities and initiatives that he has taken prior to COVID and that remain relevant in the current context?



Diane Goodman

- The HC championship started before COVID. The championship is on prevention and response to sexual exploitation abuse and sexual harassment, both grounded in gender inequality and power imbalances.
- Three priorities under his championship on prevention, expanding safe spaces, and promoting respectful use of authority.
- In the current context, reinforcing prevention is more important now than ever I notice that the remedial measures are still taking place or examples like hotlines and other aspects, but it is more challenging.
- We launched in April together with ICVA, the PSEA community outreach and communications fund which aim to bolster prevention by supporting local NGOs to strengthen community awareness on prevention to sexual exploitation abuse. It can be done in local languages, targeted to different groups.
- We received an overwhelming interest for this fund.
- Local NGOs have creative ways to engage with the community that they serve.
- Another part of the championship is leading e-learning for partners with our partners in particular IOM and WFP.
- We launched the innovative PSEA package for partners saying no to sexual misconduct.
- Finally dealing with the priorities of expanding safe spaces and respectful use of authorities, a number of the HC initiatives relate to the organizational culture change on how do we foster working environments better to speak up and to ensure a sexual misconduct does not happen but when it does it is properly addressed.
- COVID-19 has provided some opportunities for self-reflection including on these issues and we do need to adapt the materials we had prepared.
- We prepared a communications package for principles on sexual misconduct, the idea was to facilitate when they go to the field to hold a discussion with colleagues they are not going to the field at the moment but we are finalizing the package and we hope that they could still have virtual discussions.
- We are also collecting information and materials to provide examples of good practice in relate to culture change initiatives.

IASC Video [What If I were you?](#)

Arafat Jamal

- Could you talk about the IASC packages?

Theodora Suter

- The idea of using the victim's case is to insist you are part of it and empathizing with the situation, so you are not an observer anymore, you of the situation.
- The whole package is composed of different modules not only sexual exploitation and abuse but also on sexual harassment. Participants through exercises, real examples are guided to find their own answers on the concept that sometimes are given for grounded.
- We have packed the training on what do we mean by power, zero tolerance to SEA principles, the blockages to reporting.



- The training does not provide one single definition, it is really a guiding in the process.
- The training has been tested for several months now with different operational context and it has proven to be very effective.
- One indicator which is positive is the fact that we have seen a number of allegations in the report that increase exponentially.
- The package can be downloaded from the IASC website here:
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-learning-package-protection-sexual-misconduct-un-partner-organizations>
- It can be used directly, it has clear guidance, videos, all type of exercises and precise notes for the facilitators in each slide.
- With some preparation almost anybody can deliver the training.
- It has been our plan all the agencies that have participated together in this collaborative effort to support the field rollout but due to the situation we had to postpone that.
- The package will be available in a French, Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese to facilitate the use of it.

Q&A

Lutheran Worldwide Federation

- A first question to Anna and Josephine, there has been a UN PSEA tracker which is being implemented at the field level and from our country programs we have been receiving varied feedback on it in terms of efficiency and effectivity. What are your experiences from a country national NGO perspective and from the regional office perspective?
- UNICEF has recently asked partners to participate in PSEA self-assessments. I understood in the UNHCR Partners meeting in January this year that there is a move towards mutual recognition across UN agencies. Considering this, will UNHCR accept the results of the UNICEF self-assessment?

Women's Refugee Commission

- What you were describing at the beginning could potentially be much more about the risks of GBV in the context of COVID.
- Many of us are concerned about is the increase risk of SGBV during COVID, with confinement, the rise of domestic violence not only in displacement context but more generally.
- How the messaging around SEA and the prevention of GBV potentially reinforcing each other or is there even a potential of confusion of bringing GBV and SEA into the same conversation because a lot of what I heard at the beginning was really about GBV risk more than SEA risks.
- On bringing SEA and sexual harassment together I fear in many ways that it has diluted the focus on communities and people of concern and even that message at the end of the video around not abusing your power is almost focused more on perpetrators and humanitarians in a way but are we really focusing on the prevention of SEA of exploitation and abuse on communities and people affected by crisis? How can we make sure that we do not lose that essential focus on people affected by crises and who are getting humanitarian aid? So that we are not just focusing on ourselves in organizations which is very important that is also very much a human resource is issue versus how we are dealing with the protection and prevention of sexual exploitation abuse of people affected by crises.

Translators Without Borders



- We are very aware that speakers of marginalized languages often really struggle to make to use reporting mechanisms which are designed usually in official or dominant languages. Could any of the speakers talk about how they have designed reporting mechanisms which cater to the needs of the speakers of marginalised languages?

Theodora Suter

- On including or incorporating sexual harassment together with sexual exploitation and abuse this has been a very long discussion and one of the things that we have to learn working together is that often there is a lot of confusion when you start training on this about what is sexual exploitation and abuse and what is sexual harassment. So, it was very important to bring these two concepts in the same training to make sure people were clear about the communalities and differences. Keeping it separated was not a good way of working because there was some confusion that needed to be clarified; this has been the experience in terms of the reporting mechanism.
- On multi-languages I totally agree this has been a challenge. One of the things we have added in our reporting mechanism is the capacity to record a message, so you do not need to write anything you can simply orally report and then we will deal with the translation when it gets to the office.
- Access remains a problem.

Josephine Ngebeh

- On the question of TWB. We usually ensure that marginalized persons are reflected. We do the age lens and showing that diverse groups are involved in, engaged to, and understand what the issues are and also sharing information.
- We also identify languages that are spoken by the different persons of concern and these languages are used when we are doing translations and reporting for instance.
- E.g. in Tanzania for marginalized people persons with disability, HelpAge International works closely with UNHCR to ensure that there are various languages signs.

Sana Zulfiqar

- These initiatives cannot be done in a day, in a week, or in a month this will take a long time but what we expect being is that all the modules being developed by the international's or the UN agencies are engaging with the local organizations.
- We can bring the contextual impact in these materials, products and we can work with you on a daily basis on these lines, we can help you to develop a system on these issues. This is the request from our side to not only contextualize the materials but please work on the system rather than just on the reporting mechanisms.

Diane Goodman

- On the assessment, it is a result of the UN protocol on SEA allegations involving implementing partners. When the protocol was adopted in 2018, it is an obligation for UN agencies, not for partners per se. The protocol is saying that partners need to meet certain requirements in terms of standards etc.
- For SEA prevention, a number of UN agencies started developing checklist or assessment guides, but we also listen to the NGO's. It is not very helpful to have everybody assessing them and the point is to support them, build capacity, working in partnership with them.
- Several agencies including UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA and others came together and said let's do develop a common assessment tool.
- UNICEF and WFP were also involved to simplify and standardize the procedure so I am not sure what you are referring to in terms of the UNICEF tool but we have all got together, there has being consultations with with all members of the IASC through results group too.



- We are all going to use the same tool.
- UNICEF has developed a toolkit. We are looking at how we all might sign on and how we can link the toolkit directly to the assessment. The idea is that once you are being assessed by one agency with this tool you do not need to be assessed by another.
- We are also happy to have a separate conversation up on that.
- About the SEA tracker, maybe there is a miscommunication. If anybody from a UN Agencies has been found perpetrated sexual exploitation or abuse or sexual harassment or resigned during the course of an investigation, there are put in one of the two trackers, one on SEA an one on SH they're called the sea tracker so if um a colleague is found to have hum perpetrated sexual exploitation or abuse or sexual harassment or resigned during the course of an investigation.
- The challenge is that it is not for NGO partners. SCHR has developed the sexual misconduct disclosure scheme which is not a database but a sharing of information and we as UNHCR looking at how we can adhere as well as looking at certain legally human resource considerations.
- On the issue of SH and SEA, we have always said that the response to SEA needs to be done through established GBV mechanisms and programs particularly now during COVID.
- We want to adopt a holistic approach. The HC wrote to all humanitarian coordinators saying PSEA needs to be incorporated within the programs.
- On bringing SEA and SH together, from my experience there has been a lot more attention to protection of sexual exploitation abuse and bringing it with SH has been helpful if we r want to look at the underlying causes of all sexual misconduct because there are very similar underlying causes even if the responses are different.
- We need to work with communities that is a key element of our response and prevention from sexual exploitation abuse but also, we need to work with colleagues.
- We need to create positive safe environments where sexual misconduct doesn't happen so for one I fully support bringing them together.

Graine O'Hara

- We are totally on the same page and the underlying message is that when we look at SGBV services we need to advocate for increased expansion, increased equality because this is premised on the whole question of response based on the need.
- The services have to be on the basis of need and while the needs of different survivors may vary depending what they have experienced.
- On the element of confusion/blurring that the harassment integration in PSEA-H brings. No denial that there is a link and as the IOM colleague is saying, trainings should be broad enough to cover both issues for a holistic understanding. Where I have a much stronger concern is that in all of the increased attention of donors and others on PSEA we do not see a commensurate scale up of investment in quality and fully accessible SGBV programmes. This reflects a fundamental disconnect between the strength of expression of concern over PSEA at the level of advocacy which is disappointingly not matched by the desperately needed scale up of funding to the SGBV programmes in recognition of their fundamental importance in responding to the immediate and ongoing needs of survivors of SEA.
- None of us are going to question the legitimacy of all the attention placed on PSEA but that does not mean that we cannot express our matching advocacy for improved SGBV services and the service that they provide to so many survivors. We need quality services for all whether their need for them comes from having been subjected to SEA by a humanitarian worker, sexual violence at the hands of actors in a conflict, violence at the hands of intimate



partners and family members. Services on the basis of need. This is a fundamental commitment we all make as humanitarians.

Arafat Jamal

- The Venezuela Donor Pledging Conference is going to take place on the 26 May between 4:00-6:00 pm (EST time). This is an international donors conference in solidarity with Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the neighboring countries and in the LAC region.
- It will be convened by the EU and Spain together with the support of IOM and UNHCR.
- The solidarity conference is to support the refugee migrant response plan (RMRP) which at the moment has a figure of USD 1.4 billion dollars.
- The RMRP deals with both refugees and migrants, it is inclusive platform involving all relevant NGOs and other partners in the region and it is a pragmatic approach to him to a massive problem in Latin America.
- The objectives of the conference are 1) to mobilize bilateral and multilateral support and resources for national governments in receiving countries in order for them to be able to scale up their response to the migration and refugee crisis and in particular to the aggravation that has been caused by COVID-19. The focus will be on inclusion international policies including health policies. 2) objective is to mobilize support and resources for the revised RMRP, to complement government led efforts and address immediate needs of refugees and migrants. 3) It is to facilitate stronger and coordinated engagements from key actors including states, development actors, the private sector, and civil society.
- The pledges that that will be made are supposed to support the RMRP objectives but there will be a funding focus due to the current COVID needs and some donors we expect may wish to specifically fund for COVID.
- The virtual conference participation has been strictly limited by the organizers. The regional platform will be represented by the UN High Commissioner for refugees and IOM's director general. We also expect that the SG will deliver a recorded message on behalf of the whole UN system. From the NGO side, the Norwegian Refugee Council will be participating, and we anticipate that in this role, they will be representing in some manner the rest of the NGO community.