



## Safeguarding at USAID

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is committed to ensuring that its workforce and partners uphold the principle of “do no harm,” and integrate comprehensive and effective safeguarding regimes in all of its programming and operations. USAID defines safeguarding as the implementation of preventative, protection, and compliance measures for populations that may be at increased risk of harm. This harm includes *but is not limited to* sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), child abuse, exploitation, and neglect, and trafficking in persons (TIP).

It is important to understand your role in safeguarding program participants, local community members, and other individuals who are in a position of vulnerability from harm. USAID awards (e.g., contracts, cooperative agreements, grants, etc.), regardless of financial amount, include award requirements that address safeguarding-related violations. USAID’s partners are responsible for closely checking and complying with existing safeguarding requirements, and integrating safeguarding frameworks into programming and operations and should cultivate respectful, inclusive, and safe environments in their programs and workplaces.

USAID relies on our partners’ previous experience and understanding of local and area-specific risks to inform effective, survivor-centered protection and incident response. This handout summarizes USAID’s Protection from SEA (PSEA), Counter-TIP (C-TIP), and child safeguarding policies and related requirements. Together, these policies and requirements support a framework for the implementation of preventative protection and compliance measures across agency programming, especially for populations who may be at increased risk of harm.

### PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSEA)

#### Know the Basics:

USAID has zero tolerance for, and zero tolerance for inaction related to, sexual misconduct of any kind, including harassment, exploitation, or abuse among its workforce or partners. Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) occurs when people in power exploit or abuse vulnerable populations for sexual purposes. According to the [U.N. Secretary-General’s Bulletin on PSEA](#):

**SEXUAL EXPLOITATION** is  
“any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”

**SEXUAL ABUSE** is  
“the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.”

- SEA is chronically underreported due to a number of factors, including fear of stigma or retaliation, limited availability or accessibility of trusted service providers, doubts about confidentiality, impunity for perpetrators, and lack of awareness of the benefits of seeking care.
- Partners should assess risks and know what to look for, including ways SEA is manifested (e.g.,

physical and digital behaviors, program participants saying aid workers<sup>1</sup> have put a price on goods or services, non-verbal signs, concerns from civil society or government counterparts, etc.).

- Partners should also identify local actors working on PSEA related issues, assess contextual risks, and understand legal frameworks. For more on assessing risk, internal controls, and prevention strategies, see USAID's [Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\) Policy](#) and [PSEA implementation considerations handout](#).

**Know Your Responsibilities:** USAID's partners are at the front line of PSEA. USAID has a new award standard provision for its assistance awards with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which prohibits partners, their employees, agents, interns, anyone provided access or contact with program participants, and sub-awardees from engaging in SEA of any person during the period of performance of the award, as well as inaction in response to SEA. USAID partners must take a survivor-centered approach in response. For awards over \$500,000, partners must have compliance plans in place, which must be provided to the Agreement Officer (AO) upon request.

USAID partners are responsible for complying with these requirements, including flowing down to any subawards, as appropriate. The box to the right provides examples of how to integrate PSEA into programming and operations.

Partners without the new assistance provision, including contractors, must still ensure their employees abide by the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\) Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#). In addition, partners with awards that involve International Disaster Assistance (IDA), Transition Initiative (TI), and Food for Peace Title II (Title II) funds must also adopt a code of conduct with the IASC principles. Other USAID award requirements related to child safeguarding and C-TIP may also overlap with SEA. If you have questions about the requirements in your award, ask your Contracting or Agreement Officer (CO/AO).

#### EXAMPLES OF INTEGRATING PSEA:

- Make PSEA a part of training and onboarding for all staff, including volunteers and day laborers.
- Develop information, education, and communications materials like "Know Your Rights" posters to share with program participants, including tailored language for children, youth, and adults. Share these materials with participants at the beginning of group activities.
- Set up confidential mechanisms to ensure anyone affected can make a complaint and be sure reporting channels are up to date (i.e., frequently checked, active email addresses or mailboxes).
- Ensure feedback mechanisms are accessible to all and sensitive to age, gender, and identity.
- Include champions for PSEA in organizations and equip these people with enough training to lead the effort.
- Reiterate the importance of PSEA at all levels of the organization, including leadership.
- Work with sub-awardees on best practices, conduct PSEA capacity assessments and build PSEA into organizational capacity plans.
- Facilitate inclusive, safe, and contextually-informed dialogues with participants and communities.
- Include PSEA monitoring in site visits.
- Link PSEA to values present across the organization, e.g., human resources, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), technical teams.

## CHILD SAFEGUARDING

<sup>1</sup> Partners should look to the terms and conditions of their awards for requirements that may apply to their employees. Employees may include individuals working or acting on behalf of the organization, whether on a voluntary or paid basis, as well as interns, volunteers, board members, international and local consultants, and contractors, including day laborers.

### Know the Basics:

- More than 1 billion children globally—half of all children—are exposed to violence every year. Children in contexts of humanitarian crises and armed conflict face increased risks due to many factors, including lack of privacy and security in camps and emotional and physical trauma.
- Child abuse, exploitation, and neglect includes any form of physical abuse; emotional abuse or ill-treatment; sexual abuse; neglect or insufficient supervision; trafficking; or commercial, transactional, labor, or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, well-being, survival, development, or dignity.
- USAID defines children as persons who have not attained age 18, regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defense.

**Know Your Responsibilities:** As part of USAID's new NGO assistance award standard provision, partners must prevent and report incidents of child abuse, exploitation, and neglect, and ensure that these requirements flow down to any subawards, as appropriate. Further, partners must address incidents in a manner that accounts for the best interests of the child. For awards above \$500,000, partners must maintain compliance plans which should be provided to the AO upon request.

All USAID partners must abide by principles that safeguard children and have existing requirements in their awards if the new provision has not yet been added in their award. If you have questions about your award requirements, please contact your CO/AO.

#### CHILD SAFEGUARDING PRINCIPLES

- All children have equal rights to protection from harm. Prohibit all child abuse, exploitation, and neglect in programs. Promote child-safe screening procedures for personnel, particularly personnel whose work brings them in direct contact with children.
- Everybody has a responsibility to support the protection of children. Ensure compliance with host country, international, and U.S. child protection legislation and standards.
- Organizations have a duty of care to children with whom they work, are in contact with, or who are affected by their work and operations. Conduct trainings to ensure that personnel and others can recognize signs of child abuse, exploitation, and neglect. Consider potential risks to children that are associated with project activities and operations.
- If organizations work with partners, they have a responsibility to help partners meet the minimum requirements on protection.
- All actions on child safeguarding are taken in the best interests of the child, which are paramount. Investigate and take appropriate action in response to allegations of child abuse, exploitation, or neglect. Mandate that personnel and others report allegations of child abuse, exploitation, or neglect.

## COUNTER-TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (C-TIP)

### Know the Basics

- Trafficking in persons (TIP) is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploiting an individual for profit through forced labor or sexual exploitation. Trafficking is not defined by the industry or economic sector that individuals may be engaged in but rather is defined by how individuals are forced or coerced to provide labor or other services. Victims are deprived of their humanity and basic freedom(s).
- Although precise numbers are unknown, the scale of human trafficking is vast, affecting millions of men, women, and children in every country in the world.
- USAID prohibits TIP, the procurement of commercial sex acts, or the use of forced labor, consistent with Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) requirements.

**Know Your Responsibilities:** USAID awards contain requirements that prohibit partners, their employees, sub-awardees, or agents from engaging in behaviors that facilitate or support TIP. For awards over a certain dollar threshold, partners must certify that they have compliance plans in place, and these plans must be made available to the relevant CO/AO if requested. Partners are responsible for these requirements, including how they flow down to subawards. As an implementing partner, if you have any questions, contact your CO/AO.

## REPORTING POTENTIAL SAFEGUARDING VIOLATIONS

USAID partners are strongly encouraged to, and in many instances must, report any credible information of SEA, child exploitation, abuse, or neglect, and TIP to USAID. Partners should always consult their award requirements to determine how best to report these incidents, but are strongly encouraged to report all incidents to their CO/AO, [disclosures@usaid.gov](mailto:disclosures@usaid.gov), and the Office of Inspector General (OIG) via their [hotline portal](#). USAID staff who become aware of potential safeguarding violations must also report the information to [disclosures@usaid.gov](mailto:disclosures@usaid.gov), the USAID OIG hotline portal, and, when known, the cognizant CO/AO. In addition, staff members should also consult any applicable Bureau, Independent Office, or Mission-specific guidance related to receiving and responding to potential safeguarding violations. More information is available in [ADS 113: Guidance on Receiving and Responding to Allegations of Misconduct Related to Safeguarding in USAID Programs](#).

USAID takes reports of safeguarding violations seriously, and works with relevant stakeholders, including our partners and the OIG, to take appropriate action in response. Once USAID receives a report, it may direct partners to take specific steps to address an actual or alleged violation and to ensure that survivors are protected. The OIG may also investigate and refer an investigation for consideration of criminal, civil, and/or administrative remedies. At the same time, USAID recognizes that given the “invisible” nature of this crisis, we need to address formal reports while also expanding prevention and mitigation efforts and ensuring that support services are available to all survivors, regardless of whether they choose to report.

There are many best practices and guides from USAID and others that can help you navigate how to integrate safeguarding into your programming and operations. Likewise, local organizations’ knowledge and experience on the ground are critical for development agencies to ensure context-driven and survivor-centered safeguarding. See USAID’s [Safeguarding Partner Toolkit](#) for more. When responding to allegations of safeguarding failures in programming, partners should check their award requirements for specific terms and conditions.

### SURVIVOR-CENTERED APPROACHES

Regardless of the type of safeguarding violation, USAID takes, and encourages our partners to take, a survivor-centered approach to allegations. This means placing the survivor’s experiences, considerations, and needs at the center of the process, with appropriate due process and accountability for alleged perpetrators of the abuse. When the survivor is a child, this approach must consider the best interests of the child, take special measures to interview a child, provide required services and engage with parents, guardians, family, or other caregivers as appropriate.