



**CAPSEAH**



**Common Approach to Protection from  
Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment**

**Summary Guide**  
English

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*Draft for consultation*



# A Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

linked to the delivery of development, humanitarian or peacekeeping work

## Part 1: A collective vision for action

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs<sup>1</sup>) provide a framework for delivering a more equitable and sustainable future, helping governments, the private sector, civil society, multilateral organisations and many other actors to work together to tackle poverty, conflict, climate change and natural disasters.

Humanitarian, development and peacekeeping (HDP<sup>2</sup>) work is central to this effort, providing partnership, assistance, support and protection to countries and people in need. But HDP work is undermined by sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH<sup>2</sup>) committed by people working in, or with, HDP organisations or settings.

SEAH is a completely unacceptable abuse of power and breach of trust. It is rooted in power imbalances, often linked to inequality, notably gender inequality. Women and girls are most often affected, but so are men and boys, and others who may have less power or be more marginalised in certain situations and for a range of reasons.

All those working in HDP settings need to actively manage the risk that people linked to their work could sexually exploit, abuse or harass others, including by misusing the power that exists by virtue of their role in delivering support, protection and investment. The risk of SEAH occurring is made worse by factors such as climate change, instability and conflict which increase the need for HDP assistance.

There has been a move across HDP work towards a 'zero-tolerance for inaction' approach on SEAH. This means taking all reasonable actions to protect people and personnel and prevent SEAH incidents; creating or strengthening ways in which concerns can be raised; and responding robustly to concerns and cases in a way which prioritises the rights, dignity and needs of victim-survivors<sup>2</sup>.

Policies, commitments and standards to apply a zero tolerance approach have been developed and adopted. But they are not joined up or applied consistently across HDP work. The Common Approach to Protection from SEAH (CAPSEAH) brings together for the first time actions from existing PSEAH (Protection from SEAH) practice, policies and standards into a guide that everyone working in HDP settings can endorse and use to align their work on PSEAH. There is scope for others beyond HDP work to use it too.

CAPSEAH aims to drive alignment of effort; improved accountability; prevention of SEAH cases; and improved response and support to victim-survivors. It is needed to support global, regional, national and local efforts to deliver peace, prosperity, poverty reduction and the SDGs.

CAPSEAH has four parts: this collective vision for action; common principles to underpin PSEAH work; minimum recommended actions; and guidance on how different types of actors can put the actions into practice. The full version is available online [here](https://capseah.safeguardingsupporthub.org) [[capseah.safeguardingsupporthub.org](https://capseah.safeguardingsupporthub.org)] along with information on how this draft has been developed and how you can engage in the consultation process.

<sup>1</sup> Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs

<sup>2</sup> See note on terms, definitions and abbreviations contained in the full version of the CAPSEAH.



## Part 2: Common PSEAH Principles

These principles should underpin and guide the work and conduct of all people and organisations involved in the delivery of humanitarian, development or peacekeeping work. They may also be relevant to others beyond the HDP sectors whether they see their work as linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or not.

- 1. SEAH is prohibited.** SEAH can constitute gross misconduct and grounds for termination of contract, and potential prosecution under criminal, civil or military law. Such acts are an abuse of power and undermine the integrity and impact of HDP efforts. In particular:
  - a 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 any assistance or protection that is due to the people or communities that HDP personnel are there to support.
  - b Any sexual relationship between personnel engaged in HDP work – whether with people they are there to support or people they work with – which involves improper use of rank or position, or any abuse of power and power imbalances, is prohibited.**
  - c Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) by those engaged in HDP work 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.
- 2. Zero tolerance for inaction.** This means zero tolerance for acts of SEAH, zero tolerance for inaction to prevent, report or respond to SEAH; and zero tolerance for retaliation against victim-survivors or whistleblowers. It does not mean having zero cases of SEAH being reported. Reporting is encouraged and will not be penalised.
- 3. PSEAH approaches should be victim-survivor centred.** Governments, organisations and individuals engaged in HDP settings must ensure that they listen to and prioritise the rights, safety, needs, wellbeing and dignity of victim-survivors in designing PSEAH approaches and when responding to cases of SEAH related to their operations.
- 4. Be responsible and accountable.** Individuals and organisations engaged in HDP settings should act with integrity at all times and take responsibility to create and maintain an environment which prevents, reports and responds to SEAH. Managers and leaders have particular responsibility to promote a culture and systems which maintain this environment. Agencies, organisations and governments must ensure that PSEAH systems are effectively resourced and designed to identify and mitigate SEAH risk, hold those found to have committed SEAH accountable, and help provide victim-survivors and any children born of sexual exploitation or abuse by their staff, with redress and support.
- 5. Act promptly upon suspicions and reports of SEAH.** Reports, concerns or suspicions of SEAH require robust and serious action. Everyone engaged in HDP settings should be aware of reporting mechanisms relevant to their work and act promptly to report suspicions and reports of SEAH. Concerns or suspicions regarding another worker, whether in the same organisation or not, must be reported.
- 6. Respect confidentiality and protect against retaliation.** The confidentiality and dignity of all those involved in an allegation should be respected and they should be protected against retaliation. This includes victim-survivors, complainants, witnesses, and whistle-blowers.



## Part 3: Minimum Recommended Actions

These actions are recommended to help all people and organisations working in HDP settings to implement the Common PSEAH Principles in Part 2, enabling them to do all they can to protect from SEAH. Different types and sizes of organisation can implement them in a way that is proportionate and most relevant to their work.

### 1. STANDARDS: Set, communicate and uphold clear PSEAH standards.

- a Adopt and implement a PSEAH policy/strategy which aligns to these common principles and actions.
- b Ensure PSEAH principles and standards of behaviour are embedded in codes of conduct. Create a code of conduct if required.
- c Ensure all personnel, volunteers and delivery partners are aware of the PSEAH policy/strategy and code of conduct. This can be done through: mandatory induction and regular refresher training; including text in contracts, job descriptions and cooperative agreements; assessing partner capacity to meet expectations on PSEAH; and discussion of compliance in performance reviews and evaluations.

### 2. LEADERSHIP: Leaders should set the tone and embed an accountable organisational culture of zero tolerance for inaction on SEAH.

- a Leaders must show clear commitment to PSEAH by regularly highlighting the importance of PSEAH to staff and peers and fostering an inclusive and respectful working culture and environment where personnel and communities feel able to raise concerns.
- b Leaders should ensure PSEAH policies and approaches are supported by the human, technical and financial resources needed to implement them – within core business and for specific pieces of work (projects etc) – and monitor their implementation and impact.
- c Leaders should identify, train and support PSEAH champions or focal points who can help coordinate and implement PSEAH policies and approaches, and who report on progress to them and other internal and external stakeholders.
- d Include specific responsibilities on PSEAH in relevant job descriptions and performance appraisals, including those of senior managers.

### 3. COMMUNICATION: Consult, inform, and coordinate with affected communities and partners.

- a Collaborate with, listen to, and use the knowledge of local people whose situation makes them most vulnerable to SEAH, and victim-survivors where possible, when designing PSEAH approaches, projects/programmes and reporting mechanisms.
- b Communicate PSEAH information and engage with civil society, including women's and human rights groups and national human rights institutions, to empower local communities, affected people and others who come into contact with HDP programmes and operations to know what standards of behaviour they can expect, how to report, what happens if they report, their rights and what support is available to them. Do so in a way which takes account of local context, cultures, and is accessible to all.
- c Participate in PSEAH networks and coordination efforts and collaborate with peers and partners to make PSEAH approaches effective, building where possible on existing structures to be accountable to affected populations and prevent and respond to gender-based violence.



#### 4. PREVENTION: Assess risk and take action to prevent SEAH across all activities

- a Embed PSEAH measures (SEAH risk assessment, management, reporting and detection measures) into the design and running of missions, offices, projects and other activities.
- b Assess SEAH risks based on an understanding of the local context and the specific vulnerabilities and needs of affected groups. Use participatory methods so victim-survivors, affected communities and others who come into contact with programmes have a voice in surfacing the SEAH risks they face and designing prevention and risk mitigation strategies.
- c Understand and support wider efforts to tackle gender equality and other power imbalances which enable SEAH to happen in a specific context.
- d Use relevant vetting schemes and recruitment processes to prevent the hiring of perpetrators of SEAH.

#### 5. RESPONSE: Encourage reporting, and be accountable when cases occur

- a Establish, promote and test safe and accessible mechanisms for receiving complaints and detecting concerns relating to personnel and operations. Encourage their use. Seek feedback and other evidence to test if mechanisms are trusted and used.
- b Develop and implement guidance so that personnel know how to identify SEAH, and what to do if they receive a report or become aware of cases.
- c Respond to and investigate cases in a timely, fair, confidential, safe and trauma-informed manner which is centred on the dignity, needs and rights of victims-survivors.
- d Take timely and appropriate disciplinary action if SEAH occurs or if there is retaliation against those who report concerns or participate in investigations.
- e When cases may meet the definition of a crime, refer to the appropriate jurisdiction or law enforcement agency with the consent of victims-survivors (or, when children, their parents/carers/guardians/ trusted person) and when safe to do so.

#### 6. MONITORING: Use data to track progress, learn and improve

- a Learn from experience, including where things have gone wrong.
- b Share learning and practice on PSEAH to strengthen and align approaches.
- c Collect and use data (for example, on SEAH case numbers and outcomes, feedback, surveys) to monitor and evaluate the impact of PSEAH approaches.
- d Publish and share data on SEAH in a way that protects confidentiality, to help build the global evidence base on PSEAH and to show transparency and accountability.



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