

Guidance Note:

The Role of Donors for Addressing
Sexual Violence in Humanitarian
Workplaces





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Donor agencies have played an essential role in addressing various problems plaguing the humanitarian community – fraud, corruption, concerns about the funding of terrorism, and, most recently, addressing the sexual exploitation and abuse of the population that humanitarian organisations are meant to aid. By asking questions of those they fund, donor agencies have brought about significant changes to the policies and procedures implemented by humanitarian organisations, contributing to the professionalism and transparency of humanitarian operations. These changes did not come easy, nor were all humanitarian organisations eager to implement the measures requested by donor agencies. However, by donors leveraging their key power - the ability to reduce or stop funding - humanitarian organisations have moved forward with necessary measures and improved overall humanitarian operations.

Despite the incredible steps taken forward on many issues - in particular those to address financial transparency - one problem has escaped notice of donor agencies and humanitarian organisations: the pervasive sexual violence occurring in humanitarian workplaces. Although humanitarian organisations are beginning to make strides towards addressing this problem, efforts would be amplified by the inclusion and involvement of donor agencies in this effort: through the funding of measures to address the issue, as well as requirements for appropriate and responsive policies and procedures before funding will be awarded.

Why address sexual violence in humanitarian workplaces?

The issue of sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers is not new, though information about the problem has significantly increased in the last two years. Approximately 72% of humanitarian aid workers are currently reporting that they are experiencing sexual violence at the hands of one of their colleagues; the majority of these involve abuse of power situations where supervisors are sexually violating those under their authority. This is a problem for humanitarian aid workers throughout the community – expatriate and national staff, women and men, irrespective of religion, class, role within organisations, ethnicity, race, nationality, or sexual orientation¹.

It is a problem that affects all humanitarian organisations, from the smallest local NGO, to the UN Secretariat. Despite this, in a study published by Report the Abuse (RTA) last year, only 16% of 92 examined humanitarian organisations had a single mention of sexual violence even being a risk to their employees, in their external and internal documentation². This situation is changing, as more humanitarian aid workers experiencing sexual violence speak out and incidents become increasingly public. Humanitarian organisations are starting to finally put in place appropriate prevention measures, policies, and procedures to respond to sexual violence incidents occurring against their staff. RTA applauds these efforts, but considerably more work needs to be done and further resources directed at the issue.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all statistics are derived from Report the Abuse’s data collection, available at: [Report the Abuse’s Prevention, Policy and Procedure Checklist](#), by Humanitarian Women’s Network, August 2016.



The development of the first good practices tools and guidance notes, published simultaneously with this document³, will greatly assist humanitarian organisations to develop such prevention measures, policies, and procedures⁴. Guidance from donor agencies, set out below in detail, will further push the issue along the necessary path to protecting humanitarian aid workers from sexual violence.

There are also tangible benefits to creating safe and healthy workplaces for humanitarian aid workers, because staff who are better supported work more efficiently, take less sick leave, and stay with their organisation longer⁵. This significantly reduces overall costs for humanitarian organisations and results in more efficient spending of donor funds. At the end of the day, addressing sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers not only means reduced trauma for humanitarian aid workers, but also results in safer, more efficient, and more cost-effective humanitarian operations. It is a win-win situation for all involved.

Guidance for donor agencies

Donor agencies, through their negotiations and other types of interactions with the organisations they fund, routinely ask questions about the prevention measures, policies, and procedures in place to address various issues. By adding sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers to this list, the opportunity for dialogue and change within humanitarian organisations can be created. This also provides the opportunity for donor agencies to lead on an issue gaining increasing media attention, and which will be a vital and essential piece to safe and effective humanitarian action in the coming years.

The following list of questions, to be directed at humanitarian organisations, should be treated a guideline, and donor agencies are encouraged to reflect on how they can push themselves and others even further towards creating safer humanitarian workplaces:

- Are there prevention measures, policies, and procedures in place to address sexual violence in the workplace?
 - Are these prevention measures, policies, and procedures survivor-centred?
 - Were different sections of the organisation - including national and LGBTQI staff members – consulted in the creation of these prevention measures, policies, and procedures?
 - Is information on prevention measures, policies, and procedures made available in local languages in all locations where the organisation operates?

³ Megan Nobert, *Addressing Sexual Violence in Humanitarian Organisations: Good Practices for Improved Prevention Measures, Policies, and Procedures*, Report the Abuse, August 2017; Megan Nobert, *Duty of Care: Protection of Humanitarian Aid Workers from Sexual Violence*, Report the Abuse, August 2017; Megan Nobert, *Guidance Note: Communicating about Sexual Violence Incidents as Humanitarian Organisations*, Report the Abuse, August 2017.

⁴ Note that language making this a required part of the revised Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) in 2018 has also been submitted by RTA, and is under active consideration.

⁵ KonTerra Group, *Essential Principles of Staff Care*, 2017, pg. 18.



- Is a prohibition against committing acts of sexual violence against colleagues or other individuals included in the Code of Conduct for the organisation? How is this Code of Conduct enforced?
- Is sexual violence as a risk to humanitarian aid workers being included in pre-deployment and other trainings? How often are these trainings offered to staff?
- Have all relevant roles within the organisation – Human Resources, Safety and Security, Ethics, Legal, Medical, Staff Welfare, Investigations, and members of Senior Management – been trained on sexual violence issues? Are they comfortable receiving incidents of sexual violence or interacting with survivors? If not, what steps have or will be taken to ensure all relevant staff members are comfortable interacting with survivors?
- Has the organisation conducted baseline studies to determine whether staff members trust the policies and procedures in place? What steps are being taken to develop more trust amongst staff members? What goals is the organisation setting for itself to address the issue and how will they monitor their progress to reaching these goals?
- Is there a whistleblowing policy in place that specifically allows for incidents of sexual violence to be reported? Does it allow for such reports to be given anonymously?
- Can the organisation receive reports of sexual violence being committed by its staff from individuals outside the organisation?
- What support and resources does the organisation provide to survivors of sexual violence? How does it address accountability and justice?

Asking questions is only one piece of the puzzle though, and donor agencies are encouraged to reflect on how they can implement appropriate follow-up and provide the necessary funds to ensure the issue of sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers is addressed within humanitarian organisations.

Donor agencies may want to also consider new funding models or streams, focusing on core funds, that will be flexible enough for humanitarian organisations to implement comprehensive, holistic, accessible, and survivor-centred prevention measures, policies, and procedures, as well as react appropriately when incidents occur. Creating specific pockets of funding directed at staff welfare, safety, and security could also help to create safer humanitarian work environments, as well as encouraging progress to address these related concerns.

Donor agencies may also want to consider requiring the humanitarian organisations they fund begin to take steps towards addressing sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers. RTA does not suggest that this be made an immediate requirement, as doing so would risk the creation of prevention measures, policies, and procedures that are rushed, not comprehensive, holistic, accessible, or survivor-centred, and that might remain on paper. However, gradually requiring additional steps, processes, and measurable actions towards safer and healthier humanitarian workplaces will encourage humanitarian organisations to act in a manner that results in actionable and appropriate internal prevention and response strategies. It would also, as noted previously, contribute to increased transparency and efficiency of humanitarian operations overall.



As a final note, donor agencies may also want to also consider how they address sexual violence in their own workplaces, and whether making improvements in their own prevention measures, policies, and procedures could create additional opportunities to lead by example.

Good Humanitarian Donorship

The Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative⁶ began in response to the recognition that strengthened cooperation between donor agencies for the co-ordination of humanitarian aid would enable funds to better reach affected populations, resulting in more effective and accountable humanitarian action and funding. The objective and mission of the GHD addressed vital gaps and, nearly 15 years later, it may be time to incorporate lessons learned within the donor community and reflect on the changing nature of humanitarian action

It is suggested that donors consider, should the GHD be redrafted or reconsidered in the future, explicitly implementing a component that prioritises the funding of initiatives and actions aimed at the safety, security, and well-being of humanitarian aid workers. This would send a strong signal throughout the humanitarian community that the issue is essential and must be addressed. It would also provide donors with the foundational basis to prioritise this vital and grave issue, once again leading humanitarian organisations to more transparent and professional operations.

Conclusion

This Guidance Note was created upon the request of multiple donors wanting to know how they could contribute to the creation of safer workplaces for humanitarian aid workers. RTA received these requests with gratitude, and they encouraged us to present numerous proposed changes to how the humanitarian organisations address the sexual violence experienced by its staff.

Donor agencies have the leverage to push forward change on this issue, and the opportunity to make it more than a checkbox requirement for those humanitarian organisations that they fund. We encourage all donors to reflect on their role to create greater transparency in the humanitarian system, and whether issues related to the safety, security, and well-being of humanitarian aid workers should continue to receive less attention than financial transparency.

At the end of the day, everyone – from donors to humanitarian organisations to humanitarian aid workers to the local population – benefits when there are safer and healthier humanitarian workplaces. Donors play a vital role to ensuring that this happens, and RTA encourages the donor community to lead in addressing sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers.

⁶ Good Humanitarian Donorship, available at: <https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/home-page.html>



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