

Guidance Note:

Reporting Incidents of Sexual
Violence in Humanitarian
Workplaces – as a Survivor





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One of the questions frequently asked to Report the Abuse (RTA), and within the broader humanitarian community, is how we report and respond to incidents of sexual violence – as survivors¹. Who do we report to when something goes wrong? What are our options? What do we do if we are being sexually harassed? How do we prove something has happened? Where can we go for help?

This Guidance Note will hopefully begin to help answering some of these questions and concerns, empowering survivors to report their experiences with sexual violence, get accountability, and create safer workplaces for all humanitarian aid workers.

Reporting Sexual Violence – The Broad Strokes

Reporting sexual violence – to one’s organisation, the perpetrator’s organisation, or the local authorities – is an intensely personal decision. There is no right or wrong course of action, and survivors are entitled to change their minds when it is better for their healing process or the safer option. No judgement should be made about a survivor’s choice.

The suggestions outlined in this document are merely that: suggestions. Some survivors will take guidance in the advice; others will find it does not apply to their situation. Some will find pieces to draw from as they make decisions about how to process their experiences with sexual violence. This document should not to be read as legal or medical advice, but as ideas – written from one survivor to another – much like a friend might give in times of crisis.

Reporting Options – Does your organisation have them?

The available reporting options for different humanitarian organisations will vary greatly – ranging from informal reporting to formal reporting, with Ethics, Ombudsman, Staff Welfare, and a variety of other roles getting involved in the reporting and recovery processes. Information on reporting procedures should be provided with on-boarding materials when joining a humanitarian organisation, and it is possible that these details might be also found on the organisations internal webpages, or on the external webpage. All humanitarian organisations should have clearly explained, outlined, and easily accessible reporting procedures; unfortunately this is often still not the case.

Where reporting procedures are not clear, advice might be sought through specific internal channels - such as the Ombudsman, Ethics, Human Resources, Safety and Security, or Staff Welfare - assuming there is an individual in such a role that can be trusted to react with sensitivity and maintain confidentiality. This is not a preferable course of action, particularly when someone is already trying to recover from a serious trauma, as it requires seeking help from

¹ There is significant debate in the gender-based violence community of humanitarian action, and amongst those who experience sexual violence personally, about the right term to be used. Some prefer victim, others prefer



those who might fall outside the reporting process and will likely require the survivor having to recount their experience to more individuals than might otherwise be needed².

Regardless though, similar problems will be encountered if trying to report an incident of sexual violence against someone from outside one's humanitarian organisation. In such a case, access to information on the reporting process may be even further limited; looking on their external webpage or speaking to a trusted individual within that organisation is a suggested course of action.

Survivors, where possible, may wish to specifically consider approaching individuals in an Ombudsman or Ethics role. Although this information is not always widely known, individuals in these roles are bound to confidentiality. Conversations with them cannot be shared to outside bodies and reporting an incident of sexual violence to them does not automatically mean a survivor has to start any proceedings. This allows the safe space survivors often need to decide how they want their recovery process to proceed and find out their options for filing reports; there is significant value in gauging with such colleagues the impact reporting might have for a survivor's recovery process before proceeding³. This is an essential organisational role, and everyone should know whether it exists, preferably before an incident of sexual violence occurs.

Finally, some survivors might also find it easier to speak to trusted friends, family, or colleagues, either before or in lieu of taking formal steps. This is an understandable decision, and should be respected as much as any other choice a survivor might take.

Regardless of whom a survivor interacts with – formally or informally - there is value in finding one's voice and taking back control over one's narrative. Where possible, survivors should be encouraged to talk about their experience, when they are comfortable doing so, and seek qualified psychosocial support. Any step taken though should be at the pace of the survivor. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to react to acts of sexual violence.

Evidence Collection

Collection of evidence is a debated topic amongst sexual violence survivors, particularly in the humanitarian context where information and resources are often not available. Where this information goes after collection will vary greatly. With humanitarian organisations creating increasingly robust investigative or inquiry processes though, collecting evidence to prove sexual violence may increase the chances of getting justice and accountability. For some survivors, this may also be part of a healing process.

² RTA has been trying to reduce the amount of information one might need to track down, and at the end of this document provides the contact details for Ombudsman and Investigative teams for major UN agencies.

³ RTA wishes it were possible for all survivors to report their experiences with sexual violence, and this is a world that we are striving for. Unfortunately, the reality is that it is often not safe for survivors to report. Until that time, survivors should only report when and if they are comfortable doing so. Again, it is an intensely personal decision, and we respect the need for survivors to move forward, or not move forward, with reporting their sexual violence experiences.



Sexual Harassment

RTA is frequently approached for information regarding the collection of evidence to prove sexual harassment is occurring. In many ways, sexual harassment is more difficult to prove: there are often no physical signs; it may occur outside of the sight or hearing range of other individuals; and it can be more subtle. These factors contribute to fewer individuals reporting their experiences with sexual harassment.

There are ways to make it easier to report incidents of sexual harassment though. Where possible, records of the incident(s) should be kept, in particular dates, times, and the names of any individuals present or who may be able to corroborate events. Copies of any electronic messages, emails, or letters should be stored in a safe place, and ideally in both electronic and paper form.

If experiencing sexual harassment, avoiding being alone with the individual can help to establish that wrongdoing has occurred. This may also provide a witness that is able to help prove sexual harassment is happening. Confiding with a trusted colleague or friend contemporaneously with incidents of sexual violence occurring can also help to establish timelines of events and provide corroboration.

It is an unfortunate truth that sexual harassment, in particular, is typically taken more seriously when there is clear evidence, corroboration, and multiple incidents have occurred. This should not stop humanitarian aid workers from reporting sexual harassment however, though it may not be an easy process.

Sexual Assault and Rape

Post-sexual assault and rape, the primary concern will likely be one's safety. Once in a location where a survivor feels safe, getting access to medical care should then be prioritised. The decision about whether to take the medication contained in a post-sexual violence kit⁴ can be emotional, and seeking help or advice is encouraged. Seeking psychosocial support, when ready, is beneficial for many survivors⁵; it can be an important step towards rebuilding trust and confidence.

Regarding evidence collection however, in some locations, formal forensic evidence collection may be possible. This is usually also in locations where formal legal processes are functioning. If survivors are able and willing to pursue this option, it is advisable to also seek legal counsel, to ensure that one's rights are protected. Some humanitarian organisations may keep lists of lawyers available locally; other humanitarian organisations may also be able and willing to provide funds and support to help their staff seek formal legal justice.

⁴ For more information on what is contained in such a kit, please consult: ***Fact Sheet: Post-Sexual Violence Kits***, Report the Abuse, August 2017.

⁵ RTA keeps a database of psychosocial support groups, networks, and articles on its website: <http://reporttheabuse.org/help-for-survivors/>



In those locations where formal forensic evidence collection is not possible and survivors do want to try, there are actions that can be taken to collect forensic evidence, bearing in mind that there will be issues regarding chain of evidence and the purity of the evidence. It is also true that places where there is no formal forensic evidence collection available are also unlikely to have functioning justice systems. Where any evidence collected would go in such a case may be different on a case-by-case basis. For some survivors, the process of collecting evidence – even if it does not go to a legal system – can be a healing process. Again, some humanitarian organisations may have knowledge of local lawyers to seek advice from, and be able to provide support to help the survivor seek justice even in locations where legal systems may not be fully functioning.

If survivors do want to try collecting their own forensic evidence, it is advised that they start by not showering after the incident of sexual violence. If possible, the first urination should be done into a container that can be sealed, so that it might be tested for foreign substances. All clothing, bedding, or other important textiles should be kept in sealed bags, without first being washed. If possible, use a cotton swab, cloth, or other textile to wipe the body, in particular the mouth, genital opening, and anus⁶, collecting potential bodily fluids or DNA, and keep these swabs, cloths, or textiles in sealed bags as well. If it is possible to collect a blood sample (as some drugs are better identified through a blood sample), this is also advised.

Proving sexual assault or rape will likely be easier in locations where there is a formal and functioning legal process. As noted above though, with humanitarian organisations developing increasingly robust processes, the probability of getting justice and accountability will increase with time.

Conclusion

Reporting incidents of sexual violence can help the healing process, provided that it is possible to do so in a safe and supportive environment. There is no right or wrong way to respond to acts of sexual violence, and how one processes is deeply personal. Many survivors find it helpful to speak to friends or family, others to colleagues or mental health professionals. However one proceeds, they should know that they are not alone and that there are places to find help.

⁶ If possible, use a different cloth or textile for each of these locations on the body and keep them in separate sealed bags, as well as a separate cloth or textile for an overall body wipe, stored in another sealed bag.



Reporting Mechanisms

While reporting mechanisms extend far beyond the United Nations (UN), information on reporting within the UN system is made publically available, something not done for the majority of INGOs or other forms of humanitarian organisations. As such, the information provided below – which is subject to change, as individuals may leave or change roles – is primarily that for UN agencies.

FAO

Phone: + 39 06 570 52333

Email: Investigations-hotline@fao.org

Webpage: <http://www.fao.org/aud/48643/en/>

IFRC

Office of Internal Audit and Investigations

Phone: +44 207 696 5952

Email: ifrc@safecall.co.uk

Online Referral Form: www.safecall.co.uk/file-a-report.

ILO

Office of Internal Audit and Oversight (IAO)

Phone: +41 22 799 6306

E-mail: iao@ilo.org

IOM

Ombudsman: Rogelio Bernal, <mailto:ombudsperson@iom.int>

Office of the Director General

Email: Ethics&ConductOffice@iom.int

Webpage: <http://www.iom.int/office-director-general#ECO>

OHCHR

Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)

Phone: + 1 212-963-1111 (24 hours a day)

Regular mail:

Director, Investigations Division – Office of Internal Oversight Services
7th Floor 300 East 42nd (Corner Second Avenue)

New York, NY, 10017, U.S.A.

Online referral form: https://unvoiosctxwi.unvienna.org/OIOSIDWDR_3/



Webpage: <https://oios.un.org/page?slug=Contact-US>

UNDSS

Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)

Phone: + 1 212-963-1111 (24 hours a day)

Regular mail:

Director, Investigations Division – Office of Internal Oversight Services

7th Floor 300 East 42nd (Corner Second Avenue)

New York, NY, 10017, U.S.A.

Online referral form: https://unvoiosctxwi.unvienna.org/OIOSIDWDR_3/

Webpage: <https://oios.un.org/page?slug=Contact-US>

UNEP

Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)

Phone: + 1 212 963 1111 (24 hours a day)

Regular mail:

Director, Investigations Division – Office of Internal Oversight Services

7th Floor 300 East 42nd (Corner Second Avenue)

New York, NY, 10017, U.S.A.

Online referral form: https://unvoiosctxwi.unvienna.org/OIOSIDWDR_3/

Webpage: <https://oios.un.org/page?slug=Contact-US>

UNESCO

Internal Oversight Service (IOS)

Webpage:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/how-we-work/accountability/internal-oversight-service/divers/report-fraud-corruption-or-abuse/>

UN Funds and Programs

Ombudsman:

Alayne Frankson-Wallace, alayne.frankson-wallace@fpombudsman.org

Giuseppe de Palo, giuseppe.depalo@fpombudsman.org

Cannot accept complaints or incidents from non-UN funds and programs staff however. In those cases, survivors must contact the appropriate Investigations team for each UN Funds organisation, as set out below:

UNDP



Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI)

Phone - Reversed Charges - Worldwide: +1 770 776 5678

Email: hotline@undp.org

Online Referral Form:

<https://iwf.tnwgrc.com/unitednationsdevelopment/InternationalCompanyLanguageSelection/tabid/186/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

UNFPA

Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS)

Email: ethicsoffice@unfpa.org

UN Women

Shares Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI) with UNDP, with different contact information for the Investigations team.

Phone: +1 678 248 7275

E-mail: unwhotline@undp.org

Regular mail:

Deputy Director (Investigations)

Office of Audit and Investigations

United Nations Development Programme

One UN Plaza, DC1, 4th Floor

New York, NY 10017 USA

Webpage: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/accountability/investigations>

UNICEF

Office of Internal Audit and Investigations (OIAI)

Email: integrity1@unicef.org

Regular mail: All addressed mail should be marked "Private and Confidential" to:

Director - Office of Internal Audit and Investigation (OIAI) - Investigation Section

United Nations Children's Fund

Three United Nations Plaza

New York, New York - 10017 USA

Webpage: https://www.unicef.org/auditandinvestigation/index_65761.html

UN-Habitat

Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)

Phone: + 1 212 963 1111 (24 hours a day)

Regular mail:

Director, Investigations Division – Office of Internal Oversight Services



7th Floor 300 East 42nd (Corner Second Avenue)

New York, NY, 10017, U.S.A.

Online referral form: https://unvoiosctxwi.unvienna.org/OIOSIDWDR_3/

Webpage: <https://oios.un.org/page?slug=Contact-US>

UNHCR

Ombudsman: Tahiana Andriamasomanana, andriama@unhcr.org

Inspector General's Office (IGO)

Email: inspector@unhcr.org

Regular mail: Mark all mail 'Confidential':

94 rue de Montbrillant, CP 2500, 1211 Geneva

Online referral form: <http://www.unhcr.org/igo-complaints.html>

Webpage: <http://www.unhcr.org/making-complaint.html>

UNOPS

Internal Audit and Investigations Group (IAIG)

Email: harassment@unops.org

Webpage: <https://www.unops.org/english/About/accountability/IAIG/Pages/How-to-report-wrongdoing.aspx>

UNRWA

Phone: +962 6 5808 638

Email: Registrar-UNRWA.DT@unrwa.org

Regular mail:

Dispute Tribunal

Registry of the UNRWA Dispute Tribunal

UNRWA Office at HQ Amman

Bayader Wadi Seer, PO Box 140157

Amman, 11814 Jordan

UN Secretariat

Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)

Phone: + 1 212 963 1111 (24 hours a day)

Regular mail:

Director, Investigations Division – Office of Internal Oversight Services

7th Floor 300 East 42nd (Corner Second Avenue)

New York, NY, 10017, U.S.A.

Online referral form: https://unvoiosctxwi.unvienna.org/OIOSIDWDR_3/

Webpage: <https://oios.un.org/page?slug=Contact-US>



WFP

Ombudsman: Gabrielle Kluck, gabrielle.kluck@wfp.org
The Office of the Inspector General
Phone: +39 06 6513 3663
Email: hotline@wfp.org
Webpage: <http://www1.wfp.org/oversight>

WHO and UNAIDS

Ombudsman: Jose Martinez Aragon, martinezaragonjo@who.int
Cannot accept complaints from non-WHO and UNAIDS staff. In such cases, Ethics office must be contacted.

The Office of Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics (CRE)
Hotline: <http://www.expolink.co.uk/whistleblowing-hotline/PDF/WBInternationalFreephoneListing.pdf>
WHO Email: ethicsoffice@who.int
UNAIDS Email: fraudreporting@unaid.org
Online referral form: <https://wrs.expolink.co.uk/integrity>
Webpage: <http://www.who.int/about/ethics/en/>

World Bank

World Bank Group's Integrity Vice Presidency (INT)
Online referral form:
https://intlbankforreconanddev.ethicspointvp.com/custom/ibrd/_crf/english/form_data.asp
Webpage: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/about/unit/integrity-vice-presidency/report-an-allegation>



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