**Internal UN Guidance for Coordinated Interagency Operationalization of the PSEA IP Protocol of Shared Non-Governmental Implementing Partners**

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## **Introduction**

Strengthening protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) is a shared responsibility of the humanitarian and development community as a whole, including both the United Nations and its implementing partners.

Due to the importance placed on PSEA, United Nations entities developed the [United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners](https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/sites/www.un.org.preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/files/un_protocol_on_sea_allegations_involving_implementing_partners_en.pdf) (United Nations IP Protocol) in 2018, which outlines the requirements for the United Nations when working with its implementing partners. In an effort to implement the United Nations IP Protocol through a harmonized approach, the United Nations entities are using a [Common Assessment](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/un-implementing-partner-psea-capacity-assessment) tool and are piloting a common Capacity Strengthening Implementation Plan.

The assessment is intended to provide United Nations entities the necessary assurance of partners’ organizational capacities to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, agree with their partners on support and monitoring activities and serve as a baseline for tracking progress. The United Nations entities will assess and score a partner’s capacity based on a set of eight core standards on PSEA organizational policies and procedures to prevent and respond to SEA.

Each UN entity may have its own internal guidance to operationalize the PSEA protocol. However, for the purpose of undertaking a coordinated approach, the following joint guidance on undertaking the process has been developed[[1]](#footnote-1).

Assessment and monitoring are a core part of implementing partner management and is thus the responsibility of the person managing the relationship, with technical assistance from the PSEA focal points.

Please note, the process outlined in this document is related to CSO/NGO implementing partners only. Grantees, vendors, human resource and service contracts have similar provisions built into their contracts regarding preventing and addressing PSEA and are outside the scope of the United Nations IP protocol. Government implementing partners are excluded from the initial roll out and will be assessed at a later date to be determined and communicated.

**Process overview**

(4) Appropriate monitoring and support activities

(3) Documented decision incl. capacity- strengthening implementation plan

(2) UN organization

 review & make preliminary determination of partner capacity

(1) Partner self-assesses

(5) Final determination of partner capacity

Note that the United Nations IP Protocol requires agencies to complete the assessment before engaging with partners. This means any new partner must be assessed prior to beginning implementation of any activities. In a humanitarian situation, it may not be possible to complete the assessment before engaging the partner. In those instances, the office can mark the partner as low capacity and undertake the assessment as soon as possible, within a maximum of three months from initial engagement with the partner[[2]](#footnote-2). The country office should do a note to the file explaining why the assessment was not conducted prior to selection.

## **Partner self-assesses**

The implementing partner conducts a self-assessment[[3]](#footnote-3) (including a self-rating) and submits the completed assessment, together with relevant supporting documents, to the UN entity conducting the assessment as proof of evidence of meeting the required standard. UN entities can use this [draft message](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/PSEA_sample_communications.pdf) to inform their partners of the assessment.

If the partner does not have any direct contact with beneficiaries of assistance[[4]](#footnote-4) (e.g. desk based research) as part of any of its operations, some UN entities may not require the partner to complete the assessment. In these cases, the partner may be able to make note of this in the form and return it to the lead UN entity without completing the rest of the self-assessment. In this case, the partner may have to undergo PSEA assessment at a later time or with another UN entity if the nature of programmatic activities changes and there is direct contact with beneficiaries.

*Note:* Beneficiaries of assistance are individuals who are direct or indirect recipients of a partner’s services or the UN’s action. In other words, this refers to people who either a partner or the UN entity works with and/or serves or seeks to assist and who are typically in situations of vulnerability and dependence vis à vis partner’s or UN entity’s personnel. This includes any activities of the partner that are funded by an entity other than the UN.

The “*no contact with beneficiarie*s”[[5]](#footnote-5) rating only applies when the partner does not conduct any activity which involves contact with beneficiaries of assistance or other members of vulnerable communities, whether as part of a UN entity workplan or as part of a contractual arrangement with another UN or non-UN entity. One such example is a research institution who only conducts desk-based research. If a partner who is initially given a “no contact with beneficiaries” rating subsequently undertakes activities that involve contact with beneficiaries, the partner must undergo the assessment.

For existing partners, when there is a coordinated process being undertaken at country level, a lead UN entity will be assigned to conduct the assessment using this common self-assessment and lead on the verification and follow up activities for shared partners. The lead UN entity will be selected based on its mandate, the financial or geographical scope of the project/programme or the types of activities implemented within the scope of the project/programme.

For existing partners in countries where a shared process has not yet been established, the necessary arrangements should be set up as soon as possible. If this is not feasible, each UN entity will follow its own internal process and make the completed assessments available to other UN entities to ensure a partner is only assessed once.

In most cases, a PSEA assessment will need to be completed *before* entering into a new partnership with a UN entity, as part of its own selection processes[[6]](#footnote-6). Upon completing the assessment, the UN entity will request the IP to upload the results into the UN Partner Portal under the “other information” tab[[7]](#footnote-7), or through a UNCT shared platform so that other UN entities will see it has been assessed.

## **UN review and preliminary determination of partner capacity**

The UN entity focal point, with the support of the other relevant colleagues including the PSEA focal point(s), will review and either confirm the self-rating of the partner or ask for [additional clarification or documentation](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/PSEA_sample_communications.pdf). Once the partner has been given an opportunity to respond to the request for clarification, the UN entity will review and score the partner’s capacity rating based on a set of eight core standards using this [sheet](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/PSEA_self_assessment_cap_monitoring_plan.xlsx). The lead UN entity communicates the score to the partner as a [message](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/PSEA_sample_communications.pdf). The UN entity should share the results of the assessment in pdf format.

If the partner does not receive a full capacity score, the UN entity should also justify its engagement/continued partnership, either by completing the internal [PSEA Engagement Justification Form](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Vxb8vThbZ24Eo82XM3Ob2evNXcbbSbhM/edit) or according to the process/form the UN entity has in place for capturing this information. Under no circumstances should the justification be shared with the partner.

Compliance with each core standard will be assessed individually and rated with a “yes” or no”. The number of core standards met provides the basis for the partner’s “SEA Rating” and reflects the partner’s current capacities.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Total score** | **PSEA organizational capacities** |
| 8 | Meets all core standards (full capacity) |
| 6 to 7 | Meets most core standards. Support required to address remaining gaps (medium capacity) |
| 5 or fewer | Meets few core standards. Urgent action needed to strengthen PSEA capacity (low capacity) |

The assessment and subsequent SEA rating factor are used to determine the capacity of the implementing partner and as a basis for developing a plan to strengthen the PSEA capacity of implementing partners, where needed.

Detailed guidance on how to assess the 8 core standards, develop a capacity strengthening plan and monitor capacity can be found in each entity's specific technical guidance document.

The UN entity focal point, with the technical support of the PSEA focal point(s), is responsible for rating the partner for the core standards[[8]](#footnote-8).

### **Note: Translation of score and risk rating between different assessment tools**

Since 2018 there have been several tools developed to assess partners’ PSEA capacities. Partners who have been assessed after September 2018 do not need to be assessed again, so long as the previous assessment covered the following criteria: mandatory screening of personnel; mandatory training; adequate reporting procedures; appropriate action in past cases; adequate investigative and assistance capacities.

The table on the next page provides guidance on how to translate the scoring and capacity rating. Although the UNICEF assessment tool did not include a question on core standard 8, corrective measures, the UN entities have agreed to accept the assessment. If a partner scored less than 18 on UNICEF’s assessment, the common tool must be used when conducting the follow up reassessment (see Section 5 below on Final determination of partner capacity). For partners who scored 18, UN entities are encouraged to review past corrective actions taken as part of regular monitoring.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **UN Common Assessment Core Standard**  | **Translation from UNICEF Core Standard**  |
| **Corresponding standard** | **UNICEF scoring** | **Translated UN Common Tool scoring** |
| 1 – Organisational policy | CS 1 – Organisational policyThis core standard is identical. | “1 or 2” | ‘No’ |
| “3” | ‘Yes’ |
| 2 - Organisational Management – Subcontracting | Requirement 1) of CS 2 - Organizational Management and HR Systems | “1” | ‘No’ |
| “2” | If Requirement 1) is met, enter a ‘Yes’. If it is not met, enter a ‘No’ |
| “3” | ‘Yes’ |
| 3 - Human Resources Systems | Requirement 2) of CS 2 - Organizational Management and HR Systems | “1” | ‘No’ |
| “2” | If Requirement 1) is met, enter a ‘Yes’. If it is not met, enter a ‘No’ |
| “3” | ‘Yes’ |
| 4 - Mandatory Training | CS 3- Mandatory Training | “1 or 2” | ‘No’ |
| “3” | ‘Yes’ |
| 5 - Reporting  | CS 4 - Reporting | “1 or 2” | ‘No’ |
| “3” | ‘Yes’ |
| 6 - Assistance and referrals | CS 5 - Assistance and referrals | “1 or 2” | ‘No’ |
| “3” | ‘Yes’ |
| 7 - Investigations | CS 6 - Investigations | “1 or 2” | ‘No’ |
| 8 - Corrective measures | “3” | ‘Yes’ |
| **Final scoring** |
| **UNICEF scoring and rating** | **Translated Common Assessment Core Standard scoring and rating** |
| **Organisation capacities** | **SEA Risk Rating** |  |
| Adequate capacity (18) | Low risk (18)  | 8 (Meets all standards/full capacity) |
| Adequate capacity (15-17) | Low risk (15-17)  | 6 to 7 (Meets most standards/medium capacity) |
| Needs improvement (9-14) | Medium risk (9-14)  |
| Low (6-8) | High risk (6-8)  | 5 or fewer (does not meet the minimum standards/low capacity)  |

## **Documented decision, including capacity-strengthening implementation plan**

If a UN entity selects an implementing partner assessed as having capacity gaps in one or several areas, it is required to a) justify why the engagement of this partner is necessary; and b) develop an implementation plan outlining appropriate risk mitigation, capacity building and monitoring[[9]](#footnote-9). This section outlines how to do this.

How the UN engages with the implementing partner depends on its SEA rating, as summarized below:

* **Full Capacity (8/8 core standards met):** Sign an implementing partner agreement and workplan (if new partner) and incorporate monitoring of PSEA capacity into continuous monitoring plans (for new and existing implementing partners).
* **Medium Capacity (6 to 7 core standards met) and low capacity (5 or fewer core standards met):** Prior to entering into/continuing with existing implementing partner agreement, **justify the selection/continued engagement of the implementing partner** notwithstanding its limited/low PSEA capacity, either by completing the [PSEA Engagement Justification Form](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Vxb8vThbZ24Eo82XM3Ob2evNXcbbSbhM/edit) or another process/form the UN entity has in place for capturing this information. Additionally, **develop a capacity-strengthening implementation plan** outlining appropriate risk mitigation measures (including capacity building and monitoring) and steps the implementing partner needs to take in order to move towards a “full capacity level” (i.e. 8/8 core standards met).

### **Documenting the decision**

Once the UN entity focal point completes the partner’s PSEA assessment, the results must be documented and uploaded on the UN Partner Portal (by the partner) or shared, as agreed upon, by the UN country team.

Prior to signing an implementing partner agreement or workplan with a partner, the UN entity focal point must a) provide an SEA rating; b) justify why the engagement/continuation of an implementing partner who receives less than full capacity is necessary (using the [PSEA Engagement Justification Form](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Vxb8vThbZ24Eo82XM3Ob2evNXcbbSbhM/edit) or other process/form the UN entity has in place for capturing this information); and c) develop, with the support of the PSEA focal point(s), and in collaboration with other UN entities working with the partner, a capacity strengthening implementation plan outlining appropriate risk mitigation, capacity building and monitoring for all new and existing implementing partners who have contact with beneficiaries.

### **Developing a capacity-strengthening implementation plan**

For low or medium capacity partners, the UN entity focal point should work together with the implementing partner(s) and other UN entities working with the partner to jointly develop a [capacity strengthening implementation plan](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/PSEA_self_assessment_cap_monitoring_plan.xlsx)[[10]](#footnote-10). This fosters a shared understanding of the implementing partner’s organizational strengths and areas of improvement on PSEA moving forward. The UN or other partners may provide external support, as needed, to the implementing partner, including through training, technical advice, or increased coordination with interagency activities. Please note, there should only be one capacity strengthening plan for partners shared with other UN entities. Each entity does not need to develop its own plan, but can add locations or sectors to the joint plan.

## **Undertake monitoring and support activities**

Monitoring the implementing partner, particularly those involved in **higher risk programme activities,** is a key component of ensuring compliance with SEA prevention and response requirements, in line with Article 18 of the United Nations IP Protocol.

Higher-risk programme activities, as defined by Article 13 of the United Nations IP Protocol, involve *at least one* of the following:

1. Take place in high-risk environments such as camps and shelters;
2. Involve the implementing partner having direct contact with children;
3. Take place in environments where SEA has occurred in the past and/or where sexual and gender based violence is prevalent.

How the UN monitors the implementing partner depends on their level of capacity:

After activities in the capacity strengthening implementation plan are completed and/or ,the implementing partner reaches full capacity, the focal point must continue to monitor the implementing partners’ PSEA capacity against the 8 core standards through continuous monitoring.

Where feasible, and when there are shared partners, United Nations entities should always work jointly to carry out the monitoring and support activities. This joint work can be supported by the PSEA Network and/or PSEAH Coordinator (where they are in place).

## **Final determination of partner capacity**

The final determination of an implementing partner’s PSEA capacity is determined as follows:

* After initial assessment, if SEA rating is full capacity (score of 8);
* After reassessment, if given a SEA rating of medium or low during the initial assessment[[11]](#footnote-11).

All implementing partners should meet all 8 core standards *within six months* of completing the implementation plan.

Therefore, six (6) months after the partner and UN entity complete the implementation plan, the UN entity focal point must reassess any partner who received a medium or low capacity SEA rating during the initial assessment and give a new SEA rating to the partner.

As a result of its 6-month reassessment:

If the implementing partner receives a *medium capacity* SEA rating, the UN entity may continue to engage the implementing partner under exceptional circumstances with increased monitoring or other risk mitigation measures per agency specific requirements.

If the implementing partner again receives a *low capacity* SEA rating, the implementing partner may be given an exceptional 3-month extension to reach full compliance. After the end of those three months, if the implementing partner still fails to meet all 8 core standards, the UN may be required to suspend and/or terminate the partnership, in line with para 24 of the United Nations implementing partner protocol, para 6.2 [ST/SGB/2003/13](http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=ST/SGB/2003/13)[[12]](#footnote-12).

## **Validity of SEA rating**

The final determination of an implementing partner’s capacity, based on the assessment (or reassessment) and subsequent monitoring and support activities, is valid for a period of five years, unless there are significant changes to a partner's PSEA-related capacities, or any SEA related events which would require an earlier re-assessment.

The results of the assessment will be shared with the partner being assessed and with other United Nations entities. It is important to only share the assessment results and not the internal justifications for working with the partner.

As a reminder, the UN recognizes a valid PSEA assessment undertaken by any other United Nations entity any time after September 2018, as long as the previous assessment covered the following criteria:

* mandatory screening of personnel;
* mandatory training;
* adequate reporting procedures;
* appropriate action in past cases;
* adequate investigative and assistance capacities (including referral pathways where partners do not have in-house investigation/assistance capacities).

The UN entity should do due diligence to ensure that the past assessment covers locations, sectors and types of activities covered in the co-operation agreement with the partner. Please see Section 2 above for specific information on translating score and risk rating between different risk assessment tools.

**Annex I: Technical guidance**

[The methodology for review of PSEA assessment](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_92I3ddsk72XJflHj5SEzeGdoeNHL_aD/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=110294799294261604138&rtpof=true&sd=true) provides guidance on the methodology to be applied by UN agencies when reviewing partner assessments.

**CONTRIBUTORS**



1. Note that while this guidance is geared primarily toward country teams undertaking a coordinated approach, it is the responsibility of all levels of the UN - including headquarters, regional offices and country offices - to fully implement the PSEA protocol according to the processes established by each entity. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For UNICEF, new partnerships signed during rapid onset emergencies may be granted a 3-month exception. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The partner may require UN assistance to complete the self-assessment. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Beneficiaries of assistance are individuals who are direct or indirect recipients of a partner’s or the UN’s action. In other words, this refers to people who a partner or a UN entity or works with and/or serves or seeks to assist and are typically in situations of vulnerability and dependence vis à vis partner’s or the UN entity’s personnel. This includes any activities the partner undertakes under a contractual agreement with entities other than the UN entity. Therefore, the ‘no contact with beneficiaries’ rating applies only when the partner does not conduct any activity which involves contact with beneficiaries of assistance or other members of vulnerable communities, for example, desk based research. However, if the same partner subsequently undertakes activities that involve contact with beneficiaries, the partner must undergo the assessment. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For UNICEF, this rating is referred to as “low risk assumed”. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For UNFPA, if a new partner scores low capacity, the office should consider engaging another similarly qualified IP with better PSEA capacity. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. PSEA functionality will be integrated into the UNPP in early 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For UNFPA only: Core standard 8 must be referred to the UNFPA Senior Focal Point for PSEAH (Deputy Executive Director for Management), or their delegate, the PSEAH Coordinator, for assessment of adequacy of the response as well as to the Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS) per partners’ reporting obligations derived from their contractual relationship with UNFPA.

For more information on how UNFPA addresses core standard 8, please see [UNFPA Operationalization of the United Nations Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Involving Implementing Partners: Assessment Process and Technical Guidance](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ghhI4G7sUe9o55v26YDH2KRXwupWtXAn/view). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Please see resources in Section D. Technical Guidance of this document for more information on risk mitigation activities and resources available to strengthen capacity. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The capacity plan is on sheet 3 of the [self assessment](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/PSEA_self_assessment_cap_monitoring_plan.xlsx). The completed capacity template doubles as a monitoring tool to capture the IP’s progress. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Partners who scored less than 18 on the UNICEF assessment tool must be reassessed using the Common tool [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Para. 6.2 of [ST/SGB/2003/13](http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=ST/SGB/2003/13) states that the “failure of those entities or individuals to take preventive measures against sexual exploitation and abuse, to investigate allegations thereof, or to take corrective action when sexual exploitation and abuse has occurred, shall constitute grounds for termination of any cooperative arrangement with the United Nations.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)