

## UNHCR's PARTNER PSEA CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS

### Why do we have to make the assessments?

According to the Secretary-General's Bulletin 9 October 2003 on Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13) and the 2018 UN Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse involving Implementing Partners, the UN cannot partner with entities that fail to address sexual exploitation and abuse through appropriate preventive measures, investigation and corrective action. Such failures shall constitute grounds for the termination of any cooperative arrangement with the UN. All UN entities must therefore carry out a screening before entering into co-operative arrangements with implementing partners. When assessing a potential implementing partner as part of a screening process, the relevant UN partner entity shall assess the capacity of the potential implementing partner to prevent, to mitigate risks of, or respond to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).

In 2019, UNHCR started to conduct assessments of its partners' capacity to prevent, mitigate the risk of and respond to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse based on a checklist. In September 2020, a harmonized assessment tool and methodology were adopted under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). By promoting a harmonized UN and IASC capacity assessment, the UN and its implementing partners will benefit from increased transparency and reduced processes. UN funds, agencies and programmes will have the necessary assurance of partners' organizational capacities on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) with this assessment. UNHCR conducted a pilot of the harmonized assessment tool in 12 operations in 2020 and rolled out the partner assessments globally during 2021. The core standards and the requirement of a partner assessment have been incorporated into UNHCR's Partnership Agreements.

### What is the PSEA partner assessment?

UNHCR will assess and score its partners capacity to prevent, mitigate the risk of, and respond to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. The assessment is based on a set of eight standards on PSEA organizational policies and procedures. The focus of the assessment is whether systems and processes are in place in regard to organizational policy, organizational management, human resources system, mandatory trainings, reporting mechanisms, assistance and referrals mechanisms, investigations, and corrective actions (disciplinary, administrative and operational). Compliance with each standard has to be assessed individually and rated with "yes" or "no. The number of standards met provides the basis for the partner's "SEA Risk Rating" and reflects the partner's current capacities.

### Who has to undergo the assessment?

All entities to which a UN office or entity has entrusted the implementation of a programme and/or project specified in a signed document (Partnership Agreement), along with the

assumption of responsibility and accountability for the effective use of resources and the delivery of outputs must undergo the assessment. This may include government institutions, inter-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations, including NGOs with a co-operative arrangement with UNHCR. Implementing partners' sub-contractors are subsumed within this definition, which means that partners are responsible to ensure that their sub-contractors have the adequate capacity. Operational partners without a co-operation agreement with UNHCR, and organizations led by refugees or other persons of concern to UNHCR who have a grant agreement with UNHCR, do not need to undergo these partner assessments, but should consult with UNHCR on what specific safeguards may be required.<sup>1</sup>

Since the assessment is linked to the conclusion of a Partnership Agreement with UNHCR, which is a de-centralized process, the assessment should be made at country office level (or field office level if the office is authorized to sign the Partnership Agreement with UNHCR). Each entity signing a Partnership Agreement with UNHCR should do a separate assessment e.g Government entities or Ministries.

### What if another UN entity has already made an assessment?

Assessments made by another UN entity are considered valid by UNHCR if they use the same methodology and standards as the IASC Harmonized Assessment tool and they covered the field locations where UNHCR operates and the type of activities UNHCR implements. UNHCR's country office will therefore have to review the scope of a previous assessment and determine whether additional activities should be added to the joint capacity strengthening implementation plan to ensure alignment with the scope of UNHCR's Partnership Agreement.

### When should the assessment take place?

Normally, the assessment should be part of the regular process for selection and retention of partners and be concluded before the Partnership Agreement with UNHCR is finalized. During 2021-22, UNHCR aims to finalize the assessments and capacity development of all its existing implementing partners and may therefore request them to start the process during project implementation.

For new partners, signing the Partner Declaration on the UN Partner Portal and the submission of the PSEA self-assessment form and supporting documents, alternatively evidence of an assessment undertaken by another UN entity, on the UN Partner Portal are eligibility criteria for registration with UNHCR. The verification of the self-assessment form of short-listed candidates will take place as part of the risk assessment of new partners during the selection process.

Once the assessment has been conducted, it is valid for five years. The assessment may have to be re-done if there is a significant change in circumstances e.g a number of new allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against a partner, the operational context changes (e.g there

---

<sup>1</sup> For risk management for organizations led by persons of concern, see separate guidance.

is a sudden onset emergency) or the scope of the partnership agreement changes in regard to high-risk locations (e.g remote locations) or high-risk activities (e.g working with children or other persons with specific needs).

## How is the assessment made?

The assessment consists of the five steps:

1a) New partner fills out **the PSEA self-assessment form** available on [the UN Partner Portal](#) and submits supporting documents when registering on the Portal.

1b) **Existing partners** will be approached by respective country office when and how to do the assessment prior to the conclusion of next year's Partnership Agreement. The full PSEA functionality is expected to be available on the UN Partner Portal by the end of 2021. During the transitional period, partners are requested to submit their documents in paper copies to UNHCR's country office.

2) UNHCR's country office reviews the form and documents, requests clarifications from the partner and **verifies** the partner's capacity as part of the selection/retention process for partners.

3) If needed, UNHCR and the partner jointly agree on **a six-month-capacity-strengthening implementation plan**, including monitoring and support activities. The template is available on [the UN Partner Portal](#).

4) After six months, the implementation of the capacity-strengthening plan will be **reviewed** (normally during the mid-year project implementation review).

5) **The final decision of partner capacity** is shared with the partner and uploaded on the UN Partner Portal.

## What happens if the partner does not have sufficient capacity?

If the partner meets all the eight core standards and therefore has **full capacity and capability**, the final decision on PSEA capacity is signed and UNHCR's regular partnership engagement procedures apply.

If the partner meets 6-7 core standards and therefore has **medium capacity and capability**, UNHCR may conclude the Partnership Agreement, but support may be required to address the remaining gaps within six months. The final decision confirming the partner's full capacity will be made, following a review of the successful implementation of the support activities (during the mid-term or final review of the project) and will be uploaded on the UN Partner Portal. It will be required for the partner to be retained for the following year.

If the partner meets 5 or less of the core standards and therefore has **low capacity and capability**, immediate action is required to strengthen the PSEA capacity. If the operation still wishes to retain the partner e.g. because of specialized technical expertise within a particular area, lack of viable alternatives in that sector/location, and an otherwise satisfactory risk assessment of the partner, a detailed implementation plan outlining appropriate risk mitigation measures, including capacity development and monitoring should be attached to the Partnership Agreement. The final decision confirming the partner's full capacity will be made

following a review of the successful implementation of the support activities (mid-term or final review of the project) and will be uploaded on the UN Partner Portal. This decision will be required for the partner to be retained for the following year.

### Is it possible to challenge the results of the assessment?

The assessment and the strengthening of the capacity of UNHCR's partners to prevent, mitigate the risk of and respond to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse is a joint consultative process. The final decision and its consequences will be discussed with the partner. The legal consequences relating to the Partnership Agreement are contained in the Agreement.

### Where to go for more help on the partner assessments?

UNHCR's country offices have dedicated focal points who will guide partners through the process, provide resources and advice. Training materials, sample documents and other resources will be made available on the [UN Partner Portal](#) and UNHCR's internet page for partners. Partners can also submit questions to the Implementation Management and Assurance Service of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results at [epartner@unhcr.org](mailto:epartner@unhcr.org).

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Implementation Management and Assurance Service  
Division of Strategic Planning and Results  
September 2021