



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Addressing Sexual Violence in Humanitarian Organisations: Good Practices for Improved Prevention Measures, Policies, and Procedures

Report the Abuse (RTA), the first global NGO to solely address sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers, has created the first good practices tool to assist humanitarian organisations in their efforts to improve how they address this problem.

As the issue has gained more exposure, humanitarian organisations across the globe have increasingly asked for guidance. This good practices tool, as well as other guidelines and information created by RTA, forms the foundational basis for improved prevention measures, policies, and procedures to address sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers.

Any discussion on this issue must start with why it happens, and to that end RTA's good practices tool begins by examining the most significant risk factor for sexual violence in humanitarian workplaces: organisational culture. Cultures that encourage constructive feedback, address misconduct issues, and provide the information and resources necessary for sexual violence issues to be addressed in a professional and survivor-centred manner are less likely to experience such incidents. Organisational culture not only underpins why sexual violence incidents occur, but why survivors so rarely report incidents. It is the core change that humanitarian organisations must be working towards – emphasising zero tolerance for sexual violence incidents of any nature.

Zero tolerance must start with implementing strong and repetitive prevention measures: including simple and clear messaging about how sexual violence will not be tolerated, combined with appropriate, sensitive, and frequent trainings on the topic. Backed by strong leadership, these measures have the

potential to significantly reduce the number of sexual violence incidents that might occur in humanitarian workplaces. Of course any prevention measure, in addition to being understood by all members of staff, must also be supported by policies and procedures that underline both prevention and response.

Comprehensive, holistic, accessible, and survivor-centred policies on sexual violence in humanitarian workplaces serve an essential function: clarifying what is sexual violence, how to report incidents when they occur, and the consequences for perpetrators. The development of such policies must take into account feedback from staff members, in particular national staff, and evaluate the trust they have in the organisation's structure and mechanisms; this allows for the creation of an M&E system to start evaluating how humanitarian organisations are doing to address the issue.

There is a myriad of ways to guarantee staff members fully understand what is acceptable behaviour: starting from recruitment through to the regular signing of a Code of Conduct. Ensuring that the language used in policies on sexual violence is accessible and understood by everyone in the organisation – from the cleaner to the Executive Director – can be a daunting task; however it is necessary for all members of staff to understand their rights to a safe and healthy workplace, as well as how they must contribute to the creation of one.

It is important to remember that the first people a survivor encounters post-sexual violence can have a strong impact on their entire recovery process, good or bad. Therein lies the significance of developed and operational procedures, the final piece to creating safe and healthy workplaces for all



humanitarian aid workers, and the real demonstration that all prevention measures and policies put in place by the organisation function professionally, impartially, and in a survivor-centred manner.

Procedures start with functional and accessible reporting processes that result in transparent, professional, and impartial investigations; they end with accountability for both survivors and perpetrators. Where possible this should involve local justice mechanisms, bearing in mind that in many of the locations where humanitarian operations are undertaken this may not be a reality. In all circumstances though, the priorities must be the support and care of survivors, and the creation of an environment where impunity is not allowed to thrive.

Given the importance of an organisation's culture in preventing incidents of sexual violence, it should be clear that different roles within humanitarian organisations could be vital to addressing this issue. To further assist humanitarian aid workers at all different levels, we have provided some analysis of how different roles can and must contribute to the creation of safe and healthy humanitarian workplaces, and we actively encourage the empowerment of individuals within such roles to address this problem.

Finally, as part of our continuing efforts to provide support and guidance, for all of the sections noted within this short summary, a series of recommendations has been provided. These recommendations should help to guide implementation of the good practices tool, and in particular assist in the development of M&E measures to determine progress on the issue.

However, humanitarian organisations are also encouraged to expand on the ideas outlined within this tool and use it as a starting or foundational block. The publication of the good practices tool, and other guidance and information created by RTA, should not be

seen as the end of work on the issue. This is the starting point, from which we hope others will take up our call to action.

Addressing sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers is necessary, and it must happen now, not tomorrow. It is a real and grave issue that needs to be tackled by all humanitarian organisations, for the benefit of all humanitarian aid workers.

The tools to begin addressing the problem in a comprehensive, holistic, accessible, and survivor-centred manner have now been created by RTA – it is for the humanitarian community to act and implement the recommendations we have provided.

To read the good practices tool summarised here, visit: <http://reporttheabuse.org>