SEA Risk Identification and Mitigation Checklist
Emergency Telecommunications (ETC)

Sexual exploitation and abuse **(SEA) involves humanitarian and development workers committing unwanted acts of a sexual nature against beneficiaries and members of affected communities.** It is a serious abuse of power and trust. Everyone involved in emergency telecommunications (ETC) has a duty to protect affected communities from SEA. This includes ensuring assistance is delivered safely, respectfully, and without harm.

This checklist is designed for humanitarian aid workers to identify and address SEA risks in ETC programming. It is not exhaustive, and can be adapted to each context. For additional resources, consult the IASC PSEA guidelines, IASC SEA Risk Point Mapping methodology, and Empowered Aid materials linked below, all of which support further contextualisation.

KEY SEA RISK POINTS: EMERGENCY TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMMES

Below are key risks points in ETC cluster/sector. In many contexts, community members are unaware of their rights and aid workers' obligations. They may also lack awareness of what constitutes SEA and/or have limited knowledge of how or where to report abuse confidentially. This heightens risks of SEA.

RISKS DURING SET-UP

Lack of PSEA screening for contractors

- **Contractors (e.g. mobile service providers, casual laborers, construction workers, guards, technicians, electricians, other short-term laborers involved in setup)** may lack PSEA training or appropriate vetting.
- **Private sector actors (e.g. vendors, financial service providers, engineers, technicians)** may lack the necessary contractual or legal safeguards for working in a humanitarian setting.
- These actors **may not have institutional standards or training on expected conduct**, and may not have systems to provide information to affected populations on their rights and how to report misconduct.

COMMUNITY-BASED RISKS

- **When ETC sites are located near vulnerable communities**, informal interactions between staff/contractors and locals (e.g., for site preparation or cell tower construction) can become exploitative, particularly if clear boundaries are not set.
- **Increased community contact during site set-up:** Establishing a location for a cellphone tower or internet access often involves engaging local labor, service providers, or security, which can create direct contact with community members—especially vulnerable groups—without adequate PSEA controls.
- **Telecommunication is usually established in remote or poorly monitored areas,** where SEA risks are higher due to low visibility, weak reporting mechanisms, and limited community oversight including safe and confidential reporting channels.

LACK OF FEMALE PRESENCE & LACK OF ADEQUATE SUPERVISION

Male-dominated teams and work forces

- **All-male assessment teams may fail to engage with women or**
- **girls appropriately or safely,** missing their perspectives or unintentionally creating unsafe situations where SEA risks go undetected.
- **Over-reliance on male-dominated workforces in construction, security, and logistics roles,** creates gender-imbalanced environments where community women and female staff may feel unsafe or vulnerable to harassment or abuse.

Hiring and field visits

- Set-up often includes employing local people as loaders, cleaners, etc. **SEA risks may arise if job opportunities are tied—implicitly or explicitly—to having sexual relations.**
- **Unsupervised interactions with affected populations, for example during field visits conducted by technical staff alone or in remote areas without proper oversight,** may lead to opportunities for perpetration of SEA. This risk increases when combined with the risks of remote areas (above) and where accountability or reporting mechanisms are weak (below).

LACK OF ACCESS TO FEEDBACK MECHANISMS, INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Power imbalances and lack of feedback mechanisms

- **Assessors—particularly those representing humanitarian organisations—may hold perceived power** over access to assistance, services, or future employment, making community members vulnerable to coercion or exploitation.
- **If Community Feedback Mechanisms and other safe reporting channels do not exist,** incidents of misconduct may go unreported, allowing SEA behaviours to continue unchecked during or after the assessment phase.

- **Access to technology and access to information may be sought after commodities,** especially among marginalised and remote communities. ETC technicians, service providers, and support personnel may take advantage of community members by asking for sexual relations in exchange for access to technology. Lack of codes of conducts and lack of clear reporting channels increase this risk.

> **If they came to her house, she shouldn't be alone. They may harass her if she was alone, especially if they were men and most probably, they will be men. They may ask for something in return for fixing a certain damage, and if she doesn't agree, they may hurt her. They may try to get close to her to provide her with the services that she needs.**
>
> – Qualitative interview with Syrian refugee adolescent girl in Lebanon, Empowered Aid research

UNDERSTANDING AND CONTEXTUALISING SEA RISKS

WITH COMMUNITIES: RECOGNISING THEIR EXPERTISE

Women, girls, and other marginalised groups are experts in identifying the SEA risks they face when accessing aid. They know which people, places, and processes feel unsafe – and what helps reduce those risks. **Their meaningful participation to assess and monitor risks is essential for designing safer programmes**.

Consult them by using participatory methods (see Empowered Aid's Contextualisation Toolkit or M&E Tip Sheets). Ensure discussions are:

- Led by trained, same-sex facilitators in safe, confidential spaces
- Focused on community-level risks, not personal experiences

Examples of safe and unsafe questions:

- ✅ "Are there parts of the [activity or aid process] where women, girls, or other marginalised groups feel unsafe?"
- ✅ "What do they do to protect themselves?
- ❌ "Have you experienced SEA?" or "Who was the perpetrator?"

WITH PARTNERS: IDENTIFYING RISK POINTS IN ACTIVITIES

SEA risks also need to be identified within internal processes. The IASC SEA Risk Point Mapping exercise is designed for staff and partners, not community members. It provides a practical entry point for reflecting on SEA risks in day-to-day programming.

Facilitators (e.g. Cluster Coordinators) guide participants through:

- A short introduction on SEA risks and threats
- A group discussion to map potential risk points in at least two core activities they implement
- A focus on recognising risks – not yet mitigating them – to strengthen awareness and support mainstreaming of PSEA

This exercise can be done in person using flipcharts or online via Miro or PowerPoint. For full guidance, refer to the IASC SEA Risk Point Mapping Tool (Link to workshop package)

As risks evolve, continuous participatory monitoring ensures programmes remain responsive and community-centred.

Before consulting women and girls directly, consult the PSEA network and GBV sub cluster to obtain existing relevant information and coordinate around any consultations you plan to conduct (e.g. safety planning, sharing findings).

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Cluster Coordination Team

- Share SEA risk information across the sector and advocate for risk mitigation at every stage of programming.
- Support partners to apply SEA risk mitigation measures in line with this checklist.
- Liaise with the PSEA Network to ensure coordinated response and clear referral pathways.

All ETC Partners

- Brief all staff, volunteers, & third-party providers on SEA and expected conduct.
- Inform communities about their rights and safe ways to report concerns.
- Act immediately and confidentially on SEA reports—use referral pathways and prioritise the survivor's needs.
- Monitor staff behaviour and regularly gather community feedback to identify and reduce risks.

PSEA Network, Focal Points, Advisory Groups, GBV AoR & Women's groups

- Train focal points and staff on how to receive disclosures and refer safely.
- Keep referral pathways updated and share them with cluster members.
- Provide guidance on safe, survivor-centred SEA reporting systems.
- Support awareness-raising and safe feedback mechanisms in communities.

RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

Quality Assurance

- Connect with GBV coordination and women's civil society networks to **understand what makes women, girls, and marginalised groups feel unsafe,** and adapt your programme accordingly.
- Actively work toward gender balance by **hiring more women** as staff, drivers, and casual workers.
- **Coordinate with organisations offering skills training to encourage women to apply for roles typically seen as male** (e.g. drivers, engineers, security). Set up employee resource groups (e.g. Women @Work) to provide peer support for women in ETC.

Raise awareness on SEA and share information on reporting

- Reach out to the GBV sub-cluster, AAP Working Group, PSEA network, or relevant ministry to **gather information on safe reporting channels** and key community messages on misconduct.
- **Ensure all staff and contractors are familiar with these PSEA messages and integrate them within the services they provide,** especially those with a large community interface. Examples: posting PSEA hotline numbers on cell phone tower; working with phone providers to send a mass SMS every 6 months on what SEA is and how to report it, etc.

Ensure clear identification, conduct standards, and oversight

- **Ensure clear identification** for staff and contractors (e.g. names and company printed on shirts or jackets) and inform communities where to report misconduct.
- **Train all staff (ETC technicians), casual workers, drivers, security, and third-party personnel on SEA and power dynamics.** Emphasise respectful behaviour toward women, girls, and at-risk groups. Ensure they sign a code of conduct and receive regular supervision. Examples are available from the GBV sub-cluster or PSEA network.

SET-UP

Prepare teams and establish safeguards

- **Ensure all assessment personnel are briefed on SEA reporting channels, procedures, and how to handle disclosures** before starting fieldwork.
- Train teams on PSEA, Do No Harm, and protection principles.
- **Establish clear, accessible codes of conduct for all involved** and confirm they are well understood.
- **Conduct background checks on local intermediaries,** verify references, and consult women's groups or female leaders as part of the vetting process.
- **Use female assessors and translators where possible,** especially when engaging with women and girls.

Coordinate and support safe reporting

- **Coordinate with Protection, GBV, and PSEA focal points** during assessment planning.
- **Ensure safe, confidential reporting mechanisms are available and accessible** to all groups throughout the assessment process.
- **Provide clear information to communities on what is SEA, how to report SEA** and what to expect when doing so.
- Assure that every cluster member agency **designates PSEA Focal Point(s)** and that their staff are aware of who they are

IDENTIFYING & ESTABLISHING EMERGENCY TELECOMUNICATIONS SITES

Promote PSEA awareness and safe community engagement

- **Use resources** from the GBV sub-cluster, PSEA network, or tools like **PSEA at the Frontline – Together We Say No.**
- **Display information on rights and SEA reporting mechanisms in all ETC sites.** Involve community members - especially women's groups - to ensure materials are inclusive and accessible.
- **Involve women's groups/leaders in selecting community volunteers & casual workers** and clearly communicate selection criteria and any incentives across the community.
- Run regular community campaigns to raise awareness that **ETC staff are aid workers,** explain expected conduct, and **share how to report misconduct.**
- **Set clear guidelines for how staff interact with communities.**

Monitor and enforce PSEA standards

- **Include SEA risk mitigation measures in contracts** with ETC staff and contractors/suppliers - making PSEA compliance a condition for hiring and partnership.
- **Vet all third-party actors** (e.g. vendors, logisticians, engineers, technicians) and government partners. Include PSEA in contracts and support its integration into their activities.
- **Where feasible, use remote monitoring tools** such as CCTV cameras to support oversight.
- **Conduct regular spot checks to confirm PSEA materials are visible in ETC settings**, and engage staff in ongoing conversations about SEA and expected conduct.
- **Coordinate closely with PSEA Focal Points**, GBV actors, or relevant line ministries to follow up on potential risks and mitigation measures - especially where no dedicated PSEA mechanism exists.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE, HEAR, OR SUSPECT SEA

If someone shares a concern with you, or you witness or suspect SEA, it's your responsibility to act – safely and appropriately. Here's how:

- Stay calm and listen. Don't pressure the person to share more. Never ask for details.
- Believe them. Don't question their story or make promises you can't keep.
- Keep it confidential. Only share the information with those who need to know to take action.
- Follow your organisation's reporting procedure. If you're not sure how, speak to your PSEA focal point, local PSEA network, or supervisor immediately.

Always put the survivor's safety, dignity, and wishes at the centre of your response.
Do not try to investigate or intervene yourself.