

Commitments made by donors to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the international aid sector

Introduction

Sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment¹ often result from power imbalances linked to social and gender-related inequalities. These acts can constitute violations or abuses of human rights. The targets are often the most vulnerable members of society. The risks are heightened in humanitarian or fragile and conflict-affected contexts, where power imbalances can be particularly acute and the displaced have little recourse. Women, children and people with disabilities are likely to be among the most vulnerable in such contexts.

Any sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment is unacceptable. Whether of a beneficiary in a programme we fund, our employees, colleagues, or an aid worker, we take a zero-tolerance approach, which means acting on every allegation in line with agreed procedures of each organisation, and expecting our partners to do the same.

We are determined to drive the necessary changes in culture, values, programming and accountability to promote integrity and the highest possible standards of behaviour by everyone in the aid sector. This means that we believe the commitments apply to us and, by extension, the partners that receive funding from us, unless stated otherwise.

In the short- to medium-term, we expect the number of reported cases to increase as individuals become more confident to come forward, as reporting systems improve and as accountability increases. But we expect the number of cases detected or reported to decrease in the longer term, as we implement the commitments below.

We will focus on prevention and empowering beneficiaries and local communities. We will adopt a survivor-centred response that prioritises support based on the wishes and characteristics of survivors, and we will work with implementing partners to do the same. We will strengthen the mechanisms by which we hold ourselves and our partners to account, and will seek to increase capacity and capability on these issues.

Many of us signed related high-level political statements in June 2018 at one, or both, of the meetings of the [G7 Development Ministers in Whistler](#) and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) at [Tidewater](#). Today's set of political commitments builds on those statements, but goes much further in terms of the level of ambition and detail.

We have committed collectively to focus on four strategic shifts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and to respond better when it does occur. Collectively and individually, we will take actions in the coming months to achieve this. We encourage other donors to sign up to these commitments or take similar measures as soon as possible. We also encourage governments that receive aid directly from us and governments that are neither aid donors nor recipients, to support these strategic shifts, and to consider how they might tackle these issues through their own work.

Strategic Shift 1: Ensure support for survivors, victims and whistle-blowers; enhance accountability and transparency; strengthen reporting; and tackle impunity.

1. Wherever possible actively include beneficiaries in the design, implementation and refinement of programmes and improved complaints and feedback mechanisms that will empower individuals to come forward with the confidence that they will be heard, that their concerns will be fairly pursued, that feedback will be provided to them as soon as possible and that their safety will be of the utmost concern.

¹ Definitions come from those set by the United Nations and are for reference only. See last page for more detail.

2. Clearly communicate requirements and best-practice guidance for the reporting of incidents, and work towards aligned reporting practices and the sharing of information. Considerations of confidentiality, the protection of relevant individuals, and relevant legislation will be central to this work.
3. Review, and where necessary, renew efforts within and between aid agencies and across governments and the wider international system, to avoid the hiring and recirculation of perpetrators in the aid sector, and to hold them to account, including by helping to bring them to justice, when appropriate, all in line with due process and relevant legal obligations.
4. Ensure that relevant information about allegations, confirmed cases, prevention measures and response activities, are an integral part of reporting mechanisms, which for some donors will include annual public statements. The confidentiality of information and the safety of individuals will be paramount.
5. Adopt a victim/survivor-centred approach to help victims and survivors to access tangible and practical help to recover from the effects of abuse, exploitation and harassment, for example, by supporting the work of the United Nations' (UN) Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (OVRA) and the UN Victims Support Trust Fund.
6. Review best practice and lessons from ombudsman schemes to explore the potential to improve systems of complaints mechanisms, referral pathways and independent accountability.

Strategic Shift 2: Incentivise cultural change through strong leadership, organisational accountability and better human resource processes.

7. Have one or more named senior-level champion(s) accountable for work on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, while stressing that the responsibility for safeguarding rests with all individuals in an organisation.
8. Encourage at least annual discussion at the Board or equivalent level in all organisations of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and how the organisation is addressing them.
9. Encourage the recruitment and career development of women at the senior management level and throughout organisations to send a clear signal about the importance of gender balance and a diverse and inclusive workforce.
10. Review, and where necessary, strengthen recruitment and referencing processes to build workplace cultures of respect and accountability, and so help prevention.
11. For members of the UN Secretary General's Circle of Leadership and signatories to the Voluntary Compact, encourage other Member States to join this collective statement of intent, and encourage a review of progress within the next 12 months.
12. Encourage delivery of the UN Secretary-General's 2017 *Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse* strategy through joint donor messaging that recognises the need for related action plans with clear deliverables and milestones from each relevant UN organisation. Encourage the International Financial Institutions to deliver on the collective and individual commitments they have made, and ensure the monitoring of implementation.
13. Those members of the donor group who participate in the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) will support and advance the discussion on

enhancing assessment in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment to help the improved effectiveness of multilateral organisations.

Strategic Shift 3: Adopt minimum standards, and ensure we and our partners meet them

14. Demonstrate adherence to one or both sets of international minimum standards related to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), namely the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Minimum Operating Standards on PSEA, and/or the PSEA elements of The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability. In the longer term, we will look to review and strengthen measures for verification of that adherence, and how the standards could also cover sexual harassment.
15. Review, and where necessary, strengthen formal funding templates and due diligence tools to reflect those standards, and include clear and specific language on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, including common definitions. This also includes reviewing, and, where necessary, strengthening, language for our funding partners which requires them to apply the same minimum standards in their sub-granting and contracting requirements for downstream partners.
16. Review and, if necessary, revise project monitoring arrangements (e.g. frequency, scope and indicators), to ensure a stronger focus on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment issues.
17. Support the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to formulate a new DAC instrument that in 2019 will set standards on preventing and managing the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse in development cooperation, and drive donor accountability in meeting them.

Strategic Shift 4: Strengthen organisational capacity and capability across the international aid sector, including building the capability of implementing partners to meet the minimum standards

18. Review and if necessary strengthen core oversight and management systems for tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and use victim/survivor-centred responses.
19. Explore options for a Resource and Support Hub to develop and communicate the evidence base, best practices and guidance on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, with a focus on providing support to smaller organisations.
20. Provide guidance and minimum training requirements for relevant staff on the prevention of and response to, sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

Next steps

21. Each of us commits to taking action on the above through our own systems, processes and stakeholders, as consistent with relevant domestic and international law, and taking into consideration relevant existing structures and operating models. It is up to each of us to decide which measures are the most urgent and how we will communicate progress to our stakeholders.
22. We will meet no later than 12 months from now to assess progress, while continuing to liaise regularly to keep up the pace of progress and share lessons on this vital issue.

London, 18 October 2018

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Key Definitionsⁱ

Sexual Exploitation, as defined by the UN Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2003/13](#), constitutes any actual or attempted abuse by UN personnel of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. It is a broad term, but it includes transactional sex, solicitation of transactional sex and exploitative relationships.

Sexual Abuse, as defined by the UN Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2003/13](#), means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

All sexual activity with children (as defined under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as any person under the age of 18) is sexual abuse, regardless of the age of majority or consent locally. Mistaken understanding of the age of a child is not a defence.

"Sexual abuse" is a broad term, which includes a number of acts, including "sexual assault" for example, (rape, attempted rape, forcing someone to perform oral sex / touching) "sexual offence" and "sexual offence against a child".

Sexual Harassment is any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

In context of the UN, "sexual harassment" primarily describes prohibited behaviour against another UN staff member or related personnel, which could also include nationals of the host state. [ST/SGB/2008/5](#) and similar directives for uniformed personnel defines the term for UN staff: it involves any unwelcome sexual advance; request for sexual favours; verbal or physical conduct or gestures of a sexual nature; or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected, or be perceived, to cause offence or humiliation to another, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Beyond UN regulations, the definition of sexual harassment does not require a link to the work environment. Sexual harassment can be perpetrated against beneficiaries, community members, citizens, as well as staff, personnel, etc.

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ⁱ The UN Secretary General has established a Chief Executive Board Task Force to review policies to prevent sexual harassment and develop improved and consistent approaches across the UN, including a review of how the UN defines sexual harassment.