

7) Safe organizational culture

Why organizational culture is important

Environments built on integrity and respect, where staff and volunteers feel able to voice concerns and everyone takes an active role in contributing to safety-related behaviors, help to prevent incidents of SEA. As well, if they do occur, they can be addressed and dealt with quickly.

Senior leadership, managers, employees and volunteers all have a unique part to play in creating a culture of safety.

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- 8 Delegates should already have this completed as part of recruitment but it is still important to double check with your Human Resources department.
 - 9 In 2019, IFRC was among 15 agencies that joined the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response's (SCHR's) new Inter-Agency Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, which addresses the specific problem of known sexual abusers moving within and between different humanitarian and development agencies. National Societies are encouraged to join the scheme. It is also possible to implement the referencing scheme without being a member of SCHR.

Actions

Changing the culture of an organization requires vision, objectivity and a willingness to change. The following actions will contribute to creating an environment in which staff and volunteers feel safe and SEA is prevented and addressed.

Gender-balanced, diverse and inclusive teams: Diversity is a first step in ensuring dignity and respect for all. There is evidence that a higher presence of women is credited with lower SEA¹⁰.

Good governance, accountability and transparency: A PSEA focal point at senior leadership/Board level is an important step for ensuring that SEA is taken seriously, dealt with fairly and consistently, and that any necessary action will be taken.

Zero tolerance for unacceptable behavior: Clear standards for acceptable behavior in the organization, and the consequences for deviation from these standards, should include zero tolerance towards a) SEA b) stigma associated with SEA c) retaliation towards whistleblowers or anyone else reporting concerns, and d) discrimination, harassment and bullying.

Staff and volunteers speak out and challenge poor behavior: Receiving no reports, or very few, might be cause for concern in itself. For example, this might imply that reporting mechanisms are not accessible or well-designed for the context. Leadership communications, briefings and trainings which explain power and privilege and how it can lead to SEA, as well as how to recognize, respond and report concerns will help encourage reporting. Safe spaces where staff can reflect and share issues, and leaders are willing to listen and engage in conversations where uncomfortable challenges are raised and not shut down, can help create a culture in which staff and volunteers regulate their own behavior and the behavior of colleagues.

Robust procedures for responding to concerns: Standard operating procedures should require consistent implementation of measures for PSEA and monitoring of effectiveness, for example survivor surveys on quality of response.

Safe practices in recruitment, induction, people management and programming: Key PSEA risks, and actions which need to be regularly monitored, should be identified prior to service delivery. It is important that PSEA resources are in place. PSEA focal points should be designated and PSEA integrated into job/role descriptions for all staff and volunteers.

¹⁰ The presence of more women is credited with higher reporting of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as lower incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse.