

FACT SHEET: PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

What is Sexual Exploitation and Abuse?

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 Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), sexual exploitation refers to “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.” Sexual abuse refers to “actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.” Most USAID awards (e.g., contracts, cooperative agreements, grants, etc.), regardless of financial account, include the following three award requirements that address SEA:

- **Employee Conduct:** USAID implementing partners must ensure their employees conduct themselves in a professional manner when carrying out awards, consistent with the standards for United Nations (U.N.) employees in Section 3 of the [U.N. Secretary General's Bulletin - Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#). In the event that an employee's conduct is not consistent with these standards, our partners must consult with the cognizant Agreement Officer/Contracting Officer (AO/CO) and Mission Director or Country Representative. The U.S. Ambassador may direct the removal of any U.S. citizen from the country and require termination of any employee from an award.
- **Counter-Trafficking In Persons (C-TIP):** USAID prohibits trafficking in persons, the procurement of commercial sex acts, or the use of forced labor, consistent with [Trafficking Victims Protection Act](#) (TVPA) requirements. The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) provides the policy and clause for all federal acquisition awards, and USAID's Automated Directives System (ADS), specifically sections [303maa](#), [303mab](#), [303mat](#), and [308mab](#), contains clauses for assistance awards. USAID incorporated U.S. Government regulations, TVPA requirements and the Palermo Protocol to create its [C-TIP Policy](#). Violations of USAID's C-TIP Code of Conduct or [C-TIP Policy](#) must be addressed by implementing partners and USAID staff, and credible allegations of C-TIP violations must be immediately reported to the cognizant AO/CO and USAID's Office of Inspector General by NGOs, contractors, and USAID staff. For certain awards, partners must certify that they have compliance plans in place.

- **Child Safeguarding:** USAID's Child Safeguarding Standards, which are included in all USAID NGO awards other than contracts for commercial items, require recipients to: abide by core principles that prohibit personnel from engaging in child abuse, exploitation, or neglect; incorporate child safeguarding in project planning and implementation; and, institute procedures to prevent and address violations. Due to children's increased vulnerabilities and needs for special protections, Child Safeguarding includes a broader range of potential harms to children, which includes PSEA, in addition to other forms of abuse, exploitation and neglect. These protections stem from the U.S. Government Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity Strategy and the Assistance for Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children Act of 2005.

In addition, awards that involve International Disaster Assistance (IDA), Transition Initiative (TI), and Food for Peace Title II (Title II) funds must also adopt the following:

- **Code of Conduct in Humanitarian Relief Operations:** In advance of receiving funding, partners with awards involving the above-mentioned accounts must adopt a code of conduct to protect beneficiaries from SEA in humanitarian relief operations consistent with the six core principles adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Protection Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. NGO partners who receive IDA funds from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance are also required to provide details on how the code of conduct will be implemented within a specific field project.

USAID plans to revise its future award requirements related to acquisition and assistance awards, consistent with applicable U.S. law and regulations, to provide additional protections against SEA, strengthening child safeguarding systems, enhancing reporting requirements, addressing the needs of survivors, and requiring appropriate accountability for perpetrators in accordance with due process. USAID is also working with other donors and public international organizations to encourage multilateral organizations and their implementers to take appropriate steps to prevent and address incidents of SEA or other safeguarding violations under donor-supported activities. USAID anticipates engaging with the implementing partner community on any proposed changes to award requirements.

Reporting and Accountability

Implementing partners should consult their award requirements to determine how best to report SEA and child safeguarding allegations, including allegations that may also constitute trafficking in persons. USAID strongly encourages implementing partners to report credible allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse to the USAID Office of Inspector General (OIG), as well as to closely consult with the cognizant AO/CO and Mission Director/Country Representative when applicable. Public International Organizations must promptly inform the OIG of any credible allegations of SEA. Complaints can be submitted to the OIG by telephone at 1-800-230-6539 or +1 202-712-1023, by email at ig hotline@usaid.gov, by fax at +1 216-3801, or by mail to the following address: U.S. Agency for

International Development, Office of Inspector General, P.O. Box 657, Washington, DC 20044-0657, and anonymously with an online form through the OIG General Hotline [website](https://oig.usaid.gov) (<https://oig.usaid.gov>).

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, and may impose special conditions as part of its awards or take other remedial actions. The USAID OIG may also investigate and take action. The OIG may also investigate and refer an investigation for consideration of criminal, civil, and/or administrative remedies.

SEA is chronically underreported across the development and humanitarian assistance sector due to a number of factors, including fears of stigma or retaliation, limited availability of or accessibility to trusted service providers, impunity for perpetrators, and lack of awareness of the benefits of seeking care and support. This makes accurate data and reporting about SEA prevalence very difficult to obtain. Sharing and reporting the data that is available, while protecting the confidentiality and dignity of survivors and the due process rights of alleged perpetrators, is an important component in increasing transparency around and accountability for misconduct. USAID recognizes that strengthening such transparency and accountability can both serve as a deterrent and instill greater trust in our efforts to protect survivors and all those we reach through our programming.

In Fiscal Year 2022, USAID received 121 reports of sexual misconduct (including SEA and sexual harassment at the implementing partner level) in our programs. These included 85 reports of SEA, 21 reports of sexual harassment within an implementing partner organization, and 15 reports involving both SEA and sexual harassment. 75% involved civil society organizations and 25% involved public international organizations. Where the information is known, 34% involved children and 66% involved beneficiaries or participants in USAID programs.

USAID takes these reports seriously and works with relevant stakeholders, including our implementing partners and the OIG, to take appropriate action in response. At the same time, USAID recognizes that given the “invisible” nature of this crisis, we need to address formal reports while also expanding sexual misconduct prevention and mitigation efforts, and ensuring that support services are available to all survivors, regardless of whether they choose to report.