



Addressing SEA/H in Large Infrastructure Projects

In 2018, the World Bank issued its [first](#) Good Practice Note (GPN) on addressing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEA/H) focusing on large infrastructure projects. This GPN was issued based on the 2017 recommendations of the [World Bank Global Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) Task Force](#), appointed following the Uganda TSDP case in which the Inspection Panel found that the Bank was woefully unprepared to prevent and respond to GBV in its projects.

For nearly a decade, BIC has pointed out to the Bank that preventing and responding to child SEA/H necessitates specific measures that will differ from adults. As a result of BIC's advocacy, in October 2022, the World Bank released the third edition of its GPN on [Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(SEA/H\) in Investment Project Financing involving Major Civil Works](#), with the sole purpose of better addressing child SEA/H.

While it is promising to see that this version includes more robust measures around the specific risks to children and the specific needs of child survivors, moving forward the focus must be on translating these promising provisions into practice. This brief offers an overview of how the GPN has been updated and improved, as well as recommendations for implementation.

Why is this GPN a positive development for children?

Mainstreams children throughout. Mainstreaming child SEA/H prevention and response in this GPN has resulted not just in all the existing measures of the GPNs now requiring child specific measures, but also in concrete recommendations to properly address child SEA/H risks such as including a GBV specialist with expertise on children. Additionally, now there is a call to uphold the best interest of the child, and a clear reference to international instruments, namely the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), as the instrument to guide how to assess it. Finally, there is reference to highest industry standards to handle child SEA/H such as the [INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children](#).

Children are considered as key stakeholders. The GPN calls for child participation and consultation in many stages, and it recognizes that the determination of the best interest of the child can only happen with children's participation. Even when the GPN discourages Borrowers "consulting directly with children on SEA/H issues as part of stakeholder consultation" (para. 45), it calls to "ensure that spaces are made available for women, men and children affected by the project to participate in

consultations” (para. 49), and acknowledges that consulting with children “may require different approaches to enable age- and gender-appropriate content and a safe space for discussion” (para. 106).

Children should benefit now from a survivor-centered approach. The GPN calls for “safe spaces for women and children to report their experiences of violence” (para. 101) to trained professionals and there are provisions on how to handle child SEA/H cases. This includes, for example, informing the children about their rights and the option of having a survivor’s representative or advocate participate in the SEA/H resolution mechanism on their behalf and with their consent. Additionally, the GPN mentions that children that suffered any type of SEA/H should be provided with access to health services, psychosocial support, shelter, legal aid, and safety/security services. It also calls for child-friendly Grievance Redress Mechanisms and for their staff to seek to maintain a positive relationship with parents and/or guardians of child SEA/H survivors.

Child rights civil society organizations (CSO) are expected to be included and engaged. There is a recognition that CSOs’ experts in child rights, child protection, and child SEA/H are key actors to provide for better assessment and improved response measures to address child SEA/H throughout the project cycle. Child rights CSOs are expected to engage in different capacities: as key actors in consultation processes, as entry points to services for survivors and useful allies for awareness-raising activities, as experts to facilitate child participation, and as service providers or as part of “effective oversight” efforts (i.e. Third Party Monitoring).

How to make the most out of this GPN?

Deliver results. Guidance is only as good as its implementation. In order to [transform the World Bank](#) into an institution that genuinely prioritizes the well-being of children and adolescents not only on paper but also in practice, the Bank needs to deliver on its commitment to prioritize child SEA/H prevention and response by implementing the new child-specific provisions of this GPN in practice and monitoring to what extent the Borrower is assessing, preventing and responding to child SEA/H specifically.

Foster cultural change in how Bank staff and Borrowing countries approach child SEA/H. This requires multiple and intertwining actions that include: fostering mutual accountability at all Bank levels through regular information dissemination; timely and responsible reporting on how the GPN is being applied; embedding training modules on assessing, addressing, and responding to child SEA/H into existing training systems for Bank and Borrower staff, as well as contractors and subcontractors; raising awareness at the community level about child SEA/H; and consistently and systematically engaging with child rights CSOs.

Utilize the GPN to go above and beyond to tackle child SEA/H. The GPN focuses on how the Bank can avoid creating or exacerbating child SEA/H risks, but in order to go beyond ‘do no harm’ to do good, the Bank should contribute to systemic reform and focus on the root causes of child SEA/H. Strategies to achieve this could include strengthening child protection systems in areas where a project will be implemented, or addressing causes and consequences of child marriage. Additionally, the Bank should focus on the different risks and impacts of child SEA/H for particularly vulnerable children (i.e. those that have a disability and/or are LGBTQI+).

Use this GPN as a starting point to encourage the Procurement Department to take a more active role addressing child SEA/H risks. The GPN considers child SEA/H throughout, and encourages contractors to conduct a thorough analysis of SEA/H risks in its environmental and social management plan, and to have a code of conduct that specifically covers child SEA/H. However, the procurement process as a whole [should be strengthened](#) to better prevent and respond to child SEA/H.

Publish the SEA/H action plan early on. This can be as part of information disclosure processes, and can indicate progress towards its implementation as a way to be transparent about what exactly is the Bank doing to tackle child SEA/H in each project as well as how it is planning to do so.

Give due consideration to child participation. Promoting and upholding child rights, as well as preventing and responding to child SEA/H, requires upholding the best interests of the child at all times, and assessing this best interest is only possible with the active participation of children.

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