



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



📷 PSEA Group session for school children conducted by Childline, Zimbabwe

# 2021

## Listening and talking to the field



Our Symbol: We wanted to capture both our journey as an organization and that of victims/survivors in a single image that could be used to symbolize our work on SEA and SH. Our chosen symbol conveys the journey that we are on as an organization in addressing SEA and SH. We chose a dark colour as the background because the subject matter is heavy, but we illuminated the path and the stars to symbolize hope. The symbol is encapsulated in a circle to convey a trusting and safe space for victims/survivors to come forward. While the two stars represent the subject areas of SEA and SH, they also represent UNHCR as well as victims/survivors who are on a personal journey following an experience of SEA or SH. We want this symbol to represent that victims are not alone, but rather we are in this together.



**WE HAVE A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY  
TO CONFRONT WHAT IS WRONG. STOP SEA**

📷 2022-04-08 - SEA Mogadishu. © UNHCR Marcel Van Maastrigt

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the ongoing challenges presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 allowed for greater stability in continuing to strengthen our efforts to tackle sexual misconduct. UNHCR maintained its operations, including in some of the world's most difficult environments, serving displaced persons in challenging and unpredictable conditions.

Significant efforts were dedicated to ensuring that protection and assistance is delivered with dignity and respect and that those we serve, the communities we work in, and our colleagues are safe from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH), in line with our victim-centred approach. This remains a key priority for the organization.

## 2. NEW AND CONTINUING INITIATIVES

In 2021, UNHCR continued to build on the progress made in previous years and to maintain a leadership role in the fight against sexual misconduct. These efforts have been in line with UNHCR's [2020-2022 Strategy and Action Plan](#) priorities, which aim to provide a safe, trusted, respectful, and inclusive environment for the people we serve and those who work for the organization. This has included focus on ensuring UNHCR's work is guided by a victim-centred approach; strengthening organizational capacity to mitigate the risks of, prevent, and respond to sexual misconduct; and maintaining UNHCR leadership in promoting and coordinating the fight against sexual misconduct in interagency fora.

### Strengthening UNHCR's Victim-Centred Approach

Following the adoption of the [Policy on a Victim-Centred Approach in UNHCR's response to Sexual Misconduct](#) in December 2020, consultations were held with UNHCR divisions and country operations on operationalizing the policy. Virtual workshops were facilitated with UNHCR's PSEA/SH technical working group to identify concrete steps within their own processes on how to integrate the policy's key principals into their entity specific standard operating procedures.

To strengthen the integration of prevention and response to SH within the organization, the Victim Care Officer for Sexual Misconduct role now sits within the Office of the Senior Coordinator, to assist and guide victims of sexual harassment through the process of accessing support and resolution. Over the past two years, the role has evolved to include new elements such as training, support to managers and sharing of UNHCR's experiences within the interagency system.

### Maintaining investment in country-based initiatives

The [PSEA Community Outreach and Communications Fund](#), an initiative jointly launched with ICVA under the High Commissioner's 2020 IASC Championship on PSEA and SH, continued into 2021 with a second round of applications. With financial support from the German Federal Foreign Office, grants were made to 15 NGOs to raise awareness and engage with communities on PSEA. The NGO projects supported through this initiative have developed community engagement materials in approximately 30



📷 Jesuit Service for Migrants and Refugees (SJMR) Brazil - 'PSEA workshop with migrants and refugees'

languages, tailored to reach over 20 different [Age, Gender, Diversity \(AGD\) profiles](#) through 40 types of materials. A [database](#) was developed to make these products available to all IASC members and PSEA stakeholders for their use and further adaptation as needed.

### Strengthened partnerships

UNHCR was among one of the first UN Agencies to adhere to the [OECD DAC Recommendations on Ending SEAH in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance](#). We also participated in and launched a pilot of the [SCHR Misconduct Disclosure Scheme](#), a tool similar to [ClearCheck](#) but for vetting and reference checking of new recruits for NGO partners.

UNHCR remained actively engaged in the work of the [UN System Chief Executive Board \(CEB\) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment](#), which is



Humanitarian Response Consortium, Philippines – copyright COM ‘Community members read the guidelines on SEA reporting’

chaired by UNHCR’s Deputy High Commissioner. UNHCR’s Senior Coordinator on Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, who represents UNHCR on the Task Force, co-led with WFP on Workstream 5 on Leadership and Culture and UNHCR participated in the Workstreams on Learning and Communication and on Advancing a Victim-Centred Approach to Sexual Harassment.

Following UNHCR’s facilitation of a reflective session on values, attitudes, and organizational culture with the CEB Task Force in late 2020, members called for more opportunity and the creation of safe spaces for discussions, a [Facilitators’ Guide on Attitudes, Values, and Organizational Culture in Relation to Prevention of Sexual Misconduct](#) was developed to allow others in the sector to hold similar sessions within their organizations. The session provided a platform for honest reflection among senior leaders on their personal perceptions, unconscious biases, and behaviours which could be triggered by power and gender differentials. UNHCR held two additional sessions for HC/RCs from across the world.

In an effort to work with new partners, the Office of the Senior Coordinator teamed up with students from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva to explore solutions for addressing SEA in urban settings as part of an innovation challenge run by the [Collaboration for Social Impact project](#). The challenge brought together student researchers and UNHCR field practitioners to think creatively around practical solutions for challenges commonly faced by the field in responding to SEA urban and peri-urban contexts.

To further support the work of partners and practitioners in the field, the E-learning on Investigating Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse for Partners was finalized and launched in 2021 on [DisasterReady.org](#). The course, a deliverable of the High Commissioner’s 2020 IASC Championship on PSEA and SH, was developed in response to specific requests from UN partners to strengthen their capacity to conduct high-quality investigations of allegations of SEA. The tool is being translated into French, Arabic, and Spanish.

# 3. CONSULTING & ENGAGING WITH COUNTRY OPERATIONS

In 2021, the [Office of the Senior Coordinator](#) placed great emphasis on outreach to country operations, ensuring that colleagues are capacitated to prevent, identify, and respond to all forms of sexual misconduct and relay and communicate this among partners and in the communities they work and in line with their operational realities.

Formal and informal consultations were organized with more than 600 UNHCR personnel in field operations and regional bureaux across the world on the issue of sexual misconduct. In addition, with emergencies at a record high in 2021, focus was also placed on ensuring integrated PSEA and SH considerations in emergency response planning and deployments.

Consultations were held with UNHCR's seven Bureaux Directors and their Senior Management teams to brief them on UNHCR's efforts around tackling sexual misconduct, present them with the tools and support available in their own efforts, and to understand specific challenges in combatting SEA and SH in their regions. A comprehensive resource kit was developed to support UNHCR operations in their efforts in this respect.

## Visits to country operations

Two visits were conducted in September and November of 2021 to Sudan and Kenya respectively. The mission to Sudan focused on operation's efforts to strengthen risk mitigation and prevention, and response, particularly in the Tigray emergency refugee response in the Gedaref region of Eastern Sudan. The Senior Coordinator's office provided support and guidance to complement ongoing efforts to mainstream PSEA, bolster response mechanisms, and strengthen interagency coordination. In Kenya, the Senior Coordinator accompanied the Victim Rights Advocate to Kakuma refugee camp, where UNHCR organized for the mission to meet with refugees and to gain an understanding of the programmes in place to prevent, mitigate and respond to SEA. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate the implementation of a victim-centred approach and key educational and training activities with particular focus on supporting victims of SEA or GBV.



UNHCR's Senior Coordinator on PSEA/SH meets with the organization We Are Alight who prevent and respond to Gender-Based-Violence, Sudan.

## Learning

Given COVID-19 restrictions and constraints, UNHCR adapted learning materials on sexual misconduct for online delivery. Virtual learning activities were delivered to approximately 600 UNHCR personnel, including UNHCR Representatives, focal points and internal facilitators for two new UNHCR Internal Learning Packages, one on protection from SEA and one on protection from SH. In addition, content was delivered virtually to over 300 personnel through activities integrated in other learning programmes, such as the Inter-Agency Coordination programme, the Reflective Leadership Dialogues, the Senior Emergency Leadership Programme, Field Security Advisors Workshops, and Workshops for Emergency Management. In all learning and awareness raising activities the approach has changed from what is known as the 3Ps – Policies, Prohibitions, and Procedures— to engagement, open dialogue and discussion.



📷 UNHCR's Senior Coordinator on PSEA/SH and UNHCR Kenya Representative meet with refugee girls in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya. © UNHCR/Pauline Kwamboka Omagwa

## UNHCR Internal Learning Packages on Protection from SEA and SH

Two new UNHCR Internal SEA/SH learning packages aim to develop skills, knowledge and behaviour of all personnel to define, detect, prevent and respond to sexual misconduct. The packages were finalised in 2021 and are currently being rolled out by country operations. Using interactive and experiential learning methodologies, the packages consist of a one-day training on PSEA and a half-day training on SH. Participants reflect on what they can do to prevent sexual misconduct and how to respond if it does happen. These packages have been adapted for both virtual and face-to-face delivery.



The packages use video case studies and testimonies based on real events, where SH or SEA is contextualized within a UNHCR setting. A facilitated discussion guides participants to examine gender and power differentials, organizational culture and values, and the underlying influences on root causes

of sexual misconduct. In the SEA course, participants focus on putting themselves in the victims' shoes, looking at the consequences of SEA, identifying tangible support measures, and putting the needs of the victim first in determining a response. In the SH course, participants are introduced to the role of the Victim Care Officer for sexual misconduct. Both packages highlight the victim-centred approach and the responsibility of personnel in preventing and responding to sexual misconduct.

While the content has been developed specifically for UNHCR internal use, it is consistent with the style and approach of the [IASC Saying No to Sexual Misconduct package for UN partners](#), launched in 2020. Translation to French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian is underway.

In a commitment towards an effective roll out of PSEA and SH training, a 2-hour Facilitators' Webinar was developed to accompany the learning package. By the end of 2021, 149 UNHCR personnel from G5 to D1 levels participated in the webinar, representing more than 80 operations and Headquarters.

## Interactive Case Conference Tool

An interactive tool – based on a video case study - was developed to facilitate peer-to-peer exchange to unpack and better understand concepts, standards, and best practices that form the work around identifying the risk of, preventing and responding to sexual misconduct. The Case Conference consists of small face-to-face or online group sessions, using a video case study to stimulate practical discussion on UNHCR's actual operational responses to SEA cases. It provides the opportunity for shared learning amongst focal points, exchanging good practices and identifying actions to improve prevention and response at the operational level. The Case Conference can be adapted by country-level focal points to meet the unique needs of their operation. The tool was rolled out across regions, with a total of 119 PSEA focal points from 50 operations, representing over 89 office locations. An external version of this resource was also produced and shared with inter-agency networks and partners. The tool is available in English with translations in French, Spanish, and Arabic planned for 2022.

## CONCLUSION

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While significant progress was made in 2021, much work remains to be done internally and collectively to eliminate sexual misconduct from UNHCR's operations and the aid sector. Stronger collaboration, more robust policy development and implementation, innovative learning and capacity building, and enhanced operational responses, including but not limited to emergency situations, remain key priorities for the organizations efforts to ensure the fight against sexual misconduct speaks to operational realities and UNHCR's global principles.