REGIONAL NETWORK FOR SAFEGUARDING AND PSEA IN THE UKRAINE REFUGEE RESPONSE
Summary note – 15 March 2023

1. Welcome and introductions

The co-chairs introduced themselves and reiterated the objectives of the Regional Network as a forum for exchange and learning, as well as to offer support to the national PSEA networks and to organisations involved in the refugee response.

They noted the distinction between this network and the PSEA Network inside of Ukraine, which is co-chaired by UNFPA and OCHA. The new PSEA Coordinator for Ukraine has been invited to make an intervention at the next Regional Network meeting to ensure information exchange.

The new members of the network (HIAS and Internews) were introduced and the meeting agenda was adopted.

2. Presentation on the key findings from the Information Ecosystem Assessment in Moldova (Irene Scott, Internews)

Internews presented on the Information Ecosystem Assessment conducted in Moldova. They shared that overall refugees appreciate the information shared by humanitarian actors but reported that they lack detail in specific areas and information about localized services. They also reported some difficulties with the hotlines. Some callers reported that they had experienced a lack of empathy, and even inappropriate language, from call center agents.

There was a divide between refugees in rural and urban areas, as services are often located in the capital. There was also a divide between those living in Refugee Accommodation Centers (RAC) and those in private accommodation, as there is often location specific groups and information in RACs, which those who live in private accommodation often do not have access to. Age affects access to information, with younger persons more on social media, while very few over 60 use these channels. Volunteers reported feel disconnected and not as informed about services as they should be.

In terms of language, 72% speak Russian at home, while 91% would choose to speak Russian when speaking to aid workers. Many reported that they try not to speak Ukrainian in public. Language is also a barrier for refugees to engage with local media. 12% prefer Ukrainian language in writing.

The assessment found that Moldovan nationals feel less informed about the refugee response and many expressed a need for more information. A lack of understanding of the response can cause misinformation, rumors, or social tension.

In terms of trusted sources of information, the community expressed a preference for information from other refugees and secondly from volunteers, NGOs and UN workers, followed by local authorities. On social media, Viber was the preferred platform, followed by telegram, Facebook and WhatsApp.

The refugees surveyed expressed a very high reluctance to provide feedback to services (91%) and limited use of feedback and complaints mechanisms, both due to lack of awareness, fear of being considered as ungrateful, and uncertainty about what impact such feedback can have.

Recommendations from the report include increasing transparency to reduce information and build trust and to communicate in multiple formats to be accessible to different needs and preferences.

Comments and questions:

- The co-chairs expressed appreciation for the report and reiterated that the findings are relevant to PSEA practitioners in selecting communication channels and reinforcing feedback and complaints mechanisms. The exceptionally high reluctance to provide feedback may also be a barrier to report more sensitive issues, such as incidents or concerns about SEA.
- In response to a question on the recommendation for formats of communication, it was recommended to have separate platforms for the different groups that are targeted (for example, youth will not be in the same social media groups as their parents).
- The researchers highlighted that hesitation about sharing feedback may be related to not understanding the reasons *why* they should provide feedback and how this can be helpful to humanitarians and impact on the assistance and services that are provided. There may be a need to communicate this better and also showing the community *how* feedback is used.
- The researchers also noted a reluctance by humanitarians engage directly with local media to ensure understanding among the local population.
- The PSEA Coordinator in Moldova highlighted the value of the report for the work on PSEA at country level, where the PSEA and AAP working group will have a joint meeting to decide on the way forward, including on how to implement the recommendations.

3. **Presentation of the Resource and Safeguarding Hub's Regional Evidence Review (Ann Kangas and Anisha Saggu)**

The Safeguarding Hub Eastern Europe was established in April 2022, covering Romania, Poland and Moldova, and focused on tailored support for civil society organisations (CSOs). In terms of activities, RSH runs a resource library, an e-learning course, a safeguarding helpdesk, and offers training, coaching and webinars to CSOs.

As part of the establishment of the Hub, RSH conducted research both at country and national level. This included the regional evidence review completed in October-November 2022. In terms of methodology, the evidence review entailed searches in google scholar and grey literature produced by stakeholders over the last 5 years through key search words, limited to English language searches.

The evidence review showed that there is quite limited literature on the work of humanitarian organisations in ensuring safeguarding of refugees, as well as on the risks to staff and volunteers. There was, however, more information about the risks to refugees of SEA. There was also more information available on Romania and Poland than from Ukraine and Moldova.

Risk factors were analyzed using an adapted version of WHO's ecological framework for interpersonal violence. In terms of structural risks, the review noted the conflict itself, power, patriarchal and discriminative norms, and high levels of GBV (including trafficking and prostitution). At organizational level, risks were focused on organizational culture and working practices, on volunteers, and on the lack of experience. Among volunteers, a high number of unvetted and unregistered volunteers was noted, who may also not have received adequate training and information and/or signed a code of conduct. At community level, risks were identified around the physical environment (lack of security in centers) and the influx of aid workers, and at individual level, risks were related to age, gender, disability SOCIESC, and other factors.

While it was challenging to quantify the overall risk to refugees due to underreporting, organisations should always assume that SEA is happening. Concrete recommendations from the report included; embedding PSEA in all stages of the response, vetting and screening of staff and volunteers, signing

codes of conduct, working with women-led organisations, and continuing to improve the safety and security of accommodation centers, shelters and transportation.

Questions and comments:

- The researches highlighted that notable progress had been made from early in the response until the evidence review in October, including on volunteers and transportation, with positive practices in several countries.
- The PSEA Coordinator in Poland expressed appreciation for the work done and highlighted the GBV/SEA safety audit that has been conducted by UNHCR in Poland and Hungary and will be issued soon.
- RSH offered to present country specific findings also to national PSEA Networks.
- The PSEA Coordinator in Slovakia asked if there is any chance that Slovakia (and Slovak language) will also be included in the future. RSH only has funding to October 2023.

4. **Update and adoption of the Regional Action Plan on Safeguarding and PSEA**

The co-chairs shared a short update on the work done by the smaller working groups since the last Regional Network meeting in February.

On the action point on awareness raising and information campaigns, the smaller working group is composed of Plan International, UNHCR and IOM. The group has already started compiling the available child friendly material on a shared drive, which will be jointly reviewed and used as a starting point for further material to be developed where there are gaps.

On the action point on contextualized training and capacity building, UNHCR and IOM have met to review the sample material used by IOM in Ukraine and is working on a draft script for a new video, which will be circulated for comments. RSH has also started working on the inclusion tip sheets, focusing first on the tip sheet on inclusion of older persons.

The co-chairs encouraged interested members to reach out in they are interested in taking part in the working groups above or contribute to the learning corners. The first learning corner will be in April on SEA investigations. RSH proposed to coordinate in light of a webinar they are planning.

The co-chairs are formatting of the action plan, will circulate for final review shortly.