Analysis of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Risk Overview

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Contents

1. Summary

This report provides an analysis of the Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Risk Overview (SEARO) results from September 2022 (BETA v1)[1], to support the understanding of how the index can be used by stakeholders at global and country level. The report provides analysis of selected countries to illustrate the possibilities, strengths and limitations of the index. See Annex 2 for an overview of the methodology behind this analysis.

Background to SEARO

The SEARO is a Composite Index that brings together information on a range of factors known to influence the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) perpetrated by aid workers in humanitarian contexts. While women, men, girls and boys can be targeted for SEA[2], the index focuses on understanding risk factors that drive SEA against women and children.

The SEARO focuses on SEA risk factors in four dimensions: the **enabling environment** (such as the prevalence and acceptance of violence against women and children), the **humanitarian context** (centered around the scope and intensity of crisis and complexity of humanitarian needs), the **operational context** (such as the types of humanitarian assistance and how it is delivered) and the **protective environment** (focused on the structures and resources in place to prevent the occurrence, and mitigate the impact of SEA). Countries' overall risk score is composed of the average of values in the four dimensions, which is in turn the average of values for all risk factors in that dimension based on an equal weighting of all SEA risk factors identified. A high value on the SEARO indicates high SEA risk due to the co-existence of multiple and pressing SEA risk factors, and the relative lack of protective factors.

The SEARO was developed by UNICEF and UNOCHA in collaboration with the FCDO, on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Secretariat, with the aim to support analysis, decision-making and resource allocation for SEA at global and country levels – recognising that in an overall context of limited humanitarian funds, and especially funds dedicated for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), donors and IASC members need to prioritise and focus resources and support.

Generating a global picture of SEA

The September 2022 SEARO results suggests that SEA risk levels are highest in severe and complex humanitarian settings. The top ten countries[3] on the SEARO are affected by conflict and/ or armed violence, and are characterised by protracted crises with complex needs, including high levels of poverty and food insecurity, breakdown of livelihoods, and in some contexts, climate-related crisis events. The 'humanitarian context' is the most prominent dimension among the top ten countries on the SEARO – reflecting the increased SEA risk that comes with large, complex emergencies, as well as from large, complex humanitarian responses.

Another prominent dimension across countries in the index is the 'protective environment', which has the highest average values across all countries, highlighting that many contexts have insufficient structures and capacities in place to prevent and respond to SEA. Compared to other dimensions, the countries with the highest values in this dimension have a wider spread on the index. Six out of ten countries[4] with the highest scores in the protective environment do not feature on the top ten list for the overall risk score. At a global level, SEARO can help us spot trends and patterns, such as common gaps in the protective environment across countries. The data in the SEARO can help identify countries which are likely to have high risk of SEA, based on the co-existence of risk factors identified by the index, and can be used for high-level comparison of countries globally.

Using SEARO at country level

The SEARO was designed as a tool for global and regional-level actors to compare risks across countries and over time, but can also be a useful tool at the country level. The report uses case studies of Ethiopia and Nigeria to unpack what the SEARO can tell us, and how it can be used, at country level. The analysis shows that the SEARO is useful for obtaining an oversight of the most prominent risk factors in the respective countries, and can be used to explore the origin of these risks. The SEARO is not designed to capture local nuances in SEA risk, which can vary depending on settings (e.g. being higher in camp settings) and due to differences in social and gender norms, among other things. The case studies also highlight some groups who are at increased risk of being targeted for SEA, which the index does not capture. While the SEARO was not designed to capture these nuances at country level, the SEARO could be used in tandem with other sources of information and with inputs from gender-based violence (GBV) and safeguarding experts in the local context to better understand SEA risks in countries.

What are the limitations of what SEARO can tell us?

The risk of SEA is influenced by a complex interplay of factors and underlying root causes. These are by nature not easily quantifiable, however the SEARO provides a useful framework for understanding some of the known SEA risk factors, and how these may contribute to SEA risk in humanitarian emergencies. The SEARO usefully provides an estimated risk level, however, it is important to note that this not equivalent to actual prevalence or should be used for projections of SEA occurrence. Another important parameter of the index is that its values are only as accurate as the data upon which they are based, which will inevitably vary between countries. Therefore, a degree of caution should be observed when comparing risk values across countries. It is recommended that the SEARO is used alongside other sources of information and that additional analysis and discussion is conducted to gain a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of SEA risks in humanitarian contexts. This could include conducting key informant interviews and reviewing the latest evidence to explore:

- Contextual variations in SEA risks at country level, including how social and cultural norms may vary, and to what extend national laws and policies are implemented.

- Who is at increased risk of SEA due to experiencing intersecting inequalities, for instance based on (but not limited to) disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), ethnicity and race.

- Protective efforts by non-UN actors, including by civil society and national actors, to avoid duplicating efforts and systems.

2. Background to SEARO

What is the SEARO?

The SEARO is a Composite Index that brings together information on a range of factors that can influence the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) perpetration, such as policies and legal frameworks, prevalence and acceptance of violence against women and girls (VAWG), and the intensity of crisis and complexity of humanitarian needs. It also considers the capacity of the humanitarian community to reduce that risk and address incidents of SEA where they occur. The index provides an overall risk score for each country, as well as specific scores for different dimensions. As such, the index highlights the estimated risk level for SEA in countries with ongoing humanitarian operations, and flags key issues of concern in the context.

> **Key resources**
>
> SEA Risk Overview: Risk Analysis for Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCHA and UNICEF, 2022)
>
> SEARO Frequently Asked Questions (2022)
>
> SEARO Concept and Methodology (2022)

Who is it for?

SEARO was developed on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Secretariat and is intended to be used at a global level as well as country level.

Global level: At a global level, it is expected that IASC members and donors will use information from SEARO in their decision-making and resource allocation for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) to make the most strategic use of limited humanitarian resources. SEARO can be used to compare SEA risks across countries, to understand the scale and nature of SEA risks in different contexts. It is also intended to inform policy dialogue through identifying which components stand out as contributing to SEA risk.

Country level: At country level, SEARO is intended to be used by inter-agency PSEA coordinators and members of inter-agency PSEA Networks under the umbrella of the humanitarian coordinator (HCs) and humanitarian country team (HCT) that hold the primary accountability, decision making and oversight authority on PSEA.

How does it work?

The SEARO brings together data in four 'dimensions' (see below) that are known to influence SEA risk. The overall risk value for a country is the composite score of the four dimensions, based on equal weighting of all risk factors in each dimension – i.e. the average of all values in the four dimensions. A high value indicates high SEA risk. In the SEARO, the

2.0	4.0	6.0	8.0
2.0	4.0	6.0	8.0
2.0	4.0	6.0	8.0
2.0	4.0	6.0	8.0

values are colour-coded by quartile – with lighter colours for risk values between 1.0 and 2.5 and progressively darker shades for risk values between 2.5 and 5.0, 5.0 and 7.5 and 7.5 and 9.9 – the highest risk value possible. Risk values between 7.5 and 9.9 are in this report referred to as the highest 'quartile'.

Enabling Environment: The existence and strength of national laws and policies that provide protection to women and children, gendered social norms and practices that normalise and sustain violence against women and girls, prevalence of violence against women and girls[5], as well as measures of overall gender inequalities.

Humanitarian Context: The geographic scope and intensity of crises in the country and the situation of people affected, and the size and complexity of the humanitarian response operation.

Operational Context: The design of the humanitarian response operation, including the types of assistance and how assistance is delivered and monitored, and the awareness and commitment of aid workers and humanitarian organisations to prevent, identify and address SEA.

Protective Environment: Mechanisms and resources put in place to raise awareness, engage with communities, establish complaint mechanisms, investigate SEA incidents, and support survivors.

Each dimension has two '**categories'**, which in turn are made up of two '**components'**. Each component has a number of 'indicators' with data on different SEA risk factors. This clustering of risk factors provides users with multiple levels of detail and options to view and analyse the data.

> **Example**: The score in the category 'Human Rights and Gender Equality' depends on indicators under the component 'Violence against Women and Children' which pulls together data on % of women aged 20-24 who were married before 18, recent and lifetime intimate partner violence (IPV) against women and girls, and 'Gender Inequalities' which uses data from the Gender Inequality Index. In this way, SEARO can be used to analyse different factors that contribute to SEA risks, and gain a rapid insight into a country's overall risk by looking at the value for different dimensions as well as the overall country risk.

3. Generating a global picture of SEA

3.1 Where is the risk highest?

The overall risk ratings are highest in severe and complex humanitarian contexts. The top five countries[6] (Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan and Ethiopia) on the index (with the highest overall risk rating) are all affected by conflict and security challenges, with protracted crises characterised by multiple complex needs. These include high levels of poverty and food insecurity, breakdown of livelihoods and, and in some contexts, climate-related events such as drought and flooding. See Annex 1 for an analysis of what the index tells us about SEA risk factors in the top four countries on the index (see case study 1 for information on Ethiopia which ranks fifth on the index).

Geographically, nine out of ten countries with the highest overall risk on SEARO are in the Middle East[1], Central Asia[2], Northeast Africa[3], and in Central Africa[4]. Haiti (10th) is the only country among the top ten on the index located in a different geographical region. However, it is difficult to draw generalised conclusions about any regions being at higher overall risk of SEA, as looking at risk factors in the different dimensions reveals a slightly different and more nuanced picture. For example, the top ten countries in the 'protective environment' dimension have a wider geographical spread, and include countries in Southern Africa, and Central America. For future analysis, it could be useful to analyse what the SEARO can tell us about risk factors for SEA in different types and stages of humanitarian emergencies, for example, by comparing countries that experience protracted crises versus emerging crises.

3.2 Which risk factors stand out?

The humanitarian dimension is most prominent in terms of high values in the top ten countries – seven out of the ten highest-risk countries on the SEARO are in the highest quartile for the humanitarian context. These are Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. These countries are characterised by conflicts and security challenges due to ongoing armed conflicts, intercommunal violence, and in some cases, being situated in a context of wider

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[1] Yemen and Syria.
[2] Afghanistan.
[3] South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.
[4] DRC and Chad.

regional instability and insurgency. These seven countries all score extremely high on the scope, intensity and severity of crisis, while the risk factors related to size and complexity are more varied. Two countries, Yemen and Ethiopia, score in the highest quartile for both operation size and complexity – indicating large humanitarian responses which are delivered in very challenging circumstances characterised by limited humanitarian access due to factors such as insecurity affecting humanitarian assistance and restrictions on movement.

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What does the humanitarian context dimension tell us about SEA risk factors?

This dimension assesses factors related to the introduction of one or more crises into a country, such as a conflict. The dimension captures the geographic extent, scale and intensity of the crises, as well as the people affected and the severity of needs. These factors aim to reflect the increased SEA risk that comes from large, complex emergencies, as well as from large, complex responses.

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A few countries which score very high on the humanitarian context appear just below the top-ten countries for overall risk – most notably Myanmar (11th), Nigeria (13th) and Ukraine (14th). Ukraine, with a score of 9.0 in the humanitarian context, notes the third highest value for this dimension (after Yemen and Ethiopia). Ukraine does not feature higher on the SEARO as it scores low to medium on risk factors in other dimensions, for example 2.8 for the enabling environment. It is important to note that while values in the 'humanitarian context' dimension are based on data sources which are updated more regularly[7] and can thus reflect the evolving scale and nature of ongoing crises, other dimensions draw on data which might be several years old, and on other indices and databases which may be updated less frequently. This means that while the values in Ukraine's humanitarian context reflect the situation post Russia's invasion February 2022, values in other dimensions and categories largely pre-date the war. For example, values in the category 'violence against women and children' are based on data from 2012 (marriage of girls before 18) and 2018 (recent and lifetime physical and sexual IPV).

The protective environment has the highest average values across all countries in the SEARO, indicating that many contexts have insufficient structures and capacities in place to prevent SEA and respond to incidents when these occur. The index specifically looks at inter-agency PSEA structures, resources allocated for child protection and GBV in the Response Plan, and assistance provided to SEA victims/ survivors (data drawn from UN reporting channels).

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What does the protective environment dimension tell us about SEA risk factors?

The protective environment refers to the structures and resources in place to mitigate the impact and prevent the occurrence of SEA. This dimension assumes that the better the accountability systems in place to report any incident of SEA and the higher the access to assistance for the victims/survivors, the lower the risk of SEA being perpetuated. The higher the capacities identified across these components, the lesser the risk of SEA. High values in this dimension indicate lower capacities and resources to protect women and children from SEA – i.e. a high value still denotes high SEA risk – similar to other dimensions.

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Six out of ten countries with the highest scores in the protective environment do not feature on the top ten list for the overall risk score – many are instead found on the bottom half of the SEARO ranking including Libya (22nd), Guatemala (26th), Madagascar (20th), and Burundi (19th) (bracketed number denotes overall risk ranking). This may reflect the fact that countries with larger and the most severe humanitarian crises have been prioritised for establishing and supporting the protective environment, given what is known about SEA risks being exacerbated in humanitarian contexts. However, this highlights the need to look beyond the countries ranked highest overall on the risk index and examine the values in the protective environment to understand the gaps and needs in relation to the UN's and humanitarian response systems' capacity and resources to prevent and respond to SEA.

3.3 Notable data points

A few countries with very high values in the components 'scope and intensity'[8] of crisis and/ or 'crisis severity'[9] are found in the bottom half of the SEARO (based on overall risk) as they score lower in other dimensions. SEA risk is exacerbated in humanitarian crises as severity of needs is a key risk factor for SEA, increasing dependency on humanitarian assistance for survival. It would therefore be interesting to analyse these countries to understand why they appear lower on the SEARO *despite* the notable values for scope, intensity and severity of humanitarian conditions. For example:

- Mozambique scores very high on 'scope and intensity of crisis' (9.0) but appears as 27th country overall on the index. The humanitarian crisis in Mozambique is concentrated in the north and especially the province of Cabo Delgado. A number of indicators in SEARO, particularly in the 'enabling environment' dimension, focus on national data which will not provide an accurate reflection of the situation in the crisis affected areas, where UNHCR is warning about 'severe GBV risks', including the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.[10]

Some of the countries with the lowest overall risk scores on the SEARO have high values for risk factors in the protective dimension, suggesting significant gaps in the protective environment.[11] For example:

- Malawi's values of 8.8 on 'coordination and leadership' (this component includes the presence of PSEA coordination and how it functions) and 9.9 on SEA reporting and accountability (measuring the existence and effectiveness of SEA reporting mechanisms) constitute the worst values on these components among all countries.[12] The absence or inadequate functioning of these protective factors in a country which is facing its worst food crisis in a decade, where 20% of the population is expected to face high levels of acute food insecurity[13], risk exacerbating SEA risks in a way that may not be fully captured by the index – where Malawi ranks 31st out of 32 countries.

In the protective environment, the 'funding and resources' and 'survivor assistance' components stand out with high average values, suggesting critical gaps in these areas in several countries:

- Colombia (9.2), Somalia (9.0), Haiti (8.9), Ukraine (8.9) and Libya (8.9) stand out as having the highest risk ratings for survivor assistance. This indicator captures the access to GBV services by SEA victims/ survivors who have reported through UN (and their implementing partners') reporting channels. A high score indicates either a lack of progress on providing assistance or a lack of reporting on the status of cases where survivors have been referred for assistance. Since the data is confidential and not included in the index, it is not possible to say which countries have a high score due to lack of progress in providing services to SEA victims/ survivors, and which have a high score due to lack of reporting on progress.

- Ten countries have values in the highest quartile for funding and resources, indicating a low percentage of funds in Response Plans being earmarked for GBV and child protection. Funding earmarked for these areas acts as a proxy indicator on the level of support for SEA-related activities in the absence of reliable data on PSEA funding for agencies at country level. The Response Plans for Madagascar (9.6), Afghanistan (9.0), Yemen (8.4), Guatemala (8.3) and Chad have the smallest percentage of dedicated GBV and child protection resources, while Iraq (4.0), Lebanon (4.0), Cameroon (4.0), Colombia (4.5) and Malawi (4.5) have the highest percentage.

In the enabling environment, a few data points stand out which require further unpacking to understand the risk factors in this dimension. For some countries, one or more components stand out with very high values while the overall value for the dimension remains low, as the latter is based on the average of all values in the dimension. In other countries, certain values appear to be surprisingly low, which require investigating the data behind the values to understand how this score was reached. For example:

- Libya scores in the middle (5.5) for the enabling environment, with particularly low values in the components 'violence against women and children' (3.3) and 'gender inequality' (2.5). When looking at the data behind these values, it turns out that the low values in these components reflect a lack of recent and relevant data rather than progress in these areas. The value for 'violence against women and children' is based on data from one of three indicators in this component only – this data is from a piece of 2014 research, and is different than the standard data used for this indicator (as this was not available). As such, there is no evidence in the index to suggest that risk factors in this area are low in Libya, but the low value is rather based on one non-standardised and dated figure. At the same time, Libya scores very high in the component 'laws, policies and practices' (8.9) which suggest a very unfavourable environment. This highlights the needs to look beyond the composite values, especially when a country has a remarkable low value compared to other countries in the region or what would be expected for the context.[14]

Whilst the enabling environment generally sees the highest values among countries which are higher on the overall risk index, there are a few exceptions from this trend worth noting. Examples of countries outside the top-ten with regards to the overall risk score, but which have very high values in different components of the enabling environment, include:

- Myanmar (11th) with the worst possible value for 'laws policies and practices' (9.9), Mali (12th) with 9.0 and Libya (22nd) with 8.9 – indicating significant gaps in policies and laws to protect women and children from violence, and that social norms that justify violence against women are common.

- For 'violence against women and children', Bangladesh (8.7), Niger (7.6), CAR (7.5), Mali (7.4) and Burundi (7.0) stand out with high to very high values in this component, but are found below the top-ten countries with respect to overall SEA risk.

3.4 What does the data tell us about how to address SEA globally?

The data in the SEARO can support the identification of countries with ongoing humanitarian emergencies which are likely to have high risk of SEA, based on the co-existence of multiple, pressing SEA risk factors identified by the index. It can be used for high-level comparison of countries and support analysis of SEA risk factors – however, importantly, the SEARO should not be used as a standalone tool in this analysis but be accompanied by expert input and review of complementary sources and evidence.

At a global level, SEARO can help us spot trends and patterns, such as common gaps in the protective environment across countries. This type of analysis can help us understand whether gaps appear to be systematic and requiring systematic responses, or whether gaps are more context specific, and may require tailored support to country level actors.

The SEARO highlights that addressing SEA requires multi-level, nexus approaches as risk factors are always present across all dimensions. Some of these are deeply rooted such as attitudes justifying violence against women, while others are changing rapidly with evolving humanitarian contexts – this requires approaches that tackle different drivers and levels, involving multiple actors and global collaboration.

4. Using SEARO at country level

4.1 Country case studies

The SEARO was designed for primarily global and regional level use, however, the index can also be used at country level. This section dives deeper into the SEARO scores using two country case studies, where the countries' values on the SEARO are analysed together with information shared by key informants (KIs) who are experts in safeguarding in the respective countries, to explore what SEARO can tell us, and how it can be used, at country level.

Case study: Ethiopia – overall risk value 6.9 (ranked 5th)			
Enabling environment: 6.1	Humanitarian context: 9.2	Operational context: 6.7	Protective environment: 5.6

With an overall risk value of 6.9, Ethiopia ranks 5th out of 32 countries on SEARO. Ethiopia has the second highest risk of all countries in terms of **humanitarian context**, with the highest values possible for the scope and intensity (9.9) and crisis severity (9.9). These extremely high values reflect a reality of multiple ongoing crises, including the ongoing conflict in Northern Ethiopia and the worst drought in 40 years which is estimated to affect 24 million people (October 2022).[15] The SEARO also shows that Ethiopia has one of the largest humanitarian responses, which is delivered in a context of limited humanitarian access.

The **operational context** has values ranging from the middle to the higher end of the scale, giving it an average value of 6.7. The category 'response modalities' scores 9.9. The high value is driven by the risks identified in the operational design of the response, as a large share of the aid delivered is in the form of food, cash and Non-Food Items, which is known to increase the risk of SEA.

Ethiopia scores 6.1 for the **enabling environment**, with the highest value seen in 'violence against women and children' (7.6). This is based on a high percentage of women aged 20-24 being married before 18 (40% in 2016), and high levels of recent and lifetime physical and/ or sexual IPV reported by women aged 15-49 (26.5% and 37% in 2018). Other components in this dimension have lower scores, such as 'policy and societal norms'. This suggests that Ethiopia has laws in place to protect women and girls. However, a key informant pointed out that there is a big gap between policy and practice – whilst legislation has improved in recent years, implementation lags as attitudes and interpretations of these laws have not changed at the same pace. There are also key gaps in existing laws – for example, marital rape is not considered a criminal offence. In light of this, the value of 6.0 in 'laws, policies, and practices' appears to underestimate the risk.

Ethiopia's lowest value is found in the **protective environment** (5.6), suggesting that some factors are in place to prevent and respond to SEA. The outlier in this area is 'funding and resources' (7.0), reflecting a low percentage of funds in the Response Plan being earmarked for GBV and child protection – increasing SEA risk. Whilst the SEARO focuses on protective measures put in place by the UN and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), the key informant highlighted the work of other actors, such as women's rights organisations, to support survivors. Worth noting is that civil society organisations in Ethiopia are involved in the PSEA network, which the key informant highlighted as rare in most countries. The KI also mentioned the government structures and mechanisms in place for assisting survivors including One Stop Centres – although these are insufficiently resourced.

The KI highlighted that a number of groups are at high risk of SEA in Ethiopia, which the SEARO does not shed light on but would require consulting experts and research to find out about. These include women and children with disabilities, women and girls from ethnic groups, and women in camps for internally displaced people. The SEARO is a valuable starting point for understanding SEA risk in a country, however, more in-depth analysis is key to understanding nuances of risk factors and shape responses.

Case study: Nigeria – overall risk value 6.0 (ranked 13th)			
Enabling environment: 5.2	Humanitarian context: 7.1	Operational context: 5.5	Protective environment: 6.0

Nigeria ranks 13th on SEARO, with an overall risk value of 6.0, with the highest risks being found in the **humanitarian context**. The 'scope and intensity' component stands out as an extremely high risk (9.3), reflecting the protracted humanitarian crisis in the North-East which left 8.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states in 2022 (figure from June 2022).[16] More than 80% of those in need are women and children according to the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Nigeria.[17] In June 2022, the UN warned that 4.1 people in North-East Nigeria are at risk of severe food insecurity.[18] The humanitarian situation has since then deteriorated further following the worst flooding in a decade, affecting Adamawa in the North-East, among other states.[19] The flooding risk exacerbating the already alarming food crisis.

Components in Nigeria's **operational context** have values ranging from 4.8 to 6.4 – the middle of SEARO's risk scale. The highest risk value here is found in the 'operational design' component, which indicates the relative share of cash, food and Non Food Items in the Response Plan. The KI highlighted that there is an ongoing push for more cash-based assistance in Nigeria, which they emphasised comes with high risk of SEA in the distribution process. They mentioned that groups that are at increased risk of SEA in the aid distribution process include women who are poor and more dependent on aid, such as female-headed households, and people with disabilities.

Nigeria scores 5.2 in the **enabling environment** dimension – the lowest value across the four dimensions and below the average of 5.8 across all countries in the SEARO. The relatively low value in this dimension is influenced by the fact that all (by SEARO measured) protective legislation is in place, and that data from Nigeria on child marriage affecting girls and recent and lifetime physical and/ or sexual IPV experienced by women and girls give Nigeria a value in the middle of SEARO's scale (5.2). Despite not standing out as high or extremely high on the index, it should be noted that 43.4% of women aged 20-24 were married before age 18 (2018 data). The KI was surprised that the enabling environment is not flagged as a higher risk in Nigeria on the SEARO. One reason behind the relatively low value can be that the prevalence data on VAWG is based on national data, while the humanitarian situation in Nigeria is concentrated to a smaller number of states, where the situation for women and girls is likely to be significantly worse. The KI also highlighted the gap between legislation and implementation – noting that the latter is impeded by restrictive social norms prevailing and limited capacity of law enforcement and other key actors to implement the laws. In addition, the federal law passed in 2015 which covers VAWG has not been domesticated in all states.[20]

Nigeria scores 6.0 in the **protective environment.** The lowest risk value for any component in this dimension is 4.7 on 'coordination and leadership', signalling that PSEA coordination and leadership is largely in place. The highest risk value in this dimension is 7.8 for 'survivor assistance', indicating significant gaps in this component which contribute to a higher SEA risk. The KI were of the view that these values accurately reflect the situation with these components in Nigeria – noting that the PSEA network is well coordinated while the survivor assistance still has a long way to go. The case study highlights the importance of exploring subnational variations in SEA risks.

4.2 What do the case studies tell us about how to use the SEARO at country level?

The risk scores in each dimension, category and component of the SEARO are useful for gaining an overview of the most prominent SEA risk factors in a country. However, the real strength of the index when used at a country level lies in the indicators and diverse data on which these values are based. These can help actors at a country level understand where risks are being generated, and also where there are protective factors as well as gaps. This insight can guide further analysis at country level by indicating where risks are high and more in-depth analysis is required (e.g. through consulting additional data or experts) to inform strategies on how to address these risks.

The SEARO cannot tell us the specifics around how to address SEA at country level, including subnational variations, as demonstrated in the case study of Nigeria. At country level, it is a valuable tool for understanding the factors that are understood to drive SEA risk, and for identifying issues that warrant further exploration. This analysis, in turn, can be used to inform strategies for preventing and responding to SEA in humanitarian contexts.

5. What are the limitations of what the SEARO can tell us?

The SEARO and the data sources it draw on present some limitations in terms of the information included, and the analysis for which it can be used. It is important to note that the SEARO is not designed to be used as a standalone tool, but should always be used in tandem with other information and sources. Key limitations of SEARO are highlighted below, alongside tips on other sources of information and additional analysis that can be conducted to gain a nuanced and in-depth understanding of SEA risks in humanitarian contexts. The limitations are not weaknesses or criticisms of the tool, but rather highlighted to ensure that the best use can be made of the instrument by deploying it in the most useful way.

SEA prevalence/ projections: The SEARO index is designed to give an overview of risk factors that are understood to contribute to increased risk of SEA. The index is not designed to analyse the prevalence of SEA since data on prevalence of SEA is limited due to underreporting, and collecting data on SEA in humanitarian contexts is both methodologically and ethically challenging. Secondly, the SEARO cannot predict where SEA will occur. However, by assessing factors that are known to contribute to SEA risks, the SEARO can highlight contexts where SEA is at increased risk of taking place based on the co-existence of multiple and pressing risk factors, and the lack of protective factors.

Current SEA risk level: The information in the SEARO is only as accurate and up to date as the data upon which it is based. While the data in the humanitarian dimension is more recent and the data sources are more frequently updated, data in other dimensions and components can be more varied. For example, data in the 'violence against women and children' component ranges from 2006-2020 (with most data from 2015-2018). When conducting country level

analysis, or comparing the risk values across countries, it is important to keep in mind that the SEARO may not reflect the most recent situation in all countries, and it is always good to conduct research into the current situation. This is particularly relevant for the more recent humanitarian crises, such as the war in Ukraine and the Taliban take-over of Afghanistan in 2021, where data in the SEARO may not yet reflect the current situation and risk factors.

Contextual SEA risk at country level: SEARO generates a value for countries as a whole, as it was primarily designed to compare risks across countries and over time, and does not account for local variances in the nature and scale of risk factors. SEA risks can vary within a country due to differences in social and cultural norms in different areas, between different settings, and depending on type of programming and delivery models used for these. For example,

> **Country level analysis:**
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> To understand the local context and SEA risk, it is important to complement the use of the SEARO with context specific information and expertise. This can be done through key informant interviews with local experts, and through reviewing existing evidence and data at country and local levels.

SEA risks are often higher in camp settings and at aid distribution points. The locations and concentration of crisis and humanitarian needs will also shape geographical SEA risks in a country. It is therefore important to supplement the overview provided by SEARO with context specific information on factors that influence SEA risks.

Protective efforts by civil society and other actors: The protective environment dimension focuses on protective measures and processes put in place by the UN system and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) such as inter-agency PSEA coordination and leadership, survivor assistance, and inter-agency reporting mechanisms. While this data is highly relevant for assessing the protective environment in a country, the dimension does not consider protective measures by non-UN/ HCT organisations and actors. The KIs for the case studies highlighted that women's rights organisations and other actors that work in communities are often the first (and sometimes only) point of contact for SEA survivors/ victims, and they provide essential services and assistance to survivors. They highlighted that many SEA incidents will not reach UN reporting systems – as such, analysis of the UN's protective and response measures must be complemented with analysis of the broader protective environment and the range of structures and processes in place, not least within local organisations. This analysis is critical to avoid duplicating efforts by women's rights organisations, wider civil society and national actors when it comes to prevention and response to SEA in humanitarian contexts.

Who is at increased risk of SEA: The SEARO focuses on SEA targeting women and children in humanitarian contexts, as women and children are recognised as being at high risk of SEA due to power imbalances vis-à-vis aid workers. The SEARO does not include any disaggregated indicators that can shed light on how women who experience intersecting inequalities, based on age, race, ethnicity, disability, caste, class, and sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), may experience unique and exacerbated risks of SEA. The SEARO furthermore does not distinguish specific SEA risks facing girls and boys, with

the exception of the focus on marriage of girls before 18 in the 'violence against women and children' component. The SEARO also does not consider other groups at high risk of SEA, such as LGBTQI+ people more broadly, and men and boys with disabilities. Despite these limitations, some components can still provide insight into wider context and risk factors that inevitably affect other at-risk groups (e.g. rule of law, corruption etc).

Intersectional analysis:

Use of the SEARO should be complemented by analysis of which groups are at higher risk of SEA in different contexts. This could be done by examining additional data for components which will affect the risk of SEA targeting certain groups – for instance, the legal situation for LGBTQI+ people in a country, and the prevalence of violence against people with disabilities. This analysis should ideally engage organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs), LGBTQI+ organisations and other representative organisations and networks.

Annex 1: Country analysis

1) Yemen scores highest of all countries on the SEARO. It has the highest risk value of any country in the 'humanitarian context' and 'enabling environment' dimensions. In the latter, Yemen scores the highest possible on 'laws, policies and practice' (9.9), and very high on 'institutions and services' (8.3), and 'gender inequality' (8.0). Worth noting is that Yemen scores relatively low risk on the 'violence against women and children' component (4.3). However, when looking into the indicators, this is a result of there being a lack of data rather than actual low prevalence – Yemen only has one data point on proportion of women and girls aged 20-24 who were married before 18 (32%) which gives a relatively low score, while it

> **1. Yemen (7.9)**
> - Enabling environment: 7.6
> - Humanitarian context: 9.4
> - Operational context: 7.2
> - Protective environment: 7.4

does not have any data on women and girls' experiences of recent and lifetime Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Given the overall challenging context for women and girls, VAWG levels can be assumed to be high and this risk factor should not be overlooked when responding to SEA risks in Yemen. In the absence of data, it could be useful to gather inputs from gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against children (VAC) experts who could sense-check and estimate the missing scores.

Second on the SEARO is Afghanistan with high values across all dimensions, especially in the humanitarian, operational and protective contexts. The operational context score of 7.3, suggests relatively low staff capacities and knowledge of PSEA in the UN Afghanistan teams[21]. Other values that stand out as high are on PSEA coordination and leadership (e.g. having PSEA coordination in place) and funds in the humanitarian response plan allocated for GBV and child protection. Afghanistan has the highest score of all countries in this category ('capacity and resources'), indicating major gaps in the protective environment. It should be noted that most of the data in the index pre-dates the Taliban's return to power in August 2021

> **2. Afghanistan (7.6)**
> - Enabling environment: 7.2
> - Humanitarian context: 8.5
> - Operational context: 7.3
> - Protective environment: 7.3

and the situation for women and girls has significantly declined since then. For example, data on violence against women and girls is from 2016-2018, and the gender inequality data from 2019[22].

> **3. Syria (7.1)**
> - Enabling environment: 7.0
> - Humanitarian context: 8.6
> - Operational context: 7.3
> - Protective environment: 5.6

Third on the index is Syria, where the overall risk (7.1) is driven by its humanitarian and operational contexts. Over 10 years since the war started, the scope and intensity of the crisis (9.0) and the scale and complexity of needs (8.1) remain severe. The SEARO also shows the large scale of the humanitarian response in Syria (8.8), contributing to higher SEA risk. The 'enabling environment' value for Syria is just below the highest quartile for this dimension (7.0) – i.e. not the worst risk level possible. However, looking into the data generating this score gives a slightly different picture. The data on child marriage of

girls (proportion of women and girls 20-24 who were married before 18) is from 2006 (13%), which pre-dates the war and does not capture the impact of the crisis on drivers of child marriage such as household economic stress and protection concerns. Given the lack of recent data in this component, it is likely that the risks of child marriage and IPV in Syria are even higher than the score suggests.[23] The dimension which contributes least to the overall risk score for Syria is the 'protective environment' (5.6), which has the lowest value among the top 10 countries on the index (with Ethiopia) – suggesting that PSEA coordination and leadership, and reporting and accountability mechanisms are somewhat in place and functioning.

4. South Sudan (7.0)

- Enabling environment: 7.5
- Humanitarian context: 8.5
- Operational context: 5.5
- Protective environment: 6.6

South Sudan's risk value on the index reflects a context of widespread and severe humanitarian needs (9.6 for crisis scope and intensity). The score for 'scale and complexity' of humanitarian needs is slightly lower (7.4) due to a smaller operation size (6.7), while the value for the operation complexity (8.1) reflects the multiple factors restricting humanitarian access in the country. Values of several components within the 'enabling environment' dimension are found in the highest quartile; however, the average score (7.5) is brought down by lower values in the areas of 'laws, policies, and practices' (7.0) and 'gender inequality'[24] (6.4). Although the index shows that South Sudan has protective legislation in place, the high percentage of women (78.5%) justifying wife beating brings the average value up to 7.0 in 'laws policies and practices'. The operational dimension risk scores lowest of all dimensions with 5.5, with particularly low values in the 'response institutions' (4.6) – indicating a good coverage of UN staff who have undergone training in PSEA, and good staff knowledge on PSEA. The protective environment risk score is slightly higher (6.6), with a high value in the 'funding and resources' component bringing up the average value in this domain – reflecting a low percentage of funds in the Response Plan dedicated to GBV and child protection.

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Annex 2: Methodology

> **Query:** Please produce a short report analysing the results of the SEARO Overview, including:
>
> - **Exec Summary**
>
> - **Background to SEARO**
>   - What is it? (including aims and objectives)
>   - How does it work? (i.e. the four dimensions and indicators)
>   - Signpost other key resources
>
> - **What does SEARO tell us globally?**
>   - Where is the risk highest? (i.e. what are the top 10 countries? Are there any regions which are higher risk?)
>   - What components stand out as being highest risk across the dataset generally, and particularly in the highest-risk countries?
>   - Are there any 'remarkable' data points that are worth of note?
>   - What does the data tell us about how to address SEA?
>
> - **What does the data tell us at a country level?**
>   - Case study of Nigeria and Ethiopia complemented by interviews
>
> - **What does SEARO not tell us?** (i.e. limitations)

The analysis has been conducted as systematically as possible, under tight time constraints.

Step 1: Document review – The following SEARO background documents were reviewed to understand the index design, data sources, and how values are generated.

- SEA Risk Overview: Risk Analysis for Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

- SEARO Frequently Asked Questions

- SEARO Concept and Methodology

Step 2: Analysing the index – The SEARO values for countries (overall scores) and across dimensions were analysed as systematically as possible, with focus on understanding how the values have been generated, identifying patterns and trends, as well as notable data points and discrepancies. This required exploring the data in each dimension, category, and component. Desk-based research was conducted for selected countries to understand the humanitarian situations and to what extent the SEARO risk values reflect the current situation and main risk factors highlighted in the existing literature. Key sources consulted for this includes Humanitarian Response Plans and Situation Analysis.

Step 3: Country case studies – Two in-depth case studies were conducted (Ethiopia and Nigeria). One key informant interview for each country was conducted with safeguarding experts in respective countries, which was complemented by desk-based research. The information obtain from the interviews and desk-based research was analysed in light of the risk values generated by SEARO.

Endnotes

[1] In October 2022 a beta v.1.1. version was developed to include two more countries with humanitarian response plans. The new version also included updated data on two components of the Index that are mentioned in the report: the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and the UN personnel PSEA capacities survey.

[2] While SEARO focuses on understanding SEA targeting women and children, some factors in the index can help understanding the wider context which may also affect the risk of SEA targeting other groups. SEA is rooted in power inequalities, including gender inequality but also other structural inequalities linked to e.g. age, race, ethnicity, class, cast, disability status, and sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). While women, men, girls, boys, and non-binary and gender diverse people can all be targeted for SEA, women and girls (including those with diverse SOGIESC) are at heightened risk of being targeted for SEA due to structural and systematic gender inequality.

[3] In September 2022, these were Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, DRC, Chad and Haiti.

[4] The top 10 countries in this dimension are: Libya (8.0), Guatemala (7.9) Madagascar (7.8), Burundi (7.7), Yemen (7.4), Afghanistan (7.3), Honduras (7.3), Haiti (7.2), and El Salvador and Somalia both on 7.1.

[5] This falls under the 'violence against women and children' component – however, this component only includes data on violence against women and girls (VAWG) and not on boys. When discussing this component, this report will sometimes refer to 'VAWG' as that is a more accurate reflection of the data currently included in the SEARO.

[6] Here, the analysis only includes the top five countries as there was limited time to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the top ten countries on the index.

[7] All components under the humanitarian context dimension draw on data in an index which is updated monthly, except the 'operational size', which underlying data is provided annually.

[8] Countries with very high values for scope and intensity of crisis but which feature on the bottom half of the list are Burundi (9.3), Burkina Faso (8.0), Mozambique (9.0) and Lebanon (8.0).

[9] These include Cameroon (8.3), Burkina Faso (7.7) which also scores high on scope and intensity, and Colombia (8.0).

[10] UNHCR (2022) *Cabo Delgado GBV Factsheet – June 2022,* https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/cabo-delgado-gbv-factsheet-june-2022

[11] These include Honduras (25th) with extremely high-risk score for 'reporting and accountability' (9.9), Guatemala (26th) with high values across the board in the protective environment, Colombia (30th) with extremely high-risk score for 'survivor assistance' (9.2), Malawi (31st) with 8.8 for PSEA 'coordination and leadership' and 9.9 for 'reporting and accountability', and El Salvador (32nd – last on index) with 8.2 for PSEA 'coordination and leadership' and 9.2 for 'reporting and accountability'.

[12] Burundi also score 8.8 on 'coordination and leadership', and Honduras and Libya both score 9.9 on 'reporting and accountability'.

[13] Based on IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis June 2022 to March 2023.

[14] Other countries with data gaps in the 'violence against women and children' component, which warrants looking into how the values were reached, are Iraq, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

[15] UK Government (2022) 'UK announces humanitarian assistance for 150,000 women and children suffering drought and conflict in Ethiopia', Press Release 19 October 2022, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/uk-announces-humanitarian-assistance-150000-women-and-children-suffering-drought-and-conflict-ethiopia

[16] OCHA (2022) 'Urgent assistance needed in North-East Nigeria to avert serious food and nutrition crisis', Press Release 21 June 2022, https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/urgent-assistance-needed-north-east-nigeria-avert-serious-food-and-nutrition-crisis

[17] UN (2022) 'Nigeria: crisis in northeast will worsen without urgent help, says OCHA', UN News 21 June 2022m https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1120912

[18] OCHA (2022) 'Urgent assistance needed in North-East Nigeria to avert serious food and nutrition crisis', Press Release 21 June 2022, https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/urgent-assistance-needed-north-east-nigeria-avert-serious-food-and-nutrition-crisis

[19] OCHA, UN RC/ HC Nigeria (2022) 'Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria Matthias Schmale on unprecedented floods', Press Release 1 November 2022, https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/resident-and-humanitarian-coordinator-nigeria-matthias-schmale-unprecedented-floods

[20] See VAPP Tracker: https://www.partnersnigeria.org/vapp-tracker/

[21] The score is only based on UN staff capacity and knowledge, and does not include capacity of other humanitarian actors (e.g. INGOs, NGOs and CBOs).

[22] The beta v.1.1. includes information from the 2021 Gender Inequality Index. This was not available at the time of writing this report.

[23] However, there are other sources of information on GBV from Syria, including the annual 'Voices for Syria' reports (2022 report here), which include testimonies of widespread SEA in the Syrian humanitarian response.

[24] It should be noted that South Sudan's value for 'gender inequality' is based on an imputation value composed by the average scores of countries with similar HDI rankings, as the gender inequality index (which this indicator is based on) does not include South Sudan. The updated version (Beta v.1.1.) includes data from the gender inequality index for South Sudan from 2021, resulting in an a value of 5.9 for this component.