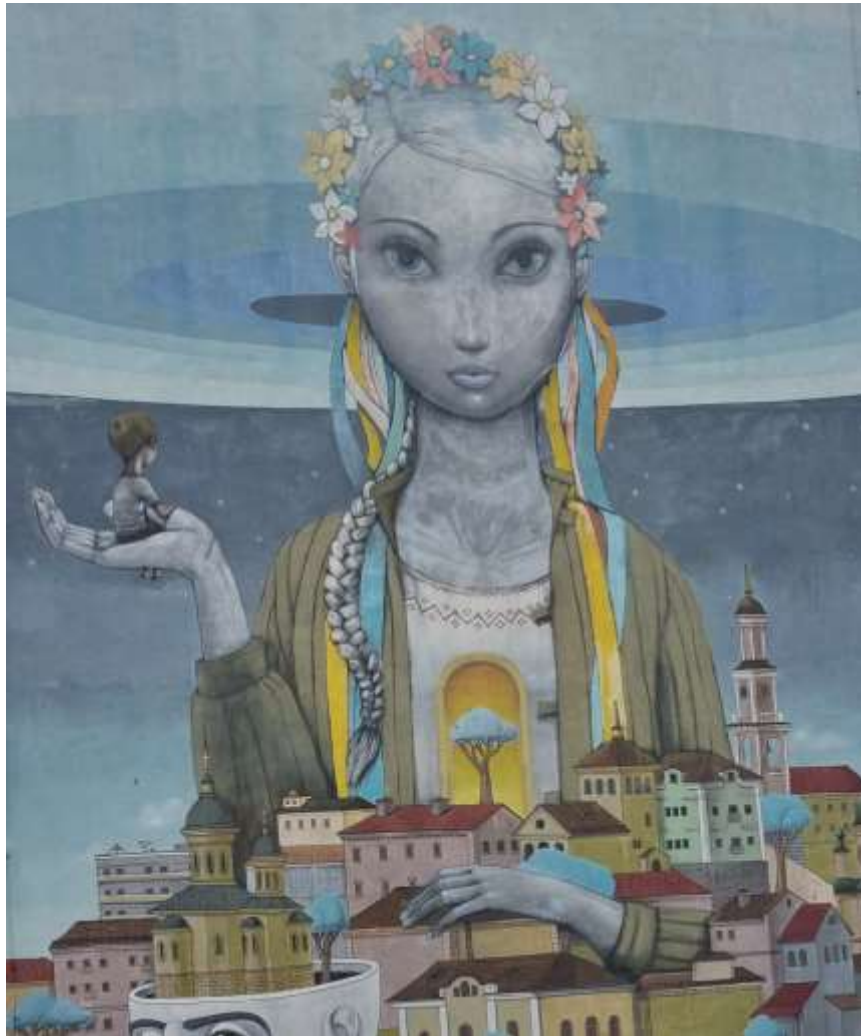


PROTECTION AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Multi-Year Strategy for Ukraine 2023-25



April 2023



PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

The purpose of this multi-year strategy is to guide the strategic direction for the collective work of the Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Programme in Ukraine. It replaces the [2017 HCT Framework on PSEA in Ukraine](#), incorporates the priorities set by the [IASC Vision and Strategy on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment 2022-26](#) and the key outcome areas and statements contained in the UNCT Ukraine Action Plan. The Strategy was endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team in Ukraine and will be implemented through the adoption of annual workplans for the PSEA Network in Ukraine.

SUMMARY OF THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

The operational context in Ukraine changed overnight in February 2022 and went from a relatively small humanitarian presence to a large-scale emergency.¹ Throughout the year, intense country-wide hostilities caused widespread destruction of infrastructure, thousands of casualties, and forced millions from their homes. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection increased from approximately 3 million people in the beginning of the year to nearly 18 million a few months later. By the end of January 2023, 6,2 million Ukrainians are estimated to be internally displaced. The massive scale-up of the humanitarian response in Ukraine was made possible thanks to the efforts of 652 organizations, more than 60% Ukrainian national NGOs. However, the humanitarian response is hampered by severe access constraints, particularly in the east and south of the country.²

The highest severity of needs is among people living in areas under the temporary military control of the Russian Federation and in areas directly affected by active hostilities. The needs are multisectoral, but intersectional diversity factors, such as gender, age, disability and minority status, are considered to play a key role in how people are impacted by the conflict. There are 7,938 sites that serve as collective or temporary accommodation, out of which, 2,498 are active sites with a population of 122,738 IDPs. It is estimated that 61% of the residents in the collective centres are women, while 25% are children and youth, 17 % are above 60 and 15% are people with disabilities. The people in collective centres are at risk of considerable protection risks, including eviction, exploitation or abuse, gender-based violence, limited access to essential services, socio-economic vulnerabilities and physical or mental harm.

There were also an estimated 4.2 million returnees during 2022, but most returns were not deemed motivated by improvements in the security situation but prompted by challenges in local

¹ The armed conflict started in 2014 but was localized to the eastern parts.

² Ukraine, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 (December 2022). Ukraine, Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 (February 2023).



integration, depletion of financial resources and fear of losing employment. The humanitarian needs continue to be great upon return.

The change in operational context prompted a review of the [PSEA Programme in Ukraine in 2023](#) and the existing inter-agency coordination structure and framework to ensure inclusiveness, efficiency and greater operationalization of the work on protection against sexual exploitation and abuse on a sub-national level. The existing PSEA Task Force was expanded to a full PSEA Network and a Technical Inter-Agency Working Group led by the PSEA Inter-Agency Coordinator and a Strategic Steering Committee, chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator, with the participation of Heads of Agencies and INGOs were established to guide the work of the Network.

VISION STATEMENT

The humanitarian response in Ukraine respects the rights and dignity of the beneficiary population and all measures are taken to ensure the integrity of the humanitarian programme, including on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

KEY CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES

The PSEA Programme in Ukraine and all its activities will be based on the following key principles:

- **Confidentiality:** Information about allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and investigations should only be shared on a need-to-know basis in order not to jeopardize the investigation and the safety and wellbeing of the victim.
- **Do No Harm:** The wellbeing of affected populations should at all times be the focus of the efforts of the humanitarian community to help them. All humanitarian actors should therefore use due diligence to avoid infringing human rights and address any adverse human rights impacts on their activities.
- **Due process:** Any allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse shall be dealt with in accordance with the main principles of due process: presumption of innocence until the allegations are substantiated, in an impartial and fair manner, and taking into account the rights of victims and witnesses.
- **A victim/survivor centered approach:** A victim/survivor-centred approach will be used for all activities contained in this strategy based on confidentiality, safety, respect and non-discrimination. Assistance should be provided in a manner which seeks to uphold the



rights, dignity, and well-being of the victim/survivor. This may entail the implementation of safety measures to protect against retaliation, re-victimization, and re-traumatization.³

- **Accountability to affected populations:** The implementation of this strategy aims to enable affected people in Ukraine to meet their different needs, address their vulnerabilities, build on pre-existing capacities and adapt programmes by systematically sharing timely, relevant and actionable information with communities, support the meaningful participation and leadership of affected people in decision-making, regardless of sex, age, disability status and other diversities, and ensure that community feedback systems are in place to enable affected people to assess and comment on the performance of humanitarian action.
- **Best interest of the child:** All decisions made regarding the prevention and response to SEA allegations shall be guided by the best interests of the child and the right of the child to participate and to be heard.

UKRAINE UN COUNTRY TEAM ACTION PLAN OUTCOME STATEMENTS

This strategy has been aligned with, and is complementary to, the agreed outcome areas and outcome statements of the 2023 UN Country Team Action Plan for Ukraine based on the IASC Core Indicators which are:

Outcome area 1 Prevention: All humanitarian workers in Ukraine personnel know the standards of conduct and understand their responsibilities to address sexual exploitation and abuse, child safeguarding and other misconduct.

Outcome area 2 Safe and accessible reporting: Every child and adult recipient of United Nations assistance has access to a safe, gender and child-sensitive pathways to report sexual exploitation and abuse, that provides access to assistance, are appropriate to the context and accessible to those in the most vulnerable situations.

Outcome area 3 Victim's right to assistance: Every victim/survivor/complainant is offered immediate, quality, assistance (medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, physical protection reintegration support).

Outcome area 4 Accountability and investigations: Every SEA victim/survivor, who gives their consent, will have their case investigated in a prompt and safe way, taking into account their rights and interests, in accordance with due process principles.

Outcome area 5 PSEA inter-agency coordination structure: An inclusive and efficient PSEA inter-agency country-level structure is in place, preventing and mitigating risks and responding to allegations of SEA, in a transparent and effective manner.

³ The term 'victim' has intentionally been chosen by the UN to denote persons subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse, while 'survivor' is normally used in the context of gender-based violence. This strategy will use both terms due to the interface with gender-based violence services.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The following strategic objectives will enable the agencies and organizations participating in the humanitarian response in Ukraine to realize its vision:

Objective 1 Ensure that risks of sexual exploitation and abuse are identified and mitigated in a timely manner.

Some of the risks of SEA in Ukraine can be related to the operational context. The sudden onset of a humanitarian emergency with large-scale displacement, mobility within the country but also across borders, high staff turnover of humanitarian workers, many new humanitarian actors, less oversight and procedures are in place is always a high-risk factor for sexual exploitation and abuse. The fact that many displaced people live in collective shelters is another risk factor since it makes them exposed, but also the lack of visibility of persons in private accommodation is a risk factor. At the frontline, there is limited humanitarian access for humanitarian agencies, which constitutes another significant risk factor. Operational risk factors are the pre-existing prevalence of gender-based violence and human trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation, the high number of women and children who are displaced, high concentrations of older persons and persons with disabilities, but also marginalized groups such as Roma and LGBTIQ+ and non-Ukrainian speakers. The Roma ethnic minority, as well as members of the LGBTIQ+ community, may face discrimination when attempting to access services and assistance and may face enhanced risks to their physical safety.

The main activities under this objective aim to ensure that risks are identified in a timely manner by mainstreaming SEA into inter-agency risk assessments, continuous joint and sector specific risk assessments, as well as participation in initiatives aimed at strengthening humanitarian principles in the response, e.g. on Last Mile Delivery together with the Humanitarian Access Working Group and field monitoring missions. Once risks have been identified, risk mitigation and management strategies or activities will be designed to ensure that the identified risks are addressed.

Objective 2 Ensure that safe, accessible and victim/survivor-centred reporting mechanisms are in place.

Following the spread of the armed conflict, there was a disruption of existing complaint and feedback mechanisms and with the surge in new humanitarian actors, there is a need to consolidate the existing complaint and feedback mechanism, coordinate predictable and transparent inter-agency referral pathways and introduce new, context specific, safe and accessible complaint mechanisms. The mechanisms should be accessible to all persons (adult or child) who come into contact with, or benefit from, protection and assistance by the UN and its partners. The main reporting channels in Ukraine are hotlines by service providers,



an inter-agency referral e-mail address and outreach by mobile teams, but other reporting mechanisms should also be explored together with the affected communities.

The main activities foreseen in the Strategy are to finalize the inter-agency referral mechanism and to work with the affected communities in identifying and strengthening multiple channels of reporting, including directly to the partner and/or the responsible UN agency, or service providers at sub-national level. Mobile teams conducting outreach activities, such as camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) or GBV/PSS/SRH Mobile Teams are key actors to sensitize populations, receiving and following up on complaints, as well as civil society organizations led by internally displaced persons, women, and/or groups with specific needs.

Objective 3 Identify and remove barriers to reporting allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse by humanitarian workers are often under reported forms of gender-based violence. Since a large-scale humanitarian presence is relatively new in Ukraine, comprehensive awareness raising about the humanitarian architecture, applicable ethical rules and the establishment of an environment of trust and confidence to encourage reporting will be a long-term goal. In order to remove barriers to reporting, it will also be important to understand and map norms and values, gender dynamics, views and practices around GBV, and misconduct relating to SEA.

The main activities of the Strategy will focus on ensuring that prevention of SEA and information about referral procedures are included in capacity-building activities with teams doing outreach with affected populations, that there is regular interaction with the regional PSEA Network to learn more from the experiences of the diaspora, improve access to information about available reporting mechanisms for all stakeholders, to cooperate with the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Group, the Age and Diversity Working Group and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to have consultations with the affected communities about the relevance and appropriateness of the available information.

Objective 4 Develop an effective joint communication strategy in consultation with the affected communities.

There are a number of different stakeholders in Ukraine who should be aware of what SEA is, the prohibition of SEA, and reporting mechanisms. The groups include the internally displaced people, UN and I/NGOs personnel, volunteers, contractors and government service providers. An active, inclusive and regular dialogue with the affected people is paramount in order to increase awareness of SEA risks and how to respond to situations of SEA. The channels of communication will include community awareness campaigns and outreach programmes with information, education and communication (IEC) materials (posters, leaflets, videos) using multiple channels



(radio, social media, websites, face to face interactions, etc.) and regular awareness activities (workshops, dialogues) targeting the different audiences.

A joint inter-agency communication strategy in Ukraine will improve awareness, knowledge, and behavior change, as well as provide information on reporting mechanisms and support to victims. The main messages would be that humanitarian assistance is free, assistance should never be given in exchange for sexual, financial, social or political gain, the definition of SEA, how and where to report SEA, the steps that will be taken to ensure the safety, confidentiality and dignity of complainants, protect children against any kind of condition that endangers their dignity or their physical or psychological integrity, what services are available to support those who have experienced harm, and how to access them. In order to enhance the outreach, the dissemination can take place together with the GBV sub-cluster, the Child Protection, sub-cluster, the CCCM outreach teams and through partners. The design and launch of inter-agency website with all key documents and resources easily accessible will be another key activity.

Objective 5 Provide access to quality, predictable and comprehensive GBV services.

In Ukraine, the UN and its partners complement the available services provided by the Government to GBV survivors. The GBV Sub-Cluster agreed on a generic GBV referral pathway in 2022 and the Child Protection Sub-Cluster on child protection referral pathways for child survivors. Victims/survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse will have access to available GBV and child protection services provided by the Government, as well as through Child Protection and GBV/MHPSS/SRH Mobile Teams and a dedicated inter-agency victim care focalpoint, who can provide counselling on the reporting procedure, consequences of reporting and facilitate access to services. The GBV and Child Protection Sub-Clusters ensure that the information on available services provided by the UN and NGOs is regularly updated and communicated to the PSEA Network.

The main activities under this objective are to ensure that all key service providers are aware of SEA as a form of GBV and how to report cases disclosed when accessing services with the consent of the victim, and that access is facilitated to the main GBV services for a SEA victim identified through other forms of complaint channels.

Objective 6 Strengthen partner capacity in regard to prevention, risk mitigation and response to SEA allegations.

The large number of organizations participating in the humanitarian response in Ukraine, often without prior experience working in a humanitarian context, pose another challenge. In the beginning of 2023, there were an estimated 700 organizations with partnership agreements with the United Nations in Ukraine. The UN cannot partner with entities that fail to address sexual exploitation and abuse through appropriate preventive measures, investigation and corrective action and must therefore carry out a screening process before entering into cooperative



arrangements with implementing partners and many international NGOs apply the same criteria with their partners.⁴

In addition to mapping partner capacity to prevent, mitigate the risk of and respond to allegations of SEA, the PSEA Network will roll out an inter-agency training of trainer programme for national NGOs based on the *IASC learning programme Say No to Sexual Misconduct*, and supporting national NGOs to meet the minimum criteria and facilitate trainings for sector specific partners within CCCM, GBV/SHR and frontline responders. A complete resource kit will be made available to national partners with key documents in translation and access to various e-learning programmes.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The implementation of this strategy will take place through the adoption of annual workplans of the inter-agency SEA Network. It will be monitored on a continuous basis using the PSEA minimum core indicators.

⁴ 2018 UN Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse involving Implementing Partners.

