

# Tip Sheet

## People with disabilities and the safeguarding journey

**This Tip Sheet outlines some overarching principles that should be considered when applying a safeguarding approach and using the resources on the Resource and Support Hub. It also has some specific recommendations.**

### Overarching principles<sup>1</sup>:

#### **Inclusion and non-discrimination**

Failure to take people with disabilities into account in safeguarding deterrence, prevention, reporting and response interventions increases their risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH). **People with disabilities are often unconsciously excluded from safeguarding activities meaning that the specific risk factors they experience are not captured in initial planning processes.**

#### Therefore:

- Ensure you are applying a disability lens to all planning processes ensuring inclusive safeguarding is 'built in' from the start
- Work with people with disabilities across all ages, genders and social economic status and their representative organisations as key stakeholders in the programming.
- Consider diverse workforces to increase the focus on intersectionality (for example, indigenous women with disabilities).

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<sup>1</sup> These are aligned to the principles of the UNCRPD; namely: Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons; Non-discrimination; Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;

Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity; Equality of opportunity; Accessibility; Equality between men and women; Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

- Develop checklists that reflect intersectional approaches, (for example, ensuring that the checklist reflects the differential needs of both women with visual impairments and those with hearing impairments – communication approaches will differ).
- When organising any workshop or training, ensure the location, materials and facilitation methodology are gender and disability sensitive, inclusive and accessible.

## Accessibility

**Inaccessible services can increase risk.** People with disabilities may have difficulty in accessing services in the same way as people without disabilities. This may place them in situations with greater risk, consider sanitation facilities, for example. Services to support SEAH survivors may also inadvertently exclude people with disabilities, if those services are provided in structures that are inaccessible or if the staff lack awareness of disability.

**Non-inclusive reporting mechanisms exclude people thus have limited effectiveness.** A person who is blind or finds communication and reading difficult may also experience challenges in making a complaint, especially if there is a reporting mechanism that requires a person to write. Similarly, alternate reporting mechanisms, for example for deaf people, or people with intellectual disabilities may compromise one's confidentiality and safety – thus increase risk further.

Therefore:

- Consider the increased risks posed by inaccessibility in project design and implementation
- Ensure that there is more than one reporting mechanism and that they are designed collaboratively with people with a variety of impairments who will be engaged in the programme.

**Accessible and inclusive information provided in a variety of ways maximises message penetration.** People must be supported to understand their rights in a way that works for them, that they are not obliged to exchange sex for goods, services or that they have the right to the same access to services as a non-disabled person. Similarly aid and development workers with disabilities need to feel safe within their working environment and see clear signals from the organisation that sexual harassment (and other forms of discriminatory practice) is unacceptable. They must also know where to make reports and where to access the services they need.

Information-sharing and awareness-raising provided by aid organisations should speak to the needs of the population and ensure that people with disabilities (who may not have had the same access to education or who may not be able to see, hear or communicate) also receive clear information.

Therefore:

- Consider involving people with disabilities and their representative organisations in the design of SEAH messaging and communication to ensure that a range of accessibility features are included
- Involve people with disabilities from the outset in information and awareness-raising activities to ensure suitability and acceptability of messaging

### Gender equality

Women, girls and adolescents with disabilities are at greater risk of SEAH given gender inequalities intersect with disability discrimination. Individuals who look for opportunities to exploit women, girls and adolescents may target those with disabilities, because they may assume that they are an easy target, who will also not be able to make a complaint, or be taken seriously if they do make a complaint, for various reasons cited above. People with disabilities and their representative organisations may also not have a strong awareness of the particular issues experienced by their female members and women may not be in leadership positions which again amplifies their lack of voice.

Therefore:

- When engaging with people with disabilities and their representative organisations, seek out diverse representation that includes women, girls and adolescents with disabilities from different settings as well as people from different impairment groups
- Integrate a disability lens into all gender-mainstreaming and gender targeted interventions that aim to empower women, girls and adolescents with disabilities

Top tips for applying a disability-inclusive lens to safeguarding

The safeguarding journey is framed around four stages. Each stage poses a question for organisations to reflect on, as they take steps towards strengthening their safeguarding policy, practice and cultures to effectively prevent and respond to sexual exploitation abuse and harassment (SEAH):

- What is safeguarding?
- How to assess and plan safeguarding
- What is needed for safeguarding?
- What to do if there is a problem

The top tips listed in the table below are not exhaustive but are relevant across the board.

**Accessibility**

**Capacity**

**Targeted**

<p><b>Work with people with disabilities and their representative organisations to conduct a disability audit of the programme, information, communication and infrastructure.</b></p>	<p><b>Build disability knowledge and awareness of staff, partners and other stakeholders (including psycho-social support, police, health facility and education staff). Engage people with disabilities as trainers, where possible to tackle harmful social norms and power imbalances to prevent SEAH</b></p>	<p><b>Identify networks which can support people with disabilities (especially those with high support requirements) who are involved in SEAH complaints and investigations.</b></p>
<p><b>Ensure SEAH information and reporting mechanisms is provided in a range of different formats and disseminated in a variety of ways (radio, community leaders, non-literary etc.)</b></p>	<p><b>Encourage the recruitment of people with disabilities and women to transform attitudes, and to represent specific gender and disability issues in project design and implementation</b></p>	<p><b>Specifically target employees with prolonged and largely unsupervised time with women, children and people with disabilities for safeguarding support, advice and training</b></p>
<p><b>Ensure design of facilities do not expose people with disabilities at additional risk (accessible sanitation facilities should have locks)</b></p>	<p><b>Work with women and men of all ages and impairment groups to design a range of confidential reporting mechanisms are available that reflect the requirements of differing impairments (e.g. people who are deaf-blind/with multiple impairments) to ensure confidentiality</b></p>	<p><b>Work with people with disabilities and their representative organisations as well as parents' groups to ensure that people with disabilities are aware of their rights, responsibilities, reporting processes and to strengthen internal SEAH approaches.</b></p>
<p><b>Embed participatory feedback loops into any safeguarding plan to check the degree to which disability inclusion has been achieved</b></p>		