



PHILIPPINES NETWORK

PSEA

PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

PHILIPPINES INTER-AGENCY PSEA NETWORK



STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

These SOPs are in accordance with the IASC Inter-Agency Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Referral Pathways Guidance Note (2023)

Endorsed by the UNCT and HCT on 08 November 2024

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Key Milestones & Challenges in SOP Development

The Philippines Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) established the Inter-Agency PSEA Task Force in 2018 to ensure prevention, reporting, and response measures are in place to address sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian aid workers.

One of the PSEA Task Force's achievements was formulating its Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), which guided members on handling and referring any SEA allegation reports to concerned entities.

With the recently released IASC procedures and guidance on reporting SEA complaints and referrals for assistance, the country's SOP was revisited.

Below were the key steps made in reviewing and updating the Inter-Agency SEA Reporting and Referrals:

• 2019-2023

- The first SOP was developed in 2019.
- The SOP was revisited in October 2023. It was agreed to update it to align with the IASC 2023 Guidance Note on IA SEA-RP.

• Feb-Mar 2024

- To lead the process, a PSEA Task Team was formed and composed of IOM, UNRCO, UN-HCR, WFP, Plan International Pilipinas, and CARE Philippines.

• April-May 2024

- Special coordination meetings were held at national and Mindanao levels to present the SOP with key government agencies.
- Several consultations and workshops were conducted to consult members of the National and Mindanao PSEA Networks.
- Shared the Philippine experience in revising the SOP during the IASC PSEAH Workshop in Brindisi, Italy in April 2024.

• Jun-Oct 2024

- The working document was widely circulated for final review before seeking the endorsement of the UNCT and HCT.
- Discussed key provisions with the RC/HC.

• Challenges:

- Mapping and standardizing community-based complaints and feedback mechanisms.
- Developing a directory of government focal points for referral of SEA allegations involving government workers.
- SEA investigation capacities of local CSOs are limited and the PSEA Network is looking for ways to address such gap.

ACRONYMS

AAP WG	Accountability to Affected Populations Working Group
CFM	Complaints and Feedback Mechanism
CP	Child Protection
CPWG	Child Protection Working Group
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FP	Focal Point
GiHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GBV SC	Gender-based Violence Sub Cluster
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IA SEA-RP	Inter-Agency Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Referral Pathways
ISP	Information Sharing Protocol
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OSCSEA	Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PII	Personally Identifiable Information
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RC	Resident Coordinator
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SH	Sexual Harassment
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team

There is
**NO
EXCUSE**
for sexual
exploitation
and abuse



#HonouringOurValues

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Results of the 2023 UN Annual PSEA Survey showed that in the Philippines, there remain UN personnel who (a) do not know what to do in case they hear of SEA rumors or risks (2.4%); (b) do not know how and where to report SEA in their organizations (4.2%); and (c) have no clear information on where to refer victims of SEA (8.7%). This was further supported by some key findings from the [2023 BARMM SEA Risk Register](#). For example, staff members who participated in the study admitted to struggling to identify internal reporting channels for SEA within their organizations. The community members have limited knowledge also about where they can report instances of SEA. The study recommended that comprehensive PSEA training for staff and implementing partners should be provided including reporting mechanisms and procedures for victim assistance referrals. Likewise, the Philippines has a total of nine reported SEA allegations for the last five years (2019-2023) based on the record of the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the UN Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSCSEA). The low reporting of SEA is alarming. There is a culture of silence, fear of retaliation, limited awareness of the reporting process, and a lack of trust in the existing mechanisms.

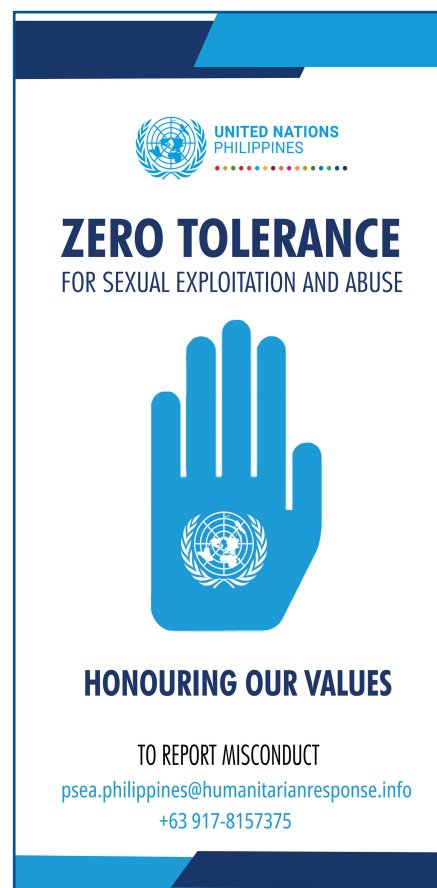
To address the gaps and challenges, the PSEA Network needs to build its internal capacities first knowing that every delay of action could lead to a victim/survivor not being able to get the help s/he needs. With this in mind, major shifts took place at the start of 2024.

One was the expansion of the scope to cover development and peace-building contexts and not only be limited to humanitarian noting that PSEA principles and standards are the same across all contexts. Second, was the change of name from PSEA Task Force to PSEA Network to make its membership more inclusive and diverse. Third was the hiring of a national Inter-Agency PSEA Coordinator lodged at the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator to support the PSEA In-Country Program. Fourth, the Mindanao PSEA Network was revived after three years of inactivity. Fifth, two UN agencies (IOM and WFP) and one National NGO (Plan International Pilipinas) committed to act as Co-Chairpersons for a period of two years (2024-2025).

All these contributed to the strengthening of the Philippines Inter-Agency PSEA Network.

The [2024 PSEA Action Plan](#) prioritizes the updating and revising of the SOPs after realizing the need to align them with the recently endorsed [IASC Inter-Agency SEA Referral Pathways Guidance Note \(2023\)](#). To carry it out, a PSEA Task Team was formed and several consultations, coordination meetings, workshops, and presentations were held. This included the conduct of Special Coordination Meetings with the government actors of the Child Protection Working Group and Gender-based Violence Sub Cluster such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Philippine National Police-Women and Children's Protection Center (PNP-WCPC), the Department of Health (DOH), the Child Protection Network (CPN), and the Ministry on Social Services and Development (MSSD) in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). With several reviews and revisions made, the updated SOP was endorsed by the members of the UN and Humanitarian Country Teams on the **8th of November 2024**.

To start putting in place accessible SEA reporting channels, the mobile hotline and email address were reactivated and managed by the UN/IA PSEA Coordinator. The SOPs were also presented in capacity-building exercises including the PSEA Refresher Course Trainings. Members are required to include their internal reporting channels as well as those of the Network when they create awareness in the communities and when they develop PSEA communication materials.



B. Purpose and Scope

This document establishes Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for inter-agency referral of SEA complaints and victims/survivors among organizations in the Philippines so that *when a SEA complaint is received, it is promptly referred to concerned entities for appropriate support to victim(s)/ survivor(s), follow-up and investigation*” in accordance with a victim/survivor-centered approach. They outline the roles of in-country stakeholders and the standards and principles that underlie complaint handling and information management of SEA allegations in the country. As such, these SOPs promote that any response-wide system for complaint and feedback handling can efficiently and appropriately handle allegations of SEA. These SOPs help to maintain confidentiality for all parties by minimizing the number of persons privy to sensitive information, yet ensuring the information is passed on to relevant stakeholders to take action, while balancing the need to monitor and learn from SEA allegations in-country in order to take preventative and risk mitigation action.

These SOPs apply to all PSEA Network members, both at the National and Mindanao levels. They are committed to prevent, respond to, and mitigate risks of any form of SEA perpetrated by their personnel. In doing so, members agree to extend the fullest cooperation and assistance to each other in accordance with the principles and standards set out in this document. This requires implementing their own internal policies, rules and procedures for handling complaints and responding to SEA incidents, including investigations and staff training.

These SOPs in no way replace or override internal policies, rules, or procedures of member organizations. Rather, they describe procedures that arise from and supplement internal policies when entities are engaging in inter-agency cooperation for SEA referrals.

These SOPs only apply when a SEA complaint has been received by an entity PSEA Focal Point or staff member and requires referral to another entity.

WHAT IS NOT WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE SOPs



1. It does not cover **how to receive a complaint**, which falls within the entities’ own internal policy.

2. It does not cover **how to set up a complaints and feedback mechanism (CFM)**. It is acknowledged that SEA incidents are sometimes reported through the CFMs. The establishment of safe and accessible CFMs is to be led by the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Group but the PSEA Network would closely collaborate, when appropriate, in sensitizing the CFM focal points in handling and reporting SEA reports.

3. It does not cover **information sharing protocols for sharing personally identifiable information (PII) on SEA complaints**, beyond referral to the entities responsible for follow-up. Complaint referral is distinct from information sharing on SEA (anonymized and aggregated) between entities and/or Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator and PSEA Coordinator, for the purpose of understanding SEA trends and mitigating risk, or to inform leadership. However, as per the [Terms of Reference of the Philippines PSEA Network](#), members are required to share information on complaints of SEA received to the RC/HC without disclosing any PII.

4. It does not cover **a standardized SEA reporting form**. Whilst the SOP provides Inter-Agency Complaint Referral Form to facilitate inter-agency referrals, entities will determine their use of common harmonized frameworks such as the CHS Alliance Harmonized SEAH Data Collection and Reporting for NGOs and private sector organizations, and the UN Incident Reporting Form (IRF) designed for use by UN designated Information Receiving Officials (IROs) for referral of SEA cases involving the UN to the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for investigation.

5. It does not cover **data protection standards and principles**. However, every participating organization shall adhere to its Data Protection Principles in the event that it collects, receives, uses, transfers, or stores any personal data of a complaint.

II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The definitions outlined here are taken from the IASC Guidance Note for IA SEA-RP unless otherwise stated.

❖ ASSISTANCE REFERRAL

The processes by which a victim/survivor gets in touch with professionals and/or institutions regarding their case and the processes by which different professional sectors communicate and work together, in a safe, ethical and confidential manner, to provide the victim/survivor with usually a multi-sectoral response including several services.

❖ ASSISTANCE REFERRAL PATHWAY

A referral pathway is a flexible mechanism that safely links survivors to supportive and competent services, such as medical care, mental health and psychosocial support, police assistance, and legal/justice support.

❖ COMPLAINT

Information provided, whether by a complainant or any other source indicating a breach of conduct that has yet to be assessed. This could be a rumor, concern, or incident related to SEA.

❖ COMPLAINANT

A person who brings an allegation of SEA in accordance with established procedures. This person may be a SEA survivor or another person who is aware of the wrongdoing.

❖ CONCERNED ENTITY

The entity that has a contractual affiliation with the alleged SEA perpetrator, giving the entity the ability and mandate to take administrative action upon misconduct, including suspending employment, investigation, and disciplinary action where warranted.

❖ “DO NO HARM”

The principle of “Do No Harm” means taking all measures necessary to avoid exposing victims/survivors to further harm as a result of our actions, when providing assistance. This means protecting victims/survivors from further harassment, intimidation, retaliation, trauma or victimization. Actors can reinforce the principle by following the [GBV Guiding Principles](#).

❖ ENTITY

An all-encompassing term to refer to organizations, agencies, funds, and programmes, including UN entities, international NGOs and local NGOs.

❖ INVESTIGATION

Refers to a legally based and analytical process to gather information to determine whether wrongdoing occurred and, if so, the persons or entities responsible.

❖ PERSONNEL OR STAFF

Refers to any person engaged by any entity/service provider to support, provide services and offer protection to the affected community, whether internationally or nationally recruited, whether as an employee, volunteer, intern, contractor or service provider, or engaged from the community with a contractual link with the entity, remunerated or not (e.g., community volunteers, incentive workers, community mobilizers, etc).

❖ PSEA STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

These are the agreed and formalized way of working together on collective commitment to SEA complaint and assistance referral, as endorsed by senior leadership in-country. The SOPs can include agreed-upon referral procedures for complaints handling and referral between organizations and how victims/survivors will be linked to assistance services by incorporating GBV/CP referral pathways, as well as the roles of in-country stakeholders, and the standards and principles that underlie complaint handling and referrals.

❖ VICTIM/SURVIVOR

A person who is or has been sexually exploited or abused.

❖ VICTIM/SURVIVOR-CENTERED APPROACH

The approach that places the rights, wishes, needs, safety, dignity and wellbeing of the victim/survivor at the center of all prevention and response measures concerning sexual exploitation and abuse.

❖ WHISTLEBLOWER

Individual who reports misconduct, provides information in good faith on alleged wrongdoing, or cooperates with a duly authorized audit, inspection or other oversight activity.

❖ GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE VS SEA VS SH

See Table below.

For purposes of this document, the definition of SEA follows the UN approach in that it occurs against a beneficiary or member of the affected/host community. Not all organizations make the same distinction.

	GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)	SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (SEA)	SEXUAL HARASSMENT (SH)
PARTIES	Perpetrator: Anyone Victim/Survivor: Anyone	Perpetrator: Aid Worker Victim/Survivor: Beneficiary or member of the community/affected population	Perpetrator: Aid Worker Victim/Survivor: Aid Worker
DEFINITION	GBV is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private.	Sexual Exploitation: Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Sexual Abuse: The actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. All sexual activity with a child is considered as sexual abuse. Note: All forms of SEA are GBV. However, not all forms of GBV are SEA.	Sexual Harassment is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected, or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Sexual harassment may occur in the workplace or in connection with work. While typically involving a pattern of conduct, sexual harassment may take the form of a single incident. In assessing the reasonableness of expectations or perceptions, the perspective of the person who is the target of the conduct shall be considered. *For many organizations, sexual harassment as included in the spectrum of behaviors that are not acceptable conduct by staff, be it in the workplace or with affected populations.

III. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following actors have the roles and responsibilities for inter-agency SEA referrals:

The Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) has system-wide responsibility for developing collective PSEA strategies and ensuring action plans are implemented.

With respect to IA SEA referral procedures, there is a responsibility to advocate and lead all entities to engage in the PSEA Network and adequately finance and resource activities, including ensuring that inter-agency SEA complaint mechanisms are in place and functional.

The RC/HC has overarching responsibility to advocate for the provision of assistance to victims/survivors (including GBV/child protection services) and reporting on actions taken in country to prevent and respond to SEA.

When an alleged perpetrator is affiliated with a government entity partnering with the UN, the RC/HC has the role to communicate and raise the situation with the government authorities at the appropriate level, in coordination with the relevant UN entity that is partnering with the government (see Section V).

The UN Country Team (UNCT) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) must promote PSEA activities across entities including that adequate time, finances and resources are contributed by participating entities to ensure that the following are prioritized: safe and efficient complaint and feedback mechanisms (CFMs); assistance services to support victims/survivors; and effective referral procedures.

HCT responsibility for PSEA, AAP and GBV under the HC is outlined in HCT compacts and standard [terms of reference for HCTs](#).

Heads of Entities/Agencies/Organizations (as members of the HCT/UNCT, or as Heads of the Member-Organizations of the PSEA Network) are accountable for PSEA within their organizations and are responsible for overseeing their entity's engagement in PSEA. This engagement includes endorsing country level SOPs; establishing and maintaining CFMs; ensuring that victims have access to assistance and support; ensuring personnel understand codes of conduct and PSEA complaint policies; and due diligence to prevent re-recruitment of offenders. Heads of Entities must designate PSEA Focal Points for their entity and determine who will represent the entity in the PSEA Network.

Inter-Agency PSEA Coordinator has the role of supporting the PSEA Network to draft country-level SOPs based on the IASC IA SEA-RP Guidance Note (2023). In coordination with Protection, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Child Protection (CP) and Senior Victims' Rights Officers (SVRO)/Victims' Rights Advocates (VRA)/Victims' Rights Focal Points (VRFP) (where deployed), the PSEA Coordinator ensures that country-level SOPs incorporate Protection, GBV and CP referral pathways for the provision of assistance to victims/survivors of SEA.

When an entity is not identified in a SEA complaint, the PSEA Coordinator has a role to identify and refer to the concerned entity or investigative body (see Section V).

Where it is appropriate, the PSEA Coordinator has a role in receiving complaints from the community directly, for instances in the absence of other neutral channels, or in cases where a PSEA Focal Point is not in place within an entity.

Where there is no PSEA Coordinator in place, another actor (an alternate, such as the most Senior

Co-Chair of the PSEA Network) must be identified to perform this role.

Inter-Agency PSEA Network includes all designated PSEA Focal Points of entities in the response, and representatives of other relevant working groups/clusters/networks (e.g., Protection, GBV, CP, Accountability to Affected People (AAP), Cash, GiHA, etc.) in the country. The Inter-Agency PSEA Network has the task of establishing and maintaining interagency referrals of SEA through agreed SOPs. The Inter-Agency PSEA Network will support to ensure IA SEA referral procedures are effective and timely and in coordination with GBV/CP and other service providers; and ensure that all personnel understand referral pathways and procedures for assistance/services and for investigative follow up.

Entity PSEA Focal Points (FP) are personnel of an organization tasked with leading/coordinating the implementation of PSEA in direct coordination with their Head of Entity, both internally and as an active member of the PSEA Network.

PSEA Focal Points are responsible for knowing their entity's procedures and their obligations to report and refer an incident. They may receive SEA complaints and are responsible to ensure safe reception, referral and follow-up of SEA complaints as needed; so that victims/survivors have access to support services through the GBV and CP referral pathways and to investigation or accountability processes, based on their informed consent, and in accordance with the referral procedures and internal procedures of their entities. It is not the responsibility of PSEA Focal Points to conduct investigations and/or try to verify the validity of a complaint.

PSEA Focal Points should ensure that all their entity personnel can identify SEA; are aware of relevant PSEA Focal Points; understand how to report SEA concerns and complaints; and are aware of services and assistance. The nomination of a PSEA Focal Point does not relieve the Head of Entity of their ultimate responsibility for PSEA but supports the Head of Entity in that role.

GBV/CP Coordinators/Specialists work with PSEA Coordinator/PSEA Network/PSEA Focal Points to ensure that they understand the referral pathways and that all personnel know/understand basic services and assistance available for survivors.

If there are no adequate services in place, GBV/CP Coordinators and the PSEA Coordinator/PSEA Network can identify gaps and advocate for additional services. The GBV/CP Coordinators and Focal Points can collaborate with the PSEA Coordinator/Focal Points to integrate responding to SEA into GBV SOPs and ensure that GBV/CP service providers are trained on how to handle SEA cases.

GBV/CP Service Providers provide services and assistance to victims/survivors based on their consent and in line with a victim/survivor-centered approach and the principle of best interest of the child.

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Group/Focal Points work with PSEA Network and PSEA Focal Points to support the regular mapping, reinforcement and establishment of feedback mechanisms; to identify where there are gaps or barriers for the affected population's safe access to report SEA; and to sensitize CFMs for SEA where appropriate. Inter-Agency AAP Coordinators and entity AAP Focal Points should also work with the PSEA Network/PSEA Focal Points on engaging and consulting communities on PSEA.

IV. MINIMUM STANDARDS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING SEA REFERRALS

IASC 6 Core Principles:

All entities should institutionalize and promote within their entity the [IASC Six Core Principles](#) relating to PSEA across humanitarian, development, and peace-building contexts.

All personnel should understand, sign, and adhere to their entity's Code of Conduct, or equivalent, setting out the standards of acceptable and prohibited behaviour.

All entities are responsible for ensuring that all their personnel have comprehensive training and information on PSEA. They must understand the obligations under mandatory reporting and who they should report to, how to apply a victim/survivor-centered approach, and how to make referrals based on the GBV and Child Protection referral pathways.

Zero Tolerance of Inaction:

All entities should be committed to institutionalizing zero tolerance of inaction against SEA with due regard for procedural fairness.

Zero tolerance means that all entities and their personnel are obligated to prevent, detect and respond to SEA fairly and reasonably, adopting a defined effort to provide a comfortable and confidential way for victims/survivors to report and putting in action an appropriate response.

Collaboration Among PSEA Network Members (National and Mindanao):

All entities can receive a complaint against another entity and act in accordance with the referral procedures as set out in this SOPs.

A Human Rights-Based Approach and Victim/Survivor Centered Approach:

Members of the Philippines PSEA Network are committed to applying an end-to-end victim/survivor-centered approach to protection from SEA. This includes referring the victim/survivor to appropriate services that offer holistic assistance, irrespective of whether the victim/survivor initiates or cooperates with an investigation or any other accountability or resolution procedure.

Some of the key principles are set out below:

- **Safety, Security and Well-Being:** Ensure the safety, security, and well-being of the victim/survivor as a primary consideration, taking into account their familial, social and cultural context. Adhere to the principles of "Do No Harm" and refrain from any action that jeopardizes the safety, security, health, and emotional well-being of the victim/survivor. Assess potential risks for victims/survivors and ensure all contacts, communication and support to a victim/survivor is provided in a manner which seeks to uphold their rights, needs, safety, dignity and emotional well-being and protects them from stigmatization, discrimination, retaliation and retraumatization. Victims/survivors and complainants should be protected from retaliation for reporting SEA.
- **Confidentiality:** Confidentiality covers the identity of those who have provided the information, as well as the information itself. Victims/survivors

have the right to choose to whom they will or will not tell their story, however, victims/survivors must be informed of the limits of confidentiality, including informing them when mandatory reporting procedures are in place and what these imply. Outline the information that may be transmitted, to whom, and for what purpose, as early as possible and before the victim/survivor shares their personally identifiable information and incident details. Explain any implications on the scope and conduct of a possible investigation of a victim's/survivor's choice to keep information confidential. Ensure that robust data protection measures are in place. All information contained in a complaint, or a report, must remain confidential and information is shared with the minimum number of people necessary, strictly on a need-to-know basis, for the purpose of referral and service provision, based on the informed consent of the victim/survivor. Likewise, confidentiality also protects the integrity of the investigation and prevent further harm for all parties concerned. Part of the PSEA training should include information-sharing mandatory requirements.

- **Dignity & Respect:** All actions taken should be guided by respect for the dignity, choices, wishes, needs, rights, culture and values of the victim/survivor, and consider their informed choices as a central priority. Treat the victim/survivor with courtesy, empathy, professionalism, and without bias or judgment. Victims/survivors are not required to identify the perpetrator or prove that they are victims of SEA to access services. Concerned entities must ensure access and assistance to services needed by the victims/survivors.
- **Non-Discrimination & Inclusion:** Victims/survivors should receive equal and fair treatment. Be gender-responsive, inclusive and be aware of (potential) bias and discrimination. Do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, language, religion, belief, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status. Acknowledge intersectional discrimination and be aware of personal bias. Response mechanisms, including case management, and provision of service and assistance, must ensure to consider differentiated approaches appropriate for the victim/survivor.
- **Special Considerations for Child Victims/Survivors:** Assistance and support to child victims/survivors (persons below 18 years of age) must

be provided in a manner consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in particular the principle of the “best interests of the child”. Children have the right to have their best interests assessed and considered as a primary consideration in all actions or decisions that concern them. In addition, children shall be assured the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with the child's age and level of maturity. For children who are too young to understand information about their rights and service options, this information should also be shared with their trusted adult who can support the child to participate in making a decision. Child victims/survivors should be provided with assistance from trained professionals who can provide child-focused care.



The definition of **‘children’** shall be extended to cover individuals over the age of 18 but are unable to fully take care of themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition as defined in [Republic Act 7610, “Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act”](#).



Refer to the Philippines' [Protocol for Case Management of Child Victims of Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation](#) for further guidance.

In accessing services for abused children in the Philippines, refer to the Child Protection Network Foundation's work centers. CPN is a non-government organization with expertise on the prevention and treatment of child abuse. It has established Women and Children Protection Units (WCPUs) in Department of Health (DOH)-retained and LGU-assisted/supported hospitals. Refer to CPN website for the list of [WCPUs](#) in the Philippines.

- **Informed Consent:** Consent is based upon the victim's/survivor's clear appreciation and understanding of the facts, implications and potential consequences of an action. Actively seek consent

from victims/survivors on the possible use of the information they provide. Endeavor to make no information disclosure at any time to any party without the informed consent of the victim/survivor *unless it is a life-threatening situation for the victim/survivor*. Inform victims/survivors about their right to engage or not to engage in a process and the fact that the PSEA Network entities may decide to pursue management action, without their consent and participation, to prevent further harm (see mandatory reporting below). A victim/survivor can withdraw their consent to participate in the process at any time, without impacting their right to assistance. In cases involving young children where informed consent is not possible, their informed assent may be sought in a manner consistent with their evolving capacity.



Informed assent of the child is the expressed willingness to participate in services or any activities. For younger children, who are by definition too young to give informed consent but are old enough to understand and agree to participate in services, the child's 'informed assent' is sought. Persons with disabilities may need specific support to give consent based on the nature of their impairment, whether it be physical, intellectual, or mental.

If the victim/survivor remains at risk of SEA, the PSEA Network entities may decide to pursue management action even without their consent and participation.

Mandatory Reporting:

Mandatory reporting in a context of the Secretary-General's Bulletin on PSEA (2003) refers to an obligation to report SEA perpetrated by UN staff or related personnel, non-UN forces operating under a Security Council mandate, and implementing partner staff and related personnel in line with established reporting procedures. Compliance with mandatory reporting of SEA complaints is a requisite for all UN entities and their partners. Reporting obligations exist whether the alleged perpetrator is from the same entity or not. Victims/survivors must be informed of entities' mandatory reporting obligations as soon as they come forward with a complaint. Victims/survivors should also be informed of their rights related to informed consent and its implications, confidentiality protections, and that as-

sistance is offered to victims/survivors irrespective of whether they initiate or cooperate with an investigation or other accountability procedure.

In the Philippines, there exists mandatory reporting laws. **This should not be confused with the principle of mandatory reporting under PSEA within their own entities or for inter-agency referral.**



Source: [Protocol for Case Management of Child Victims of Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation \(2013\)](#)

Who May Report & To Whom May One Report a Case of Child Abuse?

1. Any person may report, either orally or in writing, a case of child abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

The report may be made to any of the following:

- Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)
- Commission on Human Rights (CHR)
- Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO) of the Municipality, City, or Province
- Philippine National Police (PNP)
- National Bureau of Investigation (NBI)
- Other law enforcement agencies
- Punong Barangay or Tribal Leader
- Barangay Kagawad
- Any member of the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC)
- Barangay Help Desk person or Violence Against Women (VAW) Help Desk Officer

2. The following government workers have the duty to report all incidents of possible child abuse:

- Teachers and Administrators in Public Schools
- Probation Officers
- Government Lawyers
- Law Enforcement Officers
- Barangay Officials
- Corrections Officers
- Other Government Officials and Employees whose work involves dealing with children

3. Any person who, acting in good faith, reports a child abuse case shall be free from any civil or administrative liability. As much as possible, the persons who report should give their names and contact details for further contacts, if necessary. Their protection and anonymity shall be assured.

Continuation:

4. Any person who reports must provide basic information on the child victim (name, age, address or whereabouts of child, the reasons that child may be at risk or in an abusive or exploitative situation) and the alleged perpetrator. However, any relevant information to suspect that a child is being abused or exploited shall suffice to initiate any action and investigation.

5. The person who reports need not be the complainant but has knowledge of the incident.

6. The child victim may or may not be with the person reporting the incident.

The Mandatory Reporters

1. The following are mandated to make a report, either orally or in writing, to DSWD/LSWDO within forty-eight (48) hours, the examination and/or treatment of a child who appears to have suffered from abuse:

- Head of any public or private hospital, medical clinic and similar institutions
- Attending physician and nurse

2. Failure to report a child abuse case shall be punishable with a fine of not more than two thousand pesos (P2,000.00) or as may be determined in the future by a court with jurisdiction.

Information on complaints will only be shared with relevant authorities as appropriate, upon a protection risk assessment and in line with informed consent. In the case that the SEA constitutes a criminal offence, if victims/survivors consent for their personally identifiable information to be shared with national law enforcement authorities, the entity will assist the victim/survivor through the process, including providing legal assistance, or referring to relevant actors for legal assistance/support, as appropriate.

Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms (CFMs):

Recognizing that functioning intake channels are the basis of inter-agency referrals, all members of the PSEA Network, based upon these referral pathways, commit to having safe, confidential, accessible, disability-inclusive, child-friendly, responsive and multi-channel effective and high-quality complaint and feedback mechanisms (either entity-specific or inter-agency) and to ensure community

engagement and awareness raising on PSEA. Local communities should be consulted in designing CFMs.

Whistleblower Protection:

All complainants who report or cooperate with an investigation, including those who are not alleged victims, may also require safeguards to protect their interest. Whistleblower protection is provided in two important areas: confidentiality and retaliation. This protection is essential to safeguard victims'/survivors' and witnesses' interests and to promote a culture of accountability and integrity. The Network encourages reporting any qualifying information concerning alleged SEA in good faith and is committed to taking preventive actions to proactively protect whistleblowers when they do, empowering them to speak up.

V. INTER-AGENCY SEA COMPLAINT AND ASSISTANCE REFERRALS

A. Referral

SEA reports can come from anywhere and be received by any personnel. It is the responsibility of all entities to:

- Ensure that their personnel are trained in safe disclosure.
- Ensure their personnel understand institutional procedures for immediately reporting SEA for assistance services and potential investigation.
- Increase the numbers of staff that are trained to receive sensitive complaints and inter-agency SEA referral procedures.

For the purposes of these SOPs, the following referral pathways are intended to take effect **once a report is received by a staff member who is trained to receive sensitive complaints and inter-agency SEA referral procedures** (e.g., PSEA Focal Points, GBV or CP Specialists, PSEA Coordinator, staff running a joint CFM, hotline operators, etc.).

Referral for Victim/Survivor Assistance

The aim of a referral mechanism is to ensure that victims/survivors are supported and promptly referred so that they receive immediate assistance as

soon as they come forward. The responsibility to provide assistance and support begins as soon as information indicating that an individual may be a victim/survivor of sexual exploitation or abuse is received in any way or form; based on victim's/survivor's informed consent. This may involve referrals to service providers according to the needs and informed consent of the victim/survivor. It does not require the receipt of a credible complaint of sexual exploitation or abuse. The safety and confidentiality of victims/survivors of SEA must be central to the provision of assistance by all responsible organizations and service providers, in line with a victim/survivor centered approach. It is the responsibility of the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff to ensure that the victim/survivor/complainant has been informed about and offered assistance in line with a victim/survivor-centered approach. If assistance has not previously been offered, or if the victim/survivor only now wishes it, the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff should make appropriate referrals using existing GBV/CP referral pathways, based on informed consent.

If victims/survivors do not want to access services, their wishes must be respected. Victims/survivors can still be provided with details of GBV service providers in their area in case they wish to access services in future. When referred for assistance, the service provider receiving the survivor/complainant shall confirm to the referring personnel **within 48 hours** that the service referral was received, so s/he may fulfil the reporting duty to the concerned entity. Guidance on principled receipt of a complaint from someone other than the victim/survivor is set out in [Section 3 Technical Note on the Implementation of the UN Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of SEA](#).



The recommended **timeline** in referring SEA cases is as follows:

- All entities should acknowledge the receipt of the SEA report **within 24 hours**. The acknowledgement should be given to the person who reported e.g. the victim/survivor, complainant, etc.
- If the entity who receives the report is not the concerned entity, the receiving entity should fill out the referral form and refer the case to the concerned entity **within 48 hours**, unless more time is required to gather information.
- For victim/survivor assistance referral with urgent safety, security, or protection concerns, the survivor should be referred immediately.



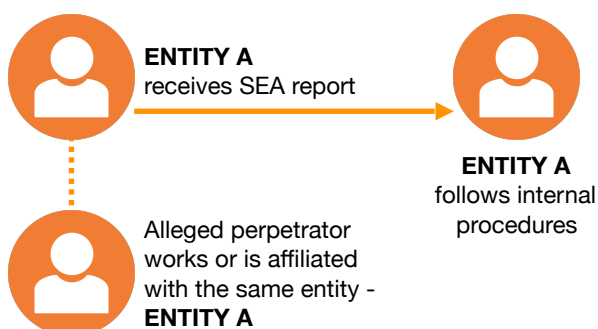
Important notes on the referral procedures:

- If there is no Inter-Agency PSEA Coordinator in the country, the most Senior Co-Chair of the PSEA Network shall take the role of the PSEA Coordinator as indicated in the SOPs.
- The SOPs are not intended to supersede the entities' internal PSEA policies. The staff should always follow their entity's own policies if in doubt of procedures.
- The SOPs cover allegations against personnel of all entities including implementing partners, supply chain partners (contractors, service providers, suppliers, vendors), community volunteers, and government partners. **The entity to which the subject of complaint is affiliated with shall be responsible for the proceedings.**

B. Inter-Agency Referral of Complaints

In parallel with ensuring that victims/survivors have access to appropriate assistance, the following section describes the pathways for complaint referral according to different scenarios. Some entities' internal procedures require that the recipient report to their own investigative body, who would then refer the complaint to the investigative body of the concerned entity. **Staff should always follow their own internal policies if in doubt of procedure.**

Scenario 1: Alleged perpetrator is affiliated with the same entity as complaint recipient



If the alleged perpetrator works in or is affiliated with the same entity as the complaint recipient, **the internal procedures of the entity should be followed, in accordance with a victim/survivor-centered approach**. For the purposes of complaint referral, “working for” or “affiliated with” an entity includes situations where the alleged perpetrator is a member of the affected community with a con-

tractual link with the entity (e.g., community volunteer, incentive worker, community mobiliser, etc) or a personnel of the implementing partner, procurement partner, or government partner of the entity.

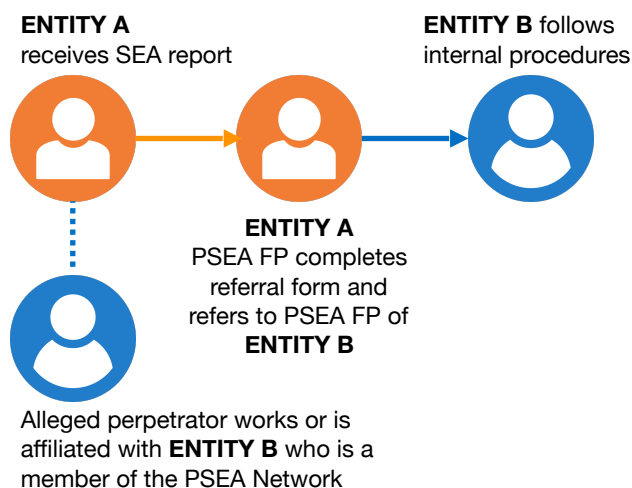
If an aid worker believes that the primary reporting route for their entity is compromised, or that they would be victimized, or they have no confidence in the local management structure, they can use any of the other reporting options available to the community including the PSEA Network's SEA reporting channels managed by the UN/Inter-Agency PSEA Coordinator. The staff member retains the right to report anonymously and is owed the same protections as any complainant.



Philippines Inter-Agency PSEA Network
 For any SEA allegations, please report at
 Mobile: +63 917-815-7375
 Email: psea.philippines@humanitarianresponse.info

Refer to the Guidelines on the Management of the Network's SEA Reporting Channels (Annex H)

Scenario 2: Alleged perpetrator is affiliated with a different entity that is a member of the Philippines PSEA Network

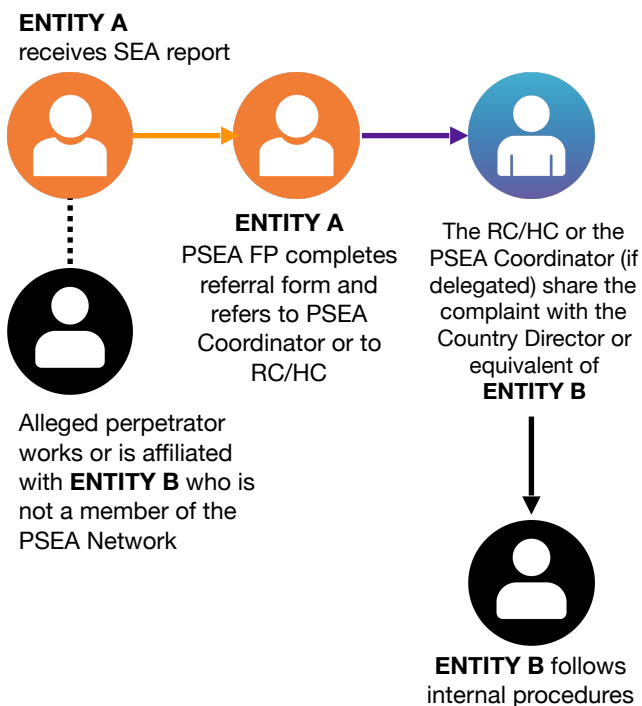


If the complaint is related to a different entity, the PSEA focal point/trained staff should complete the referral form and refer to the SEA complaint-handling body or the PSEA Focal Point of the concerned entity within 48 hours.

In limited situations where there is a conflict of interest or in situations where the complaint-handling unit's ability to handle the complaint may be compromised (e.g. the complaints relate to a country director or other senior staff), the complaint may be

referred to the UN/IA PSEA Coordinator and/or the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) (or equivalent), who in turn will share it at the appropriate level for action, based on informed consent by victim/survivor.

Scenario 3: Alleged perpetrator is affiliated with an entity that is NOT a member of the PSEA Network

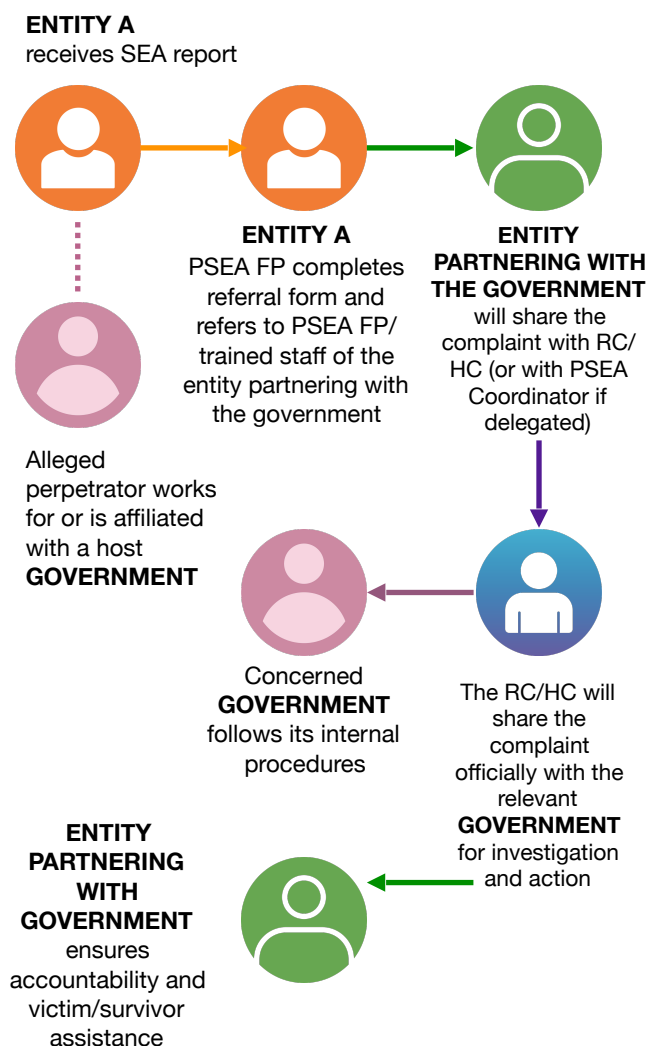


If the complaint involves personnel from an entity that is not yet a member of the PSEA Network, the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff member will fill out the referral form and share the complaint with the RC/HC (or equivalent) or to the UN/IA PSEA Coordinator, if delegated by the RC/HC; based on informed consent by the victim/survivor within 48 hours.

The RC/HC will share the complaint with the Country Director or senior most responsible person of the concerned entity in the country as soon as reasonably possible. Alternatively, when the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff member does not have direct access to the RC/HC, the complaint may be shared with the UN/IA PSEA Coordinator.

In instances when the alleged perpetrator is the Country Director, the RC/HC will share the complaint directly with the entity's complaint handling unit, Board of the organization, or other pre-identified focal point, if safe to do so.

Scenario 4: Alleged perpetrator is affiliated with a host government entity



When a PSEA Focal Point/trained staff receives a complaint regarding a government employee (or community/local leaders appointed by the government or elected) the following steps will be taken:

a) The PSEA Focal Point/trained staff will complete the referral form and refer the complaint to the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff of the entity partnering with the government authority where the alleged perpetrator works. This is so that the entity partnering with the government can assess the situation to identify actions to be taken to stop misconduct and to provide protection and assistance to victims/survivors.

b) The entity partnering with the government will share the complaint with the RC/HC (or with the UN/IA PSEA Coordinator if delegated) within 48 hours. The RC/HC will share the complaint officially with the relevant government counterpart for investigation and action within 48 hours. Complaints

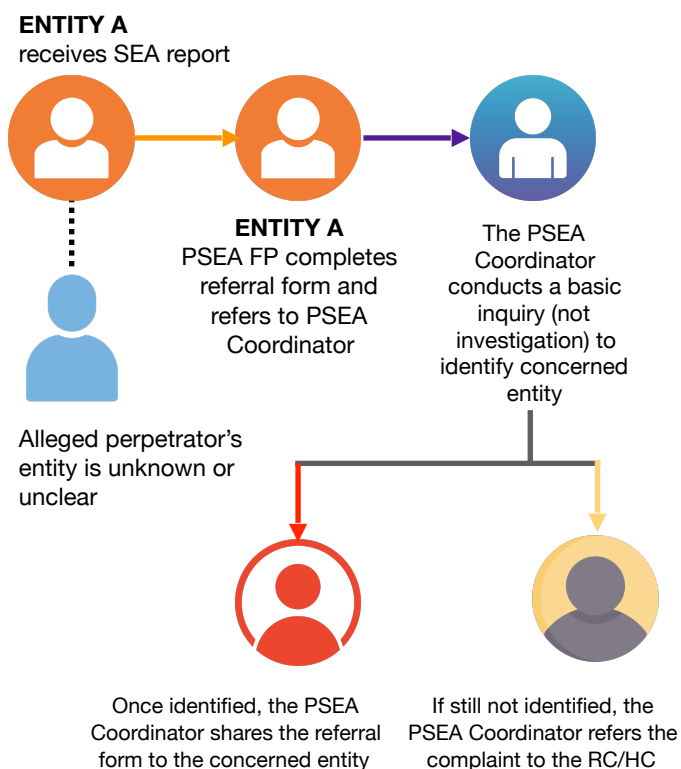
should only be shared with the government based on the survivor's informed consent and a protection risk assessment for the survivor, witnesses, and other parties to the complaint.

c) The RC/HC (or the UN/IA PSEA Coordinator, if delegated), should coordinate with the relevant entity partnering with the government, if applicable, who can support the government to ensure accountability and victim/survivor assistance.

In instances where the entity has a formal agreement with the government on the handling and investigation of such complaints, the entity will follow the existing agreed protocol and concurrently inform the RC/HC of the same.

Refer to [Memorandum Circular No. 11, s. 2021](#), of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), for the **Revised Administrative Disciplinary Rules on Sexual Harassment Cases (Amendment to the Sexual Harassment Provisions in the 2017 Revised Rules on Administrative Cases in the Civil Service)** pursuant to Republic Act No. 11313 (Safe Spaces Act). (As of writing, CSC is updating this.)

Scenario 5: Alleged perpetrator's entity is unknown or unclear



If it is unclear who the alleged perpetrator is or to which entity the alleged perpetrator belongs, the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff should complete the referral form and share with the PSEA Coordinator (or alternate as agreed within the PSEA Network), within 48 hours, based on informed consent by victim/survivor.

The PSEA Coordinator should conduct a basic inquiry (not an investigation) within 72 hours or as soon as reasonably possible to discover any information that would identify the concerned entity to make referral possible.

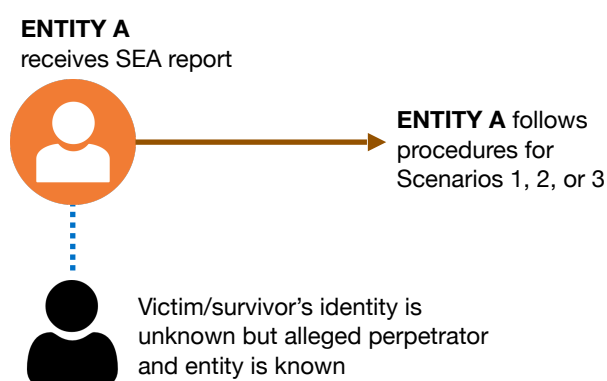
Basic inquiry includes obtaining basic information about the incident such as what happened, who is the alleged perpetrator, when and where it happened, and who else knows about the incident.

Such a basic inquiry shall prioritize the best interest of the victim/survivor and the need to minimize interviews in order to avoid retraumatization.

The PSEA Coordinator will refer the complaint to the concerned entity and cease their basic inquiry as soon as the entity of the perpetrator can be identified. If the perpetrator's entity cannot be identified, the PSEA Coordinator will refer the complaint to the RC/HC. The PSEA Coordinator should inform the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff, or initial complaint recipient, of the referral if they are in contact with the victim/survivor.

If the identity of the alleged perpetrator is unknown but their entity is known, the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff will refer the complaint to that entity, according to the procedures as under Scenario 2 above.

Scenario 6: Victim/survivor's identity is unknown, or complaint is anonymous



When the victims/survivor's identity is unknown (e.g. the complaint is reported by a third party who does not know the identity of the victim, or the complaint is made anonymously), but the alleged perpetrator and their entity is known, the complaint will still be forwarded to the concerned entity, as per scenarios above, for follow-up in accordance with its investigation policy and procedures, including to determine if administrative follow-up or investigation is possible/advisable.

Scenario 7: Victim/survivor, alleged perpetrator and entity are all unknown

Where the identity of the victim-survivor, the identity of the alleged perpetrator and the concerned entity are all unknown, then there is no distinct SEA incident to refer to and rather the PSEA Coordinator /Network shall treat it as an 'inconclusive information'. The PSEA Network, through the SOPs must determine a safe (Do No Harm) and effective procedure to inquire with community members about SEA (e.g., increasing community engagement, extra training for distributions staff) noting that such information can be an opportunity to address SEA risk mitigation and safer programming.

Scenario 8: Alleged perpetrator is a member of the affected community without a contractual link with an entity/organization

If the complaint involves a community member who does not have a contract with the entity but is involved in, or is facilitating the delivery of aid (e.g. community leader or community volunteer without a contract), the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff will follow the internal procedures of their entity for the referral of the complaint (as set out in Scenario 1) if the alleged perpetrator is associated with their entity.

If the alleged perpetrator is associated with another entity, the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff will refer the complaint to the complaint-handling body of the concerned entity (as set out in Scenario 2). Entities' own policies will determine potential follow-up actions in the absence of a contractual relationship.

If the complaint involves a community member who neither has a contract with an entity nor any agreed role on behalf of the entity to provide or facilitate the delivery of aid, the incident will be dealt with as a GBV case.

In these instances, the PSEA Focal Point/trained staff should still offer referral for assistance services (as set out above) and may inform the UN/IA PSEA Coordinator of the anonymized GBV incident, to bring to the GBV Coordinator/sub-cluster/sub-sector for their awareness of potential GBV risks and offer access to GBV services as needed.

Scenario 9: It is unclear whether the complaint alleges SEA

In cases where it is unclear whether a complaint alleges SEA, the PSEA Coordinator may provide support to the complaint recipient. No further information gathering shall be conducted, rather the complaint should be referred for determination by the concerned entity's investigation unit. When in doubt, it is good practice to behave as if SEA has been alleged, so services and follow up, including an investigation, can be triggered.

If it is determined that the complaint does not allege SEA, PSEA stakeholders still have a vested interest in timely and efficient referral for the survivor to access support services, as needed. PSEA stakeholders must be aware that community members may initially approach a mechanism or staff member with less-sensitive complaints before the trust is built to raise a SEA complaint. The SOPs should refer to other existing referral pathways for non-SEA complaints (e.g., joint CFM procedures by the AAP Working Group) or if none in place, identify the appropriate recipients for non-SEA referrals. In general, any complaint that does not involve SEA will be transferred directly to the concerned entity (if clearly indicated) or to the cluster/sector coordinating that response (e.g., Shelter, CCCM, etc.) so that the complaint can be forwarded to the relevant entity.

C. Response by the Concerned Entity

Upon receipt of the referral, the concerned entity should provide any additional assistance and support necessary to link the victim-survivor with the appropriate service providers.

Within two business days, send a confirmation to the referring personnel (e.g., PSEA FP of the referring entity) that the SEA complaint was received and that no further action is required by the referring personnel.

This acknowledgement can be a standard notification stating that the complaint was received and

the date. This should not be confused with the feedback on case status, or with entity feedback to the complainant/survivor, which are also encouraged and should be done in compliance with entity policies.

D. Identifying Additional Referrals

Given the nature of SEA and the contexts in which it occurs, an incident of SEA may not be an isolated incident, but part of a pattern of behavior requiring additional referral and links to case monitoring systems.



The Philippines has a strong legal framework on child protection, gender-based violence, and sexual misconduct. National laws mandate key government agencies to provide interventions and referral services that can be accessed by the victims/survivors.

These SOPs have outlined existing laws that can guide the PSEA Network members on identifying additional referrals and assistance needed that may arise after assessing the context:

- [RA 7610](#) - Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act
- [RA11648/8353](#) - Anti-Rape Laws
- [RA 10364/9208](#) - Anti-Trafficking in Persons Laws
- [RA 11188](#) - Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict
- [RA 11596](#) - Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage
- [RA 11313](#) - Safe Spaces Act
- [RA 10821](#) - Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act
- [RA 11930](#) - Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act
- [RA 7877](#) - Anti-Sexual Harassment Act
- [Presidential Decree 442](#) - Labor Code
- [CSC Memorandum Circular No. 11, s. 2021](#) - Revised Administrative Disciplinary Rules on Sexual Harassment Cases

The [Technical Note on the Implementation of the UN Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of SEA](#) can also be used as reference in the provision of assistance and support to SEA victims/survivors.

F. Responding/Providing Feedback to Complainants/Victims/Survivors

Feedback to complainants/victims/survivors of SEA is a two-fold responsibility: It is part of the required outcome of entities' investigations under international commitments, and it is part of victim assistance.

Victims/survivors have the right to be informed about the status of the investigative process and any other proceedings. Concerned entities also have a responsibility to notify the victim/survivor in a safe and timely manner of the outcome of their investigation. Victims/survivors have the right to request that information is provided to them in a format and way preferred by the victim/survivor (e.g., by phone, in person, in writing, by a staff member of specified gender, at specific safe location), taking into account personal circumstances, age and disability. Timely and thorough response to complaints is a meaningful part of building trust with communities.

The PSEA Coordinator/relevant PSEA Focal Point may support in providing feedback to the complainant, if requested by and dependent on the information shared by the investigating agency (i.e., basic status updates on the case). Complainants should be made aware of the limitations of providing feedback on SEA complaints, to manage expectations, and that any follow up will likely come directly from the investigation body. The alleged perpetrator also has an interest in the complaint filed against him/her, but this is not the responsibility of the PSEA Coordinator or PSEA Focal Points. Informing the subject of the complaint is the responsibility of the concerned entity in line with internal policies.

VI. INVESTIGATIONS

While it is the responsibility of each concerned entity to adhere to internal investigation policies and procedures, investigations of SEA complaints should be undertaken with a victim/survivor-centered approach, by dedicated and trained personnel of the concerned entity or by the established investigative body affiliated with the entity/provider.

It is not the responsibility of the PSEA Coordinator, PSEA Focal Points, Heads of Entities or anyone without a mandated investigation role to conduct investigations and/or try to verify the validity of a complaint.

Investigations must be conducted as soon as possible after the complaint is received and informed consent is given by the survivor. The timeline for conducting the investigation may vary.

The PSEA Network members are committed to take appropriate disciplinary action in accordance with their own internal policies in cases where SEA has been proven.

The PSEA Network is presently exploring options on how to build the SEA investigation capacities of the local CSOs.

At present, there is a plan to develop localized SEA investigation procedures that are aligned with the global and national standards but at the same time, complementary of the government's prescribed procedures under the Committee on Decorum and Investigation (CODI). All private and public sectors' entities are mandated by RA 7877 and RA 11313 to establish their respective CODIs.

The PSEA Network is also looking into creating a pool of trained SEA investigators among its NGO members and legal non-government organizations. There is a plan to develop a localized SEA Investigation Training Module for NGOs/CSOs.

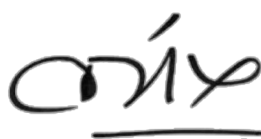
Though this is included in the present 2024 PSEA Action Plan, raising resources for these remain a challenge. But if the plans materialize, it would require a separate SOP.

This would remain a priority for the PSEA Network as it develops its Philippines PSEA Strategy Plan (2025-2028).

At the moment, NGOs/CSOs are encouraged to check [Investigator Qualification Training Scheme](#) being offered by the CHS Alliance and Humentum, for their consideration.

VII. SIGNATORY PAGE

The Philippines Inter-Agency PSEA Network's Standard Operating Procedures on the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SOPs on PSEA) is duly endorsed by the members of the United Nations and Humanitarian Country Teams on November 8, 2024. These SOPs are in accordance with the IASC Inter-Agency Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Referral Pathways Guidance Note (2023). This demonstrates our commitment to prevent, respond to, and mitigate risks of any form of SEA perpetrated by the personnel.



Gustavo González

United Nations Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator

Date signed: November 14, 2024

ZERO TOLERANCE
FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Honouring our values



VIII. ANNEXES

Note: All Annexes can be found in this [link](#) and are being updated from time to time.

A. List of SEA Reporting Channels of the Members of the PSEA Network

B. Government Reporting Channels and Referral Directory Links

C. Child Protection and Gender-based Violence Referral Pathways

D. Inter-Agency Complaint Referral Form

E. Informed Consent Form

F. Directory of UN and NGO PSEA Focal Points

G. Guidance Note on the Management of the Network's SEA Reporting Channels

*All human beings
are born free and
equal in dignity
and rights*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

#VictimsRightsFirst