



Our commitment to tackling sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment

Putting people first

The safety and wellbeing of the children and adults we seek to serve will always be our priority. This is core to who we are and will always prevail above all other considerations.

We will not tolerate sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and will put the voices, rights and safety of victims, survivors and whistle-blowers first. We will prevent safeguarding breaches from occurring but will follow up promptly and comprehensively if they do. We will report incidents to the appropriate authorities and prioritise the protection and safety of survivors and victims when doing so.

Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment are fundamentally about gender inequality and power imbalances and our leaders are committed to tackle this head on. They will drive the cultural changes we want to see – this means modelling inclusive leadership, more diverse management teams, and accountability at all levels of our organisations.

We take responsibility and will continue to work together as members of the DEC and of the wider international aid community to drive transformation in safeguarding and to demonstrate improvements. Some DEC members have well-developed safeguarding approaches in place and are driving up standards globally, but we can never be complacent. We must go further and make sure that we and all our partners are consistently meeting high standards, whatever the size of operations and regardless of the contexts in which humanitarian assistance is delivered in our name and with funds from the British public.

We will ensure that our approach is informed by the people we work with in countries around the world, in order to develop context-appropriate solutions based on their experience and knowledge.

This is what the commitments and related actions set out below aim to achieve.

Our approach to change

The DEC and its member charities are driving improvements through commitments and actions under four areas highlighted at the Summit on 18 October 2018. DEC members will work together and with others in the sector to address collective challenges and deliver systemic change.

DEC members have reviewed their approach to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (PSEAH) at the end of 2017 as part of the DEC membership review which takes place every three years. This review is an essential part of [DEC's approach](#), seeking assurance from members that they protect people from harm and that, where incidents arise, they are dealt with promptly and robustly. Improvements have been made in policies, procedures and practice since the 2017 review.

The sections below highlight actions that “we” – the DEC and its members – are taking to improve the quality and consistency of safeguarding practices in DEC-funded programmes and across all their work, depending on context, scope and remit. These actions are aligned with [ongoing efforts in the sector](#). In the spirit of improvement, we will continue to review and update our approach and these actions.

We note that increasing our efforts to protect people from harm and ensure people feel able to raise concerns is likely to lead to an increase in reporting in the short term. This is a sign that the system is being strengthened and we expect to see fewer incidents as a result in the longer term.

Survivor support and enhanced accountability to affected populations

We will support survivors, victims and whistle-blowers, enhance accountability and transparency, strengthen reporting and tackle impunity.

1. We protect the dignity and safety of the people our work serves, respecting their voice, agency and choices, while upholding the universal right to be protected from harm.

In October 2018, we reviewed **how we utilise feedback from communities** in our humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. We will share findings from this review, will continue to build contextually and culturally relevant feedback systems into programme design and delivery, and will evidence how community voices impact decisions that affect them across all DEC-funded programmes and beyond.

2. We ensure victims and survivors of safeguarding breaches are at the heart of our response.

We will explore **options for joint support services for survivors** of sexual exploitation and abuse, will apply good practice guidelines when providing survivors of gender-based violence with care and case management services, and will share lessons to improve practice.

3. We are transparent about our activities; we will monitor progress and will publicly demonstrate our ongoing efforts to improve safeguarding practice.

We will continue to **track and report changes to policies and practices** on PSEAH with each other and with the DEC at least every three years as part of the membership review process.

We will open ourselves to scrutiny and acknowledge all areas that require improvement and the timeframe for achieving such improvement by **making available in the public domain** our [third-party audit summary reports](#) against the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS).

The DEC will prepare a **regular progress report across the DEC members against the CHS**, including the 19 indicators on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and will work closely with the CHS Alliance to benchmark our progress against that of the wider sector.

4. We work towards consistent, rigorous reporting and complaints processes that are gender-sensitive and survivor-centred, so that the people we serve, our partners, staff, volunteers and trustees have confidence that we deal with alleged incidents swiftly and comprehensively.

We will learn from our collective experience in setting up individual and joint complaint-handling systems in different humanitarian emergencies and inform sector-wide efforts to develop a **good practice toolkit on reporting and complaint-handling**.

In August 2018, we [drafted](#) a set of **survivor-centred principles** for escalating serious incidents within our wider federated structures and for onward reporting. We will develop these principles further and consider them in both direct operations and partner-led work.

We will continue to support the development of **sector-wide guidelines on public reporting** of numbers of sexual exploitation and abuse incidents and will look to adopt such guidelines in our approach to reporting.

The DEC has been engaging closely with the Charity Commission over the last year on risk management and serious incident reporting of safeguarding breaches, including through round-table discussions on updates to its guidance and advice that it has developed. Most recently, we have contributed to the development of its advice and guidance on safeguarding for charities working overseas and for charities funding other charities.

Cultural Change

We will incentivise cultural change through strong leadership, organisational accountability and better human resource processes.

5. Our boards and senior leaders drive behaviours and attitudes throughout our organisations, leading by example to nurture a strong safeguarding culture.

From March 2018, the Board of Trustees of each individual DEC member is required to **review and approve assurance** on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment which members submit as part of the DEC membership review every three years.

We will continue to support and progress NGO sector work on the **leadership standard** and will engage closely with others across the sector to develop diagnostic and benchmarking tools that help us assess ourselves against indicators of an effective safeguarding culture.

6. We collaborate within and beyond our sector to improve employment practice, including background checks, to minimise opportunities for perpetrators to access and stay in our sector.

We will work together and with others in the sector to find legal means to share relevant information during the recruitment process about individuals who have been found to have committed sexual abuse, harassment or exploitation. Alongside commitments to the Core Humanitarian Standard, we will work to finalise and adopt the **Inter-Agency Scheme for the Disclosure of Safeguarding-related Misconduct in Recruitment Processes within the Humanitarian and Development Sector**.

Common Standards

We have agreed common standards and will ensure we and our partners meet them.

7. We apply established good practices and meet recognised international standards.

In 2015, **the DEC Board adopted the Core Humanitarian Standard** as the main standard for quality and accountability for its members. In 2017, the Board made it a requirement for members to provide **external assurance of measurable progress** against the CHS through the [CHS Verification Scheme](#).

In DEC-funded programmes and in line with our commitment to collaboration, DEC members will work closely with in-country colleagues, partners and other humanitarian organisations to explore options for setting up:

- **inter-agency approaches to information sharing and collecting feedback** from communities and crisis-affected populations,
- **joint community-based complaints mechanisms** (including single-entry reporting channels).

8. We work with others to advance consistent and high-quality safeguarding practice worldwide.

We will continue to promote the application of the Core Humanitarian Standard, including through work facilitated by BOND, our counterparts in the **Emergency Appeals Alliance** and other like-minded networks to which we belong.

We will work closely with our operational partners in DEC-funded programmes and beyond to identify gaps, areas of improvement and to strengthen our collective capacity to apply the Core Humanitarian Standard. **DEC funds will be set aside for activities which enable accountable programmes that put people first**, and the consistent application of good practice in safeguarding.

9. We ensure our safeguarding policies and practices address the needs of vulnerable groups.

In line with the Core Humanitarian Standard, we will consult with communities and people affected by crisis in the design, implementation and monitoring of complaint-handling systems in ways which are respectful and culturally appropriate.

We will regularly review both our safeguarding policies – to learn from their application in different contexts; and our practices – to ensure that they are appropriate and relevant for different groups, including women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. We will make changes and report on improvements informed by such regular reviews, including **third-party audit reports against the CHS**, evidence collected from **DEC commissioned real-time reviews**, and **independent evaluations**.

Organisational capacity and capability

We will strengthen organisational capacity and capability, including that of implementing partners to meet the agreed standards.

10. We improve safeguarding capabilities by building the awareness and skills of our staff, volunteers and trustees, while sharing solutions and expertise so the whole sector can learn and do better.

DEC members come together regularly to share learning and expertise in the context of DEC-funded programmes. Through different aspects of the DEC Accountability Framework and in line with our commitment to the CHS, we will engage our staff and volunteers as well as those of our partners to strengthen awareness about standards, roles and responsibilities, actively identify gaps and develop their capacity to improve.

We will continue to invest in and strengthen our Accountability Framework, which covers independent third-party assurance against the Core Humanitarian Standard, a robust planning and reporting cycle, a DEC-commissioned real-time review, independent evaluations, end of programme meta-syntheses, and a series of learning exchanges and workshops focused on improvement.

The DEC recognises that improvements in accountability to crisis-affected populations, including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, require resources. Therefore, **the DEC will fund such activities as an integral part of the delivery of high-quality humanitarian programmes.**

11. We strive towards equal relationships between organisations delivering and receiving aid.

We are committed to respecting and learning from the local knowledge and expertise of our local and national partners and their staff and recognise that they share responsibility for high-quality programme delivery and for keeping people safe.

We recognise that solutions led by national and local partners are essential for improvements in PSEAH to be relevant to their context and sustained over time. At a minimum, we will gain a **good understanding of our partners, their policies and procedures**, and will undertake a due diligence and capability review of their operations. We will invest individually and collectively in addressing the findings of such reviews and **strengthening the capacities of partners** in PSEAH in a way that respects and recognises their knowledge and expertise.

12. We will test innovative technology solutions to strengthen safeguarding practice as a sector.

We will work closely with others in the sector to explore whether **aid worker passporting or a similar accreditation process** could be developed to enhance vetting and support rapid mobilisation of international and national humanitarian workers, using innovative technologies.