

HR Screening in Recruitment and Induction

Overview

An important PSEA action that all National Societies should undertake is ensuring that they have a thorough screening process in place for the recruitment and induction of staff and volunteers.

National Societies must make every effort to avoid hiring people who pose a risk of perpetrating acts of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) towards community members who benefit from RCRC services/programmes. One of the National Societies that has taken steps to improve their screening processes is the International HR department at the British Red Cross (BRC).

Background

BRC has always had screening processes in place in the application, testing and interviewing stages. The International HR department at BRC consists of around 15 people, including those working in learning and development. They are responsible for recruiting staff in international positions (outside of the UK).

The team also look after registers, a pool of professionals who can be called on to deploy at short notice in response to international emergencies.

Members of registers might not be full-time BRC staff, they may be employed elsewhere full-time and only engage with BRC when called on to deploy. Register members also go through screening processes before they are added to the register, this includes two references and a police check.

Steps taken

Previously, these screening requirements were not checked again before a deployment. Now, references covering the past five years, including those from their most recent employer are required, as well as a risk assessment or a character reference for any gaps in employment. In addition to the five-year references, International HR also began asking for references for the gaps between deployments.

In the past, International HR did not require police checks to be renewed for staff and register members. Now it is a requirement that they are renewed within the past three years. Also, safeguarding-related questions were added to the interviews and the interviewee's responses to these questions affects the decision on whether they are hired or not. These questions include:

"Have you ever had any formal disciplinary sanction regarding your conduct?"

"What would you expect to be in place to safeguard the individuals/groups we support and engage with?"

What do you see as your safeguarding responsibilities?"

"How would you respond if you witnessed a staff member/volunteer/colleague being subjected to sexual harassment or inappropriate sexual conduct?"

Another significant component of PSEA action and a recent achievement of BRC is joining the Inter-Agency Misconduct Disclosure Scheme. The scheme is a way to prevent known abusers from moving from one humanitarian organisation to another. This is done by organisations disclosing to the scheme the names of known confirmed abusers, or those under investigation, so that this information can be shared with the recruitment teams of all participating organisations.

International HR also introduced changes to its induction processes. Now, new recruits are required to sign both the IFRC and BRC Code of Conduct and are asked to complete the IFRC PSEA e-learning module. The probationary period has not changed and remains at six months.

For register members, if there is a check missing from the onboarding procedures (for example not having a police check), the new recruit is asked to fill out a self-declaration form. This leads to International HR producing a risk-assessment form which must be signed off by the head of International HR and the hiring manager. In the case of register members and staff who deploy, safeguarding information is added to the pre-deployment briefing, which includes informing them of their obligation to report SEA concerns as well as detailing how to report them.

BRC's commitment to addressing SEA also includes staffing, and an International Safeguarding Assurance Adviser has been hired who has led an HR review and supported with HR and Security briefings on Safeguarding.

New processes will take a few months to be fully integrated as standard procedure, however, it is useful to recognise this as an ongoing process to ensure safer recruitment and induction. These changes were spearheaded by the larger People Directorate at BRC and some members of the International HR department.

Successes and challenges

The main success of these changes is the enhancement in selection of new staff members. The challenge has been an increase in the workload of members of the International HR department. The increased checks before deployment of staff and register members has slowed the speed at which BRC can deploy people but it should be noted that a safer deployment, rather than faster deployment, is the priority.

Key learning

BRC's top tips for other National Societies seeking to strengthen their recruitment and induction processes is to have a consistent selection process and to integrate safeguarding in all stages of the recruitment process.