IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee

SEA Risk Identification and Mitigation Checklist Shelter

GLOBAL SHELTER CLUSTER
Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements

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 shelter 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 shelter 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: SHELTER PROGRAMMES

Below are key risks points in Shelter cluster/sector. In many contexts, community members are unaware of their rights or what constitutes SEA and/or have limited knowledge of how or where to report abuse confidentially. This heightens risks of SEA.

OVERALL RISKS

Limited knowledge on SEA, rights, and absence of safe reporting mechanisms

- **Strong reliance on community-based structures and**
- **volunteers** - especially in targeting, registration, and distribution - who often lack knowledge of PSEA, safeguarding responsibilities, and reporting obligations.
- **Background checks, codes of conduct, and oversight are rarely applied** to these actors, increasing the risk of SEA.
- **Many community members do not recognise SEA when committed by a local actor or volunteer,** leading to significant underreporting.
- **Assistance is often delivered in ways that overlook the safety, mobility, and access needs** of women, girls, and other marginalised groups.
- **Community feedback mechanisms are rarely established,** and existing channels are often unsafe, not confidential, or inaccessible to those most at risk.
- **Referral pathways for victim assistance are poorly communicated or unavailable,** and victims/survivors' fear of retaliation, disbelief, or social exclusion further deters reporting

Lack of meaningful engagement

- **Women, children, and marginalised groups are not always consulted** during the design of assistance, including the timing, location, and modality.
- **Child-headed households are rarely asked about preferred modalities** such as cash, which may increase their reliance on others to access aid.
- **Limited knowledge of entitlements, rights, and complaint mechanisms,** combined with poor access to information, exposes at-risk groups to additional SEA risks.

Weak data protection mechanisms

- **Enumerators, volunteers and partners delivering assistance have access to personal information** of at-risk groups, yet they have limited knowledge on PSEA.
- **Some personal data is shared publicly without safeguards,** and in low literacy contexts, marginalised groups must rely on community members or volunteers to access information, including how to report misconduct - heightening the risk of SEA.

EMERGENCY SHELTER

- **Shelter kits may lack essential materials, forcing women to rely on others for help,** increasing SEA risk.
- **Shelter teams are often male-dominated,** limiting women's participation, access to information, and influence--perpetuating gender inequality and increasing SEA risk.
- **Many shelter organisations have low PSEA capacity,** and limited support or funding for institutional change hinders partners' ability to mitigate risks.
- **A large influx of actors, combined with poor coordination and a lack of safe reporting channels and referral pathways, discourages reporting** and fosters impunity.
- **Targeting criteria and complaint systems are often not adapted** to different literacy, language, or disability needs.

RENTAL SUBSIDIES - SHELTER HELP

Gaps in oversight and tenancy agreements

- **Communities often lack clear information on their rights, selection processes, and how to report misconduct** by landlords, shelter staff, or community leaders.
- **Rental agreements are often weak, and tenants are not fully informed of their rights** or complaint options.
- **Oversight of landlords, shelter staff, and government counterparts is limited,** especially where no formal frameworks or safe reporting systems exist.
- These gaps increase SEA risk for vulnerable groups with less access to information or support.

REPAIR AND RECONSTRUCTION

- **Private sector actors** (e.g. vendors, builders) **often operate without PSEA safeguards** in contracts or training on expected conduct and reporting.
- **Repair workers may access private homes without supervision or clear codes of conduct,** creating opportunities for abuse, misconduct, or abuse of power.
- **Reconstruction efforts not paired with food, WASH, or NFIs may increase reliance on negative coping strategies** like sale and exchange of sex.
- **Lack of consideration for additional costs households may bear** for renovation or reconstruction activities.

Misuse of power by aid workers & weak safeguarding measures

- Local families selected for shelter upgrades often become landlords for displaced households. **These landlords (often men with greater access to resources) hold significant power,** especially when roles and conduct expectations are not clearly explained.
- Displaced families may have no alternative accommodation, giving landlords access to their private space & increasing risks of abuse.
- **When information is shared only with men, women may be excluded** from understanding how to access shelter or report SEA.
- **Landlords, volunteers, or humanitarian workers may demand sexual favours in exchange for shelter** - particularly where complaint systems are weak or unclear.
- **Lack of support for survivors allows abuse to continue without consequences.**

> **Some do accept offers like repair of shelter in exchange for sex, and others don't. If the woman desperately needs to find a shelter for her kids, she might agree. Others would rather live on the streets and protect their reputations.**
>
> – 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 Shelter 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 & regularly gather community feedback to identify & 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 & safe feedback mechanisms in communities.

RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

CROSS-CUTTING RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

Continuous engagement with women and girls and other marginalised groups

- **Consult women, girls, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups** during programme design and implementation.
- If direct consultation is not feasible, engage GBV actors, PSEA networks, or women's organisations instead.
- **Put in place ongoing engagement processes -** such as validation exercises and feedback sessions - to identify and reduce SEA risks throughout the response.

Increased awareness on PSEA and reporting/feedback channels

- Coordinate with the PSEA network, GBV sub-cluster, & women's or marginalised groups to **design safe, accessible SEA reporting options.**
- **Disseminate clear information** - using visual and oral formats, in local languages - about rights, what SEA is, how to report, and where to seek help.
- **Post materials where women and at-risk groups are likely to see them,** and use trusted methods such as radio, megaphones, posters, community drama, or interpersonal communication (see resources on PSEA at the Frontline.

EMERGENCY SHELTER

Inclusive project design

- **Involve women, girls, persons with disabilities, and other at-risk groups in shelter design** to ensure their needs are considered.
- Ensure privacy and safety through **adequate lighting, lockable doors, and separate shelters or entrances** where appropriate.
- Avoid placing shelters in isolated or poorly monitored areas.

PSEA training, assessment and vetting

- **Provide mandatory PSEA training** for all shelter staff, volunteers, contractors, enumerators, community structures, landlords, and vendors and ensure they sign a code of conduct, undergo background checks, and are regularly supervised.
- **Involve women's and marginalised groups,** where feasible, in defining selection criteria for community actors.
- **Deliver regular refresher trainings and awareness campaigns.**
- Where possible, **carry out internal PSEA self-assessments and support partners to do the same.** Examples: IASC, RSH, ICVA.

Ensure data protection

- Coordinate with the national PSEA network and GBV sub-cluster to align with good practices on handling sensitive data.
- **Restrict access to personal information to trained staff only and protect data with passwords and secure storage systems.**
- Strengthen oversight of how sensitive data is collected, used, and shared to reduce risks to survivors.

Gender-balanced teams and PSEA capacity

- **Promote inclusive hiring and encourage women to apply for shelter team roles -** especially in male-dominated positions.
- Raise community awareness and offer skills-building sessions to support women's recruitment.
- **Establish safe reporting mechanisms and collect feedback** from women and girls on risks and mitigation.

Deliberate consultation with diverse groups

- Consult women's groups, organisations of persons with disabilities, and other marginalised communities to inform communication strategies, language, and channels - especially around targeting and access to shelter.
- Provide **PSEA training to all personnel and volunteers,** based on an assessment of learning needs.
- Where funding is limited, **identify partners who can support PSEA capacity-building for local organisations.**

REPAIR AND RECONSTRUCTION

Strengthen agreements & collaboration

- **Brief vendors, engineers, technicians, financial service providers, and government counterparts on PSEA.**
- **Include SEA clauses in contracts,** and where clauses exist, ensure actors understand and apply them.
- **Coordinate with other partners providing WASH, food, and NFI assistance to reduce reliance on negative coping strategies** and provide more comprehensive support.

Training and supervision

- **Train vendors and repair workers on SEA,** especially those entering homes.
- **Include women in field teams where possible** to reduce risk and improve access for affected groups.
- **Clearly brand staff** (e.g. with vests or IDs) to improve accountability/ visibility.
- **Carry out regular supervision** including spot checks, to monitor conduct.
- **Collect feedback from households** whose shelters were repaired to identify risks and improve safety.

Participation

- **Engage women, girls, and marginalised groups** - such as persons with disabilities, ethnic or language minorities - in programme design and delivery.
- **Map community spaces and common meeting times to support inclusive consultations.**
- **Encourage women's employment in repair and reconstruction** and collaborate with skills training partners to provide on-the-job learning.

DISTRIBUTION OF NFI

Increase information provision on PSEA

- **Coordinate with the PSEA network, GBV sub-cluster, and women's groups** to access or adapt existing SEA messaging and materials.
- **Use these to conduct awareness sessions** and share information on rights, what constitutes SEA, and available support services.
- **Share information in multiple formats -** visual, oral, and in local languages - adapted for non-literate audiences.

Consult women and girls to design safe & contextually-relevant distributions

- **Involve women and girls in decisions about the timing and location of distributions.**
- Use **sex-segregated lines** and **increase the number of female staff,** volunteers, and crowd controllers.
- **Inadequate or partial distribution of NFIs** (e.g. hygiene and dignity kits, lighting, cooking and heating fuel and fuel alternatives, building materials for shelter) may increase vulnerability to SEA in exchange for missing supplies.
- Ensure distribution ends before dark and takes place in **well-lit, non-isolated, and accessible areas.**

Strengthen collaboration to protect children

- **Ensure a child protection focal point or trained community structure is present at distributions to support children.**
- Collaborate with child-focused organisations to ensure unaccompanied and child-headed households are supported to access shelter-related services safely.

- **Post materials in places women frequent** (e.g. markets, clinics, community centres) and use trusted formats like radio, posters, megaphones, theatre, and community events.
- **Regularly monitor & adjust messaging and feedback channels** to ensure they are safe, accessible, and effective.

- **Minimise risks by setting collection times for different groups,** avoiding long travel distances, and providing waiting areas with shade.

- Adapt distribution approaches to **consider the specific risks and needs of children, especially girls.**

RENTAL SUBSIDIES & SHELTER HLP

Strengthen agreements and increased oversight

- **Ensure safe & equal access to land** through formal agreements and sensitisation of landlords on PSEA.
- **Have a framework in place to support the national government to strengthen internal mechanisms on PSEA** such as: having a PSEA focal person, signature of Codes of Conduct for personnel, and facilitating UN-government mechanisms for referring of SEA allegations.
- **Establish clear boundaries & expectations for landlords within agreements on access to private spaces.** Put in place reporting and feedback mechanisms that are accessible so that displaced families can easily report any misconduct or breach of contract.

Community owned safety response mechanisms and consultation

- **Consult the PSEA Network, the GBV sub-cluster, women's networks** on how to safely consult women and girls and other marginalised groups on what makes them feel safe.
- **Continuous monitoring and consultation** with displaced families especially women and girls and other marginalised groups **on their feelings of safety where they are staying and seeking their guidance on risk mitigation measures** that can be put in place to make them feel safe.

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.

Looking for more tips on safe distributions?

The **Empowered Aid** shelter tip sheet offers practical, community-driven guidance to reduce SEA risks during shelter activities, in particular distributions. It is also available in French, Spanish and Arabic here.