



DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual
Exploitation, Abuse, and
Harassment in Development
Co-operation and Humanitarian
Assistance: Key Pillars of
Prevention and Response

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Background Information

A Collective Response to End Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance: Key Pillars on Prevention and Response was adopted on 12 July 2019.

The DAC Recommendation is the first international instrument on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH) that applies to development co-operation and humanitarian assistance. It was developed in response to disturbing reports of sexual exploitation and abuse in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance and provides a comprehensive framework to support, guide, incentivise and help governments – in their capacity as donors, cross-government and international community stakeholders – to implement more coherent and aligned measures, following international standards, to prevent and respond to SEA and SH in their activities in the disbursement and/or management of aid, including by putting survivors and victims first, supporting organisational cultural change, building capacity, strengthening accountability, and bolstering the integrity of the international aid sector.

The DAC Recommendation aims to embody an ambitious standard to build systems best fit to prevent and respond to SEA and SH and is built around six pillars: (i) Policies, professional conduct standards, organisational change and leadership; (ii) Survivor/victim-centred response and support mechanisms; (iii) Organisational reporting, response systems and procedures; (iv) Training, awareness raising and communication; (v) International coordination; and (vi) Monitoring, evaluation, shared learning and reporting.

In addition, the DAC Recommendation includes provisions aimed at supporting DAC members and non-DAC members having adhered to it in their efforts to implement the commitments it contains, establish mechanisms for continued shared learning, and monitor progress. It will require adequate investment in resources and research to build future international best practice, taking into consideration the need to tackle the power imbalances and gender inequalities that underlie these issues.

While the DAC Recommendation does not seek to precisely define SEA and SH, certain sources may provide useful guidance for its dissemination, interpretation, and implementation.

For example, certain bulletins issued by the UN Secretary-General - which are applicable to UN staff for the purpose of preventing and addressing cases of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in the UN system - pertain to “sexual exploitation” and “sexual abuse”. Specifically, bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13 states that sexual exploitation means “any actual or attempted abuse by personnel of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including but not limited to, profiting momentarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.” “Sexual exploitation” is thus a broad term that includes, for example, transactional sex, solicitation of transactional sex, and exploitative relationships. With respect to “sexual abuse”, the same bulletin provides that the term “means actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions”.

Concerning “sexual harassment”, the UN General Assembly Resolution ‘Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment,’ (A/RES/73/148) stresses that sexual harassment “encompasses a continuum of unacceptable and unwelcome behaviours and practices of a sexual nature that may include, but are not limited to, sexual suggestions or demands, requests for sexual favours and sexual, verbal or physical conduct or gestures, that are or might reasonably be perceived as offensive or humiliating.”

Lastly, where the term “children” is used in the DAC Recommendation, DAC members took into account the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines “children” as any person under the age of 18.

An inclusive process for developing the DAC Recommendation

In June 2018, the DAC established a DAC Reference Group on PSEA, co-Chaired by delegates from Austria, Ireland and the United Kingdom. This Reference Group included, in addition to DAC member delegates, representatives from, among others, the United Nations and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the World Bank, representative civil-society networks , and non-DAC member countries.

The Reference Group worked closely with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), in line with the DAC-CSO Framework on Engagement, to help ensure that the DAC Recommendation would assist both DAC members and implementing partners in aligning their actions on SEA and SH prevention and response. The Reference Group also worked with detailed information on DAC member practices in preventing and responding to SEA and SH gathered through an in-depth survey sent to DAC members in 2018.

Monitoring implementation, dissemination and adherence

The DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET) will monitor implementation through the existing DAC peer-review mechanism, as well as develop options for more frequent monitoring and review within five years of the DAC Recommendation's adoption. The GENDERNET will report on implementation to the DAC no later than five years following its adoption and at least every ten years thereafter.

THE OECD DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE (DAC),

HAVING REGARD to the Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship [[OECD/LEGAL/0398](#)]; the Recommendation of the Council for Development Co-operation Actors on Managing the Risk of Corruption [[OECD/LEGAL/0431](#)]; the Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life [[OECD/LEGAL/0418](#)]; and the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus [[OECD/LEGAL/5019](#)];

HAVING REGARD to the DAC Tidewater Joint Statement on Combatting Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the Development and Humanitarian Sectors and the Whistler Declaration on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in International Assistance committed to by the G7 Development Ministers;

HAVING REGARD to the Commitments made by donors to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the international aid sector at the 2018 London Safeguarding Summit;

HAVING REGARD to the foundation provided by international instruments on various aspects of gender equality and human rights, notably the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and relevant provisions of International Humanitarian Law, including the Geneva Conventions and protocols thereto; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child; the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women; the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (A/RES/48/104); the UN Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Staff and Related Personnel (A/RES/62/214); the UN Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse involving Implementing Partners; the 2018 UN General Assembly Resolution on Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment (A/RES/73/148); and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence;

HAVING REGARD to relevant political commitments made within the UN context, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development; the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women and the outcome documents of their review conferences;

RECOGNISING that sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment (SH) are unacceptable and in defiance of applicable international standards and international law and that SEA and SH constitute unacceptable behaviour that has lasting, traumatic and deleterious impacts on individuals and communities and, where perpetrated by aid providers and their partners, call into question the integrity of the international aid community and the credibility of aid itself;

RECOGNISING that SEA and SH risk undermining global efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”;

RECOGNISING that the risk of SEA and SH increases when donors and their partners fail to set organisational cultures and norms that prevent SEA and SH or act to proactively manage and mitigate risk, including exacerbated risks that arise when operating in contexts of fragile, conflict-affected environments where power imbalances and gender inequality may more easily persist;

RECOGNISING that donors and their partners need to strengthen coordination and coherence in preventing and responding to incidences of SEA and SH, building a strong donor platform to lead cultural organisational change and accountability; respond to victims and survivors and tackle impunity; strengthen capacity across the aid sector; recognise the critical role of women’s rights organisations and women-led organisations in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls, and the need to ensure their central role in international and local efforts to prevent and respond to SEA and SH; and align around applicable

international standards to reduce the likelihood and impact of SEA and SH perpetrated through actors delivering international aid;

RECOGNISING the UN efforts to prevent and respond to SEA and SH, including the UN Secretary General's Report on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse: A new approach (2017); the UN Secretary General's Bulletins: Special Measures for protection sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (2003), Prohibition of discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority (2008), and Protection against retaliation for reporting misconduct and for cooperating with duly authorized audits and investigation (2017); UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, including Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions up to and including Resolution 2242 (2015); Model Policy on Sexual Harassment (2018); as well as the important work done by the UN Special Coordinator on improving the UN response to SEA, the UN Victim's Rights Advocate, the UN Trust Fund for victims of SEA, the Voluntary Compact between the UN Secretary General and individual Member States, the Circle of Leadership on the Prevention of and Response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations, the Civil Society Advisory Board on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the Grand Bargain's Agenda for Humanity (2016); and the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (2016);

RECOGNISING the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Principles and Minimum Operating Standards on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (MOS-PSEA), and the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), as essential international standards;

RECOGNISING the importance of integrating a survivor- and victim-centred approach into PSEA and SH policies, in line with four guiding principles of: (i) safety; (ii) confidentiality; (iii) respect; and (iv) non-discrimination described in the UN Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Staff and Related Personnel (A/RES/62/214), as well as that child survivors require particular attention to ensure their safety, protection, and well-being;

RECOGNISING that SEA and SH are deeply rooted in structural inequality, especially gender inequality, that give rise to gender-based violence, among other forms of violence, and discrimination;

RECOGNISING that SEA and SH can constitute a violation or abuse of human rights, and thus the promotion, protection, and respect of human rights must be at the core of preventing and combatting SEA and SH. Ensuring a human-rights based approach that does no harm in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance is fundamental. Particular attention is needed for vulnerable groups, including women and children, and those most at risk of discrimination on the basis of, for example, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age or religion;

- I. **AGREES** that for the purpose of the present Recommendation, the following definitions are used:
 - a. **International development agency (also referred to as donor)** refers to government line ministries or other public or private agencies entrusted with the responsibility of disbursing public funds that are accounted for as Official Development Assistance (ODA).
 - b. **Implementing partners** refers to government's line ministries or other public agencies, as well as partners of international development agencies such as developing countries' governments, public bodies including local authorities, non-governmental and civil-society organisations, trade unions, multilateral development and humanitarian organisations, and suppliers of goods and services involved in implementing aid projects or programmes or private-sector organisations recipient of aid funds.

- II. **AGREES** that the purpose of this DAC Recommendation is to provide a comprehensive framework that can support, guide, incentivise, and help DAC and non-DAC members having adhered to it (hereafter the "Adherents") in their capacity as donors, cross-government and international community stakeholders to implement more comprehensive, coherent and aligned measures, consistent with applicable international

standards and taking into account national laws, to prevent and respond to SEA and SH in their activities in the disbursement and/or management of aid. This includes putting survivors and victims first, supporting organisational cultural change, building capacity, strengthening accountability, and bolstering the integrity of the international aid sector.

III. RECOMMENDS that Adherents set up or revise their development co-operation and humanitarian assistance systems to strengthen SEA and SH prevention and response, manage risk, and support and protect survivors and victims. Adherents should take measures to ensure that these systems are implemented by their international development agencies and implementing partners in all of their activities in the disbursement and/or management of aid, based on adequate resources. In setting up or revising these systems, and as appropriate to relevant mandates, roles and responsibilities, Adherents should:

1. **Develop policies and professional conduct standards and seek to foster organisational change and leadership on SEA and SH in the provision of international aid.** To this effect, Adherents should, as appropriate:

- a. Foster improved **organisational culture and norms** through effective value-based leadership and guidance on goals, values, behaviours, and expectations related to SEA and SH prevention and response, including the promotion of inclusive, non-discriminatory, gender-balanced work environments and opportunities, including by encouraging the recruitment and career development of women in senior leadership and throughout organisations.
- b. Ensure sustained **senior-level engagement and leadership** commitments to shift or sustain positive organisational culture and norms in relation to SEA and SH prevention and response, through regular senior-level discussions on how these issues are addressed, and also ensure dedicated organisational capacity to support and coordinate work on SEA and SH, recognising the links to broader human rights and commitments to gender equality.
- c. Develop **policies, strategies, and work plans for SEA and SH prevention and response** that are effectively implemented; set goals and standards; demonstrate a coherent approach; and support implementation of related work streams. In these policies, Adherents should make it clear that failure to respond appropriately to incidents of SEA and SH will not be tolerated, while prevention and response should be based on a survivor and victim-centred approach that aims to do no harm.
- d. Develop **Codes of Conduct or Ethical Standards** providing explicit standards and regulations to prevent and combat SEA and SH, ensuring they are publicly available and conveyed to staff and senior management consistently throughout key employment cycle moments (including recruitment and disciplinary processes), in preparation for and during missions, in performance management structures, and within leadership values. Such codes of conduct and ethical standards should be shared with implementing partners and actively communicated in relevant languages and formats to local communities where relevant.
- e. Develop **reporting and response** protocols, with clear guidelines for staff on when and to whom to report, and how to respond in a confidential, survivor- and victim-centred and ethically-sensitive manner. Staff should be aware of the obligation to report SEA and SH incidents, with a set time frame for response and follow-up mechanisms, and know that a policy for protection from retaliation is in place, recognising that improved accountability mechanisms may lead to more reporting of SEA and SH incidents.
- f. Include standards, procedures, requirements, and/or binding commitments in all **cooperative agreements and funding instruments** (for example, contracts, grants, memoranda of understanding) alongside remedies for breaches and reporting requirements.

2. **Develop or support survivor- and victim-centred response and support mechanisms.** These mechanisms should:

- a. Provide for a **survivor- and victim-centred approach** to SEA and SH prevention and response, where survivors and victims' experiences, rights, needs, and wants are at the centre of reporting, investigative, and response systems, and to ensure donors and implementing partners respond in a timely manner and support and protect survivors and victims throughout the process. This approach should take special consideration of vulnerable groups, including women and children, as well as people most at risk of discrimination on the basis of, for example, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age or religion. A survivor- and victim-centred approach should be grounded in respect for human rights, as well as respect, confidentiality, safety, and non-discrimination.
- b. Include a variety of effective, clear, and simple survivor- and victim-centred **complaints mechanisms** that are available to all community members, with clear requirements and guidance on when and how the mechanisms might be used, and ensure appropriate linkages to and support for the provision of survivors' and victims' assistance. Complaints mechanisms, including community-based mechanisms, should be developed and implemented, adapted to specific local and cultural contexts, and used in co-operation with local leadership, and with authorities where safe and appropriate, and to the maximum extent practicable, be jointly supported.
- c. Provide integrated and safe **response and protection** for those who report SEA and SH, including survivors and victims, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders such as: the United Nations; Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and local women's organisations; local and national governments where safe and appropriate; and public bodies including local authorities. Adherents should develop guidance and minimum standards for survivors' and victims' assistance, redress, and support, including by mapping out key stakeholders and service providers for referrals, and by seeking to provide required financing support that is jointly supported to the maximum extent practicable.
- d. Seek to strengthen existing **local services and networks and coordination** with gender-based violence and child-protection services, also to address violence against girls, where appropriate. A survivor- and victim-centred approach should be integrated into broader efforts to strengthen responses to gender-based violence and SEA and SH at the local level, including strengthening the rule of law and access to justice. Efforts should aim to improve the quality and availability of referral services and protection mechanisms to minimise the risks of survivor and victim stigmatisation.

3. **Establish organisational reporting and response systems and procedures for the prevention of SEA and SH.** These systems and procedures should include:

- a. **Internal complaint and investigation procedures** that are context-specific and survivor- and victim-centred, and that include established functions and mechanisms to handle incidents and allegations for donors and implementing partners. Adherents should explore independent mechanisms as appropriate, noting that alleged perpetrators also have privacy rights.
- b. Easy, safe, accessible, context-sensitive, culturally appropriate **reporting and complaint mechanisms** that are confidential and anonymous through which affected individuals and communities can report incidents, and which are coordinated to ensure consistency in response efforts. These could include independent whistleblowing mechanisms available to staff, partners, aid recipients, and their families and communities, as well as other stakeholders, involving local and national governments where safe and appropriate, and in accordance with their national legal and institutional frameworks.
- c. **Protection from retaliation** for those affected or who report, including whistleblowers, by having a policy for protection from retaliation in place.
- d. Support for **local capacity, rule of law, access to justice, and increased accountability**, through development co-operation and humanitarian assistance, depending on the local context.
- e. Strengthened transparent **reporting and investigation mechanisms and procedures** to ensure internal and external accountability, support prevention, and improve access to information, taking

into consideration the safety, wants, needs, and rights of survivors and victims with regard to information-sharing, confidentiality, consent, and risk assessment, for the protection of the survivor and victim and with the aim of preventing future incidents.

- f. Policies and processes to ensure both **mechanisms and management responsibilities** to ensure accountability for staff when necessary, including dismissal, suspension, and other administrative measures. At the same time, **positive incentives to promote good practice** and rewards for learning and improvement should be used to foster a culture of inclusion, trust, and openness to enable accountability and transparency.
- g. Clearly communicated mechanisms to tackle **impunity**, and **penalties** for staff violations of codes of conduct.
- h. Effective and transparent **recruitment, performance management, and referral practices** to prevent the hiring (e.g., re-hiring, transfer, or promotion) of perpetrators, including improved mechanisms for screening candidates' backgrounds, references, and criminal records checks for former misconduct.

4. **Conduct training, raise awareness, and communicate on SEA and SH prevention.** These measures require adequate ongoing resourcing and should include:

- a. **Effective communication** to raise community awareness on SEA and SH response, including the provision of information on: applicable national laws, donor agency standards, and codes of conduct; requirements and expected behaviour of donor management, staff, and implementing partners, including the private sector; and how complaint mechanisms can be used to report violations.
- b. **Regular training and capacity building** for management and staff on standards, codes of conduct, mechanisms to file complaints and report misconduct, and the implications of breaching standards, including anti-retaliation policies, to ensure effective cultural change and promote a safe, confident, and mutually-respectful work environment. Training and capacity building should be linked to, or aligned with, gender equality training and capacity building. Where possible, designated focal functions for SEA and SH prevention should receive professional training.
- c. **Awareness-raising activities and educational, preventative outreach efforts** or programmes with implementing partners to ensure aid recipients and local populations are aware of their rights, reporting mechanisms, and available support services. Aid beneficiaries and local populations should be consulted in the design of SEA and SH response programmes, and wider programming where appropriate, to ensure their needs are met. This could include capacity building and training of established local organisations, including women's rights organisations, and in-country SEA and SH prevention networks and mechanisms. Tools and materials should be shared between headquarters, field offices, implementing partners, and local and national governments, as well as public bodies including local authorities, where safe and appropriate; in relation to gender equality and non-discrimination, to prevent and protect against SEA and SH.

5. **Ensure international coordination for SEA and SH prevention and response.** To this effect, Adherents should:

- a. **Coordinate internationally** with donors and implementing partners to set clear standards and expectations, align existing measures to the extent possible, respond to survivors' and victims' needs, and take comprehensive action in SEA and SH prevention and response.
- b. **Include existing commitments** by some DAC members as a policy basis for action on prevention and response, including the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Minimum Operating Standards (MOS-PSEA), relevant OECD and DAC Recommendations, and other relevant international commitments, including the Commitments made by donors to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the international aid sector at the 2018 London Safeguarding Summit.

- c. Ensure closer **co-operation and collaboration among DAC members, implementing partners, and international and national experts** on SEA and SH prevention and response; the UN, specifically the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC); and the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). Particular efforts should be made to align standards for survivors' and victims' support, investigation management, and reporting by implementing partners.
- d. Support the development of measures to jointly assess the performance of **multilateral organisations** with regard to their approach to SEA and SH, such as those currently under development by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN).
- e. **Dedicate resources** – including financial and personnel – to realise the goals of this DAC Recommendation and to ensure that implementing partners can uphold these standards.

6. **Develop mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on SEA and SH prevention and response.** To this effect, Adherents should:

- a. Establish mechanisms for **monitoring and reviewing** responses, support, and follow-up, such as independent progress and impact assessments, evaluations, or review mechanisms on best practices and lessons learned, and common definitions.
- b. Improve **data, including sex- and age-disaggregated data**, qualitative and quantitative measures, and assessments and evaluations of agencies and partners' initiatives that ensure confidentiality for survivors, victims and vulnerable groups. These efforts could include disaggregating data to be able to use it across organisations, locations, and time to learn and detect trends that would inform gaps in all the other areas.

IV. **INVITES** the Secretary-General to disseminate this DAC Recommendation;

V. **INVITES** Adherents to disseminate this DAC Recommendation, particularly throughout their development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding agencies and partners, and across government;

VI. **INVITES** non-Adherents to take account of and adhere to this DAC Recommendation;

VII. **ENCOURAGES** relevant non-governmental partners, contractors, and grantees to disseminate and follow this DAC Recommendation;

VIII. **INSTRUCTS** the DAC Network on Gender Equality to:

- a. Support a multi-stakeholder forum in which Adherents, through a consultative process, share policies, best practices, and innovative approaches to SEA and SH prevention and response in order to support mutual learning and adaptation, and develop tools for the implementation of this DAC Recommendation;
- b. Monitor and learn in the implementation of this DAC Recommendation, including through the existing DAC peer-review mechanism, and applicable international agreements, such as those on women, peace and security, and develop options for more frequent monitoring and review, within the first five years to enable and support lesson-learning, adaptation, and sharing of best practices to build understanding and capability;
- c. Report thereon to the DAC no later than five years following the adoption of this DAC Recommendation and at least every ten years thereafter.

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- **Recommendations:** OECD legal instruments which are not legally binding but practice accords them great moral force as representing the political will of Adherents. There is an expectation that Adherents will do their utmost to fully implement a Recommendation. Thus, Members which do not intend to do so usually abstain when a Recommendation is adopted, although this is not required in legal terms.
- **Declarations:** OECD legal instruments which are prepared within the Organisation, generally within a subsidiary body, and are not legally binding. They usually set general principles or long-term goals, have a solemn character and are usually adopted at Ministerial meetings of the Council or of committees of the Organisation.
- **International Agreements:** OECD legal instruments negotiated and concluded within the framework of the Organisation. They are legally binding on the Parties.
- **Arrangement, Understanding and Others:** several ad hoc substantive legal instruments have been developed within the OECD framework over time, such as the Arrangement on Officially Supported Export Credits, the International Understanding on Maritime Transport Principles and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendations.