



DEBATE PACK

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Sexual abuse and exploitation

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Contents

1.	Background	2
2.	What is being done to ensure that UK aid is not complicit in sexual exploitation and abuse?	5
	DFID action	5
	Charity Commission action	6
	International Development Committee action	7
	Action by UK based aid organisations	8
3.	Press articles	9
4.	Press releases	11
5.	PQs	14
6.	Statements	17
7.	Further reading	19
7.1	Committee inquiries and publications	19
7.2	Other publications	20
7.3	Websites	21

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

Since the beginning of 2018 there has been [heightened concern](#) about the sexual exploitation and abuse (known for short as SEA) of aid recipients by aid providers, as well as sexual harassment and abuse within aid sector organisations. This concern was initially triggered by reports that Oxfam GB staff had paid three local women for sex in Haiti during the humanitarian response to the 2010 earthquake there and that the group had covered up these offences, failing to report them to the Charity Commission.

Soon afterwards, there were allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment by senior male figures at Save the Children. After these incidents became public, a significant number of similar allegations involving a range of other organisations emerged, some of them stretching back nearly 20 years. Previous controversies about SEA by UN peacekeepers were revisited. These developments are seen as partly responsible for a [drop](#) in the value of charitable donations in the UK.

DFID, the Charity Commission and the International Development Committee (IDC) quickly became involved in efforts to address these scandals. UK-based aid organisations have also taken steps of their own.

An extensive discussion of the actions taken by different stakeholders between 2018 and early 2020 can be found in the Library briefing [UK aid: frequently asked questions](#). The COVID-19 pandemic has inevitably taken up most of the time and attention of the UK aid sector since then, but the issue of SEA remains high on its agenda.

In July 2020 the International Development Committee (IDC) launched a fresh [inquiry](#) into the issue. It said in a press release at the time:

In February 2018 our predecessor committee started working on sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector, holding an oral evidence session in light of the scandal in Haiti and then launching a full inquiry in March 2018, as the scale of the problem became apparent to them. It published a wide-ranging report in July 2018 which put numerous recommendations to the Government to help tackle the problem. That Committee undertook follow-up work on this issue, including two oral evidence sessions and a follow-up report published in October 2019 which set out the Committee's disappointment at the lack of progress in key areas.

The Department for International Development (DFID) held a safeguarding summit in October 2018 during which it signed up to a number of donor commitments. It has set up a

Safeguarding Unit and we also aware of the various steps that NGOs, the private sector, multilateral organisations, including the UN have taken.

Chair of the International Development Committee, Sarah Champion MP said:

“I have listened in horror at how the aid sector is targeted by perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse. In many cases, extremely vulnerable people are taken advantage of and abused by the very people they trusted to support them.”

“The fact that this inquiry is the third piece of work the Committee will have undertaken on sexual exploitation and abuse in two years tells me that this issue continues to rumble on as no one is prepared to challenge the culture that perpetuates it.”

“The Committee will investigate what progress has been made since the UK's international safeguarding summit in 2018. We will look at whether aid recipients, victims and survivors know their rights and feel properly supported. Crucially, we will help identify what work needs to be done by the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office as it takes on responsibility for this in September to end this abuse once and for all.”

So far, the IDC has held several [oral evidence sessions](#) and numerous [written submissions](#) have been submitted -- including by [DFID](#), shortly before it was merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCDO). Below are some extracts from the DFID submission which set out how the new government department intended to approach the issue:

What action should the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office take to improve reporting mechanisms, strengthen independent investigations and oversight, support victims and survivors and provide access to justice?

10. One immediate priority is to ensure that as a result of the merger the quality of what DFID currently provides in these areas is maintained. DFID has a Ministerial lead for safeguarding and this will continue in the FCDO. DFID's Investigations Section is discussing with FCO how to ensure a single reporting mechanism is in place for 1st September. Communications will be issued early and widely internally and externally to promote the new reporting route.
11. Another priority is to continue to ensure high safeguarding standards for partners and for staff members and the capability offer and operational procedures which underpin them. Other longer-term and more externally focused things that FCDO could consider to secure improvements in the areas set out in the question include: lobby regularly - both at international level through Ministers and headquarter

officials and at country level - on the importance of all those issues in the context of keeping people safe from harm; continue to chair and convene the wide range of external partners and networks that DFID has since 2018; and continue to provide funding for existing and possibly new programmes which directly seek to address these issues.

[...]

What are the opportunities for improvement under the new FCDO which will bring the Safeguarding Unit, existing initiatives to tackle SEAH, and the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (PSVI) programme under the same department and Secretary of State?

34. All UK ODA spending government departments signed up to the donor commitments at the October 2018 London Safeguarding Summit. Since then they have met quarterly, convened by DFID, to drive delivery of those commitments across portfolios. All departments have indicated that they wish to continue to meet quarterly convened by FCDO. The creation of FCDO should bolster even further that all-of-government approach to tackle sexual misconduct which is an affront to British core values and basic human rights.
35. DFID and FCO have throughout this period worked closely on issues such as PSVI and engaged with organisations such as the United Nations. For example, DFID and FCO both provide financial support to United Nations initiatives linked to PSVI and work to tackle SEAH. We are also finalising a guidance note that brings together work to tackle SEAH and PSVI as part of our broader strategic objective on ending gender-based violence under the UK's [National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security](#). The announcement of the creation of FCDO has already catalysed some useful discussions both separately within DFID and within FCO - and also across the two departments - about how we can best work with organisations such as the UN and in specific situations such as the Rohingya crisis.
36. The creation of FCDO provides in itself a great opportunity to look at how we can combine the best of current work in DFID on safeguarding and related issues such as support to human rights and our world-leading research into [what works to prevent violence against women and girls](#), with the best of work in FCO on issues such as PSVI and improving peacekeeping standards, building for example on the recent ICAI reviews. The aim is to ensure that the impact of the whole is greater than the sum of the current work of the DFID and FCO parts. Having the same Secretary of State lead on PSVI, broader gender-based violence and safeguarding might generate new ideas about how to improve the provision of support services to survivors and victims, and how to use the full capability of Britain's overseas network to help bring perpetrators to justice.

2. What is being done to ensure that UK aid is not complicit in sexual exploitation and abuse?

[Extract from Commons Library Briefing CBP7996, [UK aid: frequently asked questions](#), 4 May 2020]

Since the beginning of 2018 there has been [heightened concern](#) about the sexual exploitation and abuse (known for short as SEA) of aid recipients by aid providers, as well as sexual harassment and abuse within aid sector organisations. This concern was initially triggered by reports that Oxfam GB staff had paid three local women for sex in Haiti during the humanitarian response to the 2010 earthquake there and that the group had covered up these offences, failing to report them to the Charity Commission.

Soon afterwards, there were allegations of sexual misconduct and harassment by senior male figures at Save the Children. After these incidents became public, a significant number of similar allegations involving a range of other organisations emerged, some of them stretching back nearly 20 years. Previous controversies about SEA by UN peacekeepers were revisited. These developments are seen as partly responsible for a [drop](#) in the value of charitable donations in the UK.

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DFID action

The Secretary of State at the time, Penny Mordaunt, [froze funding](#) to Oxfam GB (both it and Save the Children later withdrew from bidding for UK aid while they put their houses in order) and established a DFID unit to review safeguarding across all parts of the aid sector. DFID also convened a safeguarding summit with the UK aid sector in March 2018 to agree steps to improve safeguarding processes and mechanisms. A range of [measures](#) were agreed at this summit.

In addition, DFID took a leading role at the global level, announcing that there would be an international safeguarding conference in London in October 2018. This summit [resulted](#) in 22 donors (including DFID) committing themselves to adhering "to one or both sets of international minimum standards related to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), namely the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee Minimum Operating Standards on PSEA](#), and/or the PSEA elements of the [Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability](#)".

The 22 donors also said:

In the longer term [...] we will look to review and strengthen measures for verification of that adherence, and how the standards could also cover sexual harassment.

They also agreed to support a new OECD DAC instrument to set standards on preventing and managing the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse in development cooperation and on donor accountability. This instrument was [adopted](#) by OECD DAC member states in July 2019.

In terms of specific initiatives, donors agreed, on a pilot basis, to:

- create a “passport” for aid workers that provides relevant information about an individual, including their previous record;
- establish a new “Disclosure of Misconduct Scheme” across the NGO sector;
- create a new background-check system led by Interpol;
- create a “resource and support hub” to assist smaller organisations meet common global safeguarding standards.

In October 2018, DFID also published “enhanced safeguarding due diligence [guidance](#)”.

In February 2019, Penny Mordaunt [updated](#) Parliament on DFID’s work on safeguarding. In the following month she made a keynote [speech](#) at BONDS Annual Conference, congratulating the aid sector on its efforts towards “cleaning up its act” on safeguarding.

In October, another Secretary of State, Alok Sharma, provided Parliament with [another update](#). Amongst other things, he said that DFID had just awarded a £10 million contract to set up and run its resource and support hub. He also announced that it was publishing three detailed [reports](#) setting out “some of the progress made and some of the challenges remaining.”

Charity Commission action

The Charity Commission opened statutory inquiries into Oxfam GB, which had failed to meet its obligation to report the allegations about the conduct of its staff in Haiti in 2010/11 to it, and Save the Children.

In October 2018, the Commission published new [reporting advice](#) for UK charities on criminal reporting. It also published a [report by a safeguarding taskforce](#) which assessed the nature and scale of the problem.

The Charity Commission [report](#) on Oxfam GB in June 2019 found that “aspects of the charity’s past record on safeguarding amount to mismanagement”. It issued an official warning and directed that Oxfam GB take remedial steps. The Commission has not yet published its report on Save the Children. There has been [criticism](#) of the delay.

Oxfam GB and Save the Children also commissioned their own independent investigations into their performance. The [final report](#) on Oxfam GB was published in June 2019. The [final report](#) on Save the Children was published in October 2018. Both organisations again apologised for past failures and undertook to implement the recommendations made in these reports.

International Development Committee action

The IDC quickly launched an inquiry in 2018, holding evidence sessions and publishing a draft Bill intended to promote debate about how best to plug any gaps in the UK's legal framework for addressing these issues. At the end of July 2018, the Committee [published](#) its report, containing 18 recommendations for action.

In its report, the IDC expressed concern that momentum for tackling sexual exploitation and abuse would not be sustained in the long-term, as had happened following previous reports and scandals. Key recommendations for action included:

- Victims and survivors should be at the centre of all efforts to improve safeguarding in the aid sector.
- Aid organisations must improve reporting mechanisms so that beneficiaries of aid are able to safely report incidents of exploitation and abuse, receiving appropriate care and support in response.
- Aid organisations must be transparent with DFID and the Charity Commission about any allegations of SEA.
- DFID should lead on developing a global register of aid workers to prevent perpetrators from moving round the sector undetected.
- The international aid community must establish an international aid ombudsman to provide an avenue of appeal to victims and survivors who do not feel that internal processes provided them with redress.
- Aid organisations should aim to achieve gender parity on boards, at senior management level, and throughout the workforce, and should commit to recruiting and promoting into leadership positions only those who can display a clear commitment to the rights of women and minorities.

DFID [responded](#) to this report in December, fully agreeing with some of the IDC's recommendations, but only [partially agreeing](#) with the majority of them.

The main reason why DFID only partially agreed with many of the IDC's recommendations was that, in its view, they asked the department to accept roles and responsibilities which rested primarily with other bodies and to ensure outcomes that were "not in DFID's gift". It also said that the proposed global register of aid workers was not feasible at present but that other measures flowing from the October 2018 international conference may have a similar effect. On the idea for an international aid ombudsman, it noted that the Dutch government had published a report about this, which would be the basis for considering next steps.

In its July 2018 report, the IDC committed to playing its part in "ensuring that momentum on SEA is maintained". To this end, on 7 May 2019 it launched a follow-up inquiry, which included an [evidence session](#) with the new Secretary of State for International Development, Rory Stewart, and other stakeholders.

At this session, Rory Stewart said:

“To understand the role we are trying to play here, it is not to be an international policeman or pretend that DFID can micromanage and control what other people are doing.”

But he added that DFID would energetically seek to shape and influence the policies of other actors. Rory Stewart also expressed “some scepticism” about the idea of an international aid ombudsman. Several members of the IDC – Chair Stephen Twigg included – expressed concerns that the momentum on tackling SEA was already slowing. Pauline Latham [claimed](#) that the aid sector was “failing miserably”.

The IDC published a follow-up [report](#) in October 2019. It found that the aid sector had made slow progress in addressing SEA in key areas, including not doing enough to protect whistleblowers.

Action by UK based aid organisations

UK-based aid organisations have taken steps, both individually and collectively, to address the SEA issue. In terms of [collective action](#), BOND, the UK network for organisations working in international development, has played a prominent role.

Four working groups were set up by BOND members to consider the following issues: accountability; organisational culture; the employment cycle; and reporting and complaints mechanisms.

DFID and the Charity Commission are represented on each working group. All are supported by academic and specialist experts. These working groups have developed [guidance](#) and tools to improve safeguarding practice.

A representative of BOND’s working groups [gave evidence](#) to the IDC in May 2019 IDC, as did a representative for UK private sector suppliers. Both were subjected to considerable criticism.

UK-based aid groups defended the performance of the sector following the IDC’s critical report in October 2019. BOND [convened](#) a conference on “safeguarding for development in December at which strengthening protection for whistleblowers was again discussed.

3. Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

['Zero tolerance' of abuse in aid sector failing to have an impact, MPs told](#)

Daily Telegraph
Jordan Kelly-Linden
7 October 2020

[Efforts to tackle sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers have had 'little impact', watchdog finds](#)

Daily Telegraph
Anne Gulland
30 September 2020

[Power, poverty, and aid: The mix that fuelled sex abuse claims in Congo](#)

The New Humanitarian / Thomson Reuters
Robert Flummerfelt / Nellie Peyton
29 September 2020

[International aid workers accused of sexual abuse during Congo's two-year Ebola battle](#)

Daily Telegraph
Will Brown
29 September 2020

[Opinion: independent accountability is crucial for ending sexual harassment in the aid sector](#)

Code Blue
Sharanya Kanikkannan
11 August 2020

[Could genealogy websites help catch aid worker sex abusers?](#)

National Post [Canada]
Emma Batha
16 July 2020

[UN peacekeeping has a sexual abuse problem](#)

Human Rights Watch
Skye Wheeler
11 January 2020

['They put a few coins in your hands to drop a baby in you' – 265 stories of Haitian children abandoned by UN fathers](#)

The Conversation
Sabine Lee and Susan Bartels
17 December 2019

[Blunders in Central African Republic sex abuse probe detailed in internal UN review](#)

The New Humanitarian
Philip Kleinfeld and Paisley Dodds
31 October 2019

[When the peacekeepers are part of the problem](#)

Global Initiative
Thi Hoang
26 February 2019

[Ebola vaccine offered in exchange for sex, Congo taskforce meeting told](#)

Guardian
Kate Holt and Rebecca Ratcliffe
12 February 2019

[How we found unreported claims of UN peacekeeper abuse](#)

Frontline (PBS)
Leila Miller
24 July 2018

[Sri Lankan 'war criminals' deployed as UN peacekeepers](#)

Observer
Mark Townsend
21 July 2018

[Timeline: Oxfam sexual exploitation scandal in Haiti](#)

Guardian
Damien Gayle
15 June 2018

[Ending impunity for crimes committed by UN peacekeepers](#)

Global Insight June/July 2016
International Bar Association
Kelly Askin
17 June 2016

4. Press releases

[The UN's newest sex abuse scandal won't be its last](#)

Code Blue [Campaign to end impunity for sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers]

1 October 2020

The story is appalling. UN and other emergency responders are accused of committing vile sexual offenses against women they were sent to assist—this time during the most recent Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). At least 30 women told reporters that World Health Organization (WHO) personnel in North Kivu demanded sex in exchange for temporary jobs in the Ebola response, according to the report by The New Humanitarian and the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The UN reacted just as expected: WHO will launch investigations. Future incidents will be prevented, its spokespeople claim. The perpetrators will be punished. "Zero tolerance" will be upheld.

None of that will make a bit of difference. It can't. Structurally, legally, neither WHO nor any other part of the UN has the right to investigate crimes. They can conduct preliminary "fact-finding" to determine whether their personnel may have committed crimes that bona fide government authorities should investigate and prosecute, but beyond that, WHO has no more authority to deal with crimes than a local coffee shop.

Our criticism of the WHO, we hasten to add, should not be construed as an endorsement of the Trump administration's illegitimate attacks on the global health body. We raise a protest against the UN's actions not because we are opposed to the UN but because we wish it to do better.

In response to this latest media exposé, the WHO declared in a statement that the alleged actions of WHO personnel "are unacceptable and will be robustly investigated." The WHO is "outraged." Anyone involved "will be held to account and face serious consequences, including immediate dismissal."

Secretary-General António Guterres called for the crimes to be "fully investigated." By implying that anyone employed by the UN can or should investigate these heinous crimes, the Secretary-General has guaranteed the inevitable: Little if any evidence will be unearthed, and few if any perpetrators will be traced; those who are identified will face administrative consequences and nothing more. No one will be prosecuted.

The sexual offenses will continue with impunity.

The purported outrage represents the first myth of this episode: the pretense that WHO was taken by surprise. In fact, according to an article published in The Guardian, WHO knew in early February 2019 that a sex scandal plagued its Ebola response in North Kivu. Twenty long months ago, non-governmental organizations had informed the WHO and the Congolese government that sex was being extorted from

women in exchange for Ebola vaccinations. No outrage was expressed. On the contrary, WHO spokesperson Tarik Jasarevic told the paper at the time, "We will continue to check and improve measures we have in place to prevent, monitor and report on any such incidents. More can always be done."

Why were no promises of "serious consequences" made back then?
Why no promises of robust investigations?

We know why: The Guardian story didn't receive the same level of media attention as the New Humanitarian/Thomson Reuters Foundation report. With no one watching closely, the UN knew it could get away with doing nothing. The UN's reputation is all that matters.

Which brings us to the second myth: that even if a WHO investigation is launched, it can result in anything approximating justice. The mission of WHO's tiny Office of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) is not to track down perpetrators, fight crime, protect citizens, or take part in impartial adjudication. Its role is to "enhance the integrity and reputation of the Organization." Its internal explorations can lead to internal discipline, but that means that in the unlikely case that WHO "investigators" happen to find a civilian employee who demanded sex from a woman looking for protection from Ebola, the worst that might happen is that he could be fired.

Unlike police, IOS investigators only have access to UN records, property, and personnel; they can't search a hotel's rooms, subpoena its records, or question its staff, for instance. But let's play along with a third myth, for a moment, and imagine that the UN actually had the legal authority to investigate crimes. Would it have the capacity? According to WHO's most recent internal auditor's report, in 2018, WHO's IOS had one coordinator for investigations and a total of four investigators—for the entire world. On average, the audit said, it took IOS 1,646 working days to complete a case.

Legally, the DRC has jurisdiction over crimes committed in the DRC. After rapidly determining that its personnel may have committed crimes and therefore immunity doesn't apply, the UN should refer these sex-for-jobs and sex-for-vaccinations cases to local authorities. But senior UN officials have placed the DRC on a long, closely guarded list of countries whose police and courts they consider too incompetent to investigate and prosecute UN personnel.

What is the solution if the UN has no authority to investigate crimes, and it claims that the DRC isn't up to the job? UN lawyers pass the buck: they claim that responsibility should rest with the countries of nationality of the accused personnel. That myth leads directly to a legal and practical labyrinth, which we explained in our 2018 submission to a UK House of Commons inquiry (para. 26).

So, are we saying that there are no possible routes to justice when WHO and other UN personnel are accused of sexually violating women and children? No. There is a path, and it's clear, simple, and cost-effective. The UN simply must act on the Code Blue Campaign's proposal for an as-needed Special Court Mechanism. To end impunity

and ensure that UN civilian personnel face justice, such a mechanism would step in and serve law enforcement and criminal justice functions in areas where the UN operates. It would be completely independent, truly impartial, and answerable only to Member States rather than to the Secretary-General or to any other employee of the UN Organization.

This latest rash of UN sex crimes is almost rivalled in odiousness by the perpetuation of myths—by the bogus implication that a victim’s report is the first step toward a righteous UN solution; by the shameless fraud that WHO or any other part of the UN is qualified, equipped, or even allowed to investigate or prosecute itself; and that this will be the last exposé we’ll hear.

Nothing grieves us more than to make this prediction, but we must: WHO and the UN will be allowed to “investigate” this latest scandal, emboldening more personnel to demand more sex from more women with little fear of any real consequences. And two or three years from now, we will learn that in too many cases to count, the cost of a COVID-19 vaccine was sex with a “humanitarian.”

Bond statement in response to reports of sexual exploitation in DRC during Ebola crisis

Bond [UK network for organisations working in international development]

30 September 2020

Stephanie Draper, CEO of Bond, the UK network for organisations working in international development said:

Today’s reports of sexual exploitation and abuse in the DRC during the Ebola outbreak are incredibly saddening and serve as a critical reminder that reporting mechanisms alone are insufficient to prevent or tackle abuse.

The people we are there to support must be at the heart of any humanitarian response. UK NGOs have worked hard to improve safeguarding policies and practices since 2018. To get real change across the whole aid sector, we need strong leadership to shift organisational cultures and tackle power imbalances head-on. This needs to be fully resourced and funded.

There needs to be more diversity across organisations, including women in positions of power. During humanitarian crises reporting mechanisms also need to be rapidly developed in partnership with women and local communities.

Finally, perpetrators must be kept out of our sector. The misconduct disclosure scheme improves referencing and helps ensure those found to have abused will not be able to move freely between organisations. But more is needed: disclosure and disbaring checks should be extended to frontline aid workers, and we need better checks available internationally.

5. PQs

[FCO/DFID Merger](#)

13 Oct 2020 | 682 c146

Asked by: Sarah Champion

The International Development Committee is currently holding an inquiry into sexual abuse and exploitation by aid workers of the beneficiaries, and I am ashamed to report that we are finding that it is rife. I welcome the fact that the new Department has brought forward a safeguarding document as one of its first publications. However, will the Minister please comment on why the FCDO's terms and conditions for staff say:

"Sexual relations with beneficiaries are strongly discouraged"?

Why is this not gross misconduct when there is an obvious power imbalance, and what will the Minister do to remedy this immediately?

Answered by: Nigel Adams | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

I thank the hon. Lady for raising a very important issue. I do not have those terms and conditions in front of me, but I am more than happy to meet her to discuss what sounds like an incredibly serious point that she has raised.

[Non-governmental Organisations: Sexual Offences](#)

8 Oct 2020 | 97709

Asked by: Layla Moran

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps the Government has taken since (a) 2018 and (b) 31 December 2019 to tackle sexual abuse by aid workers.

Answered by: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Sexual exploitation and abuse are completely abhorrent. Since 2018, the Government has taken action to prevent abuse by aid workers and to improve the response when it happens. We introduced enhanced safeguarding standards and regularly assess partners against them. We created Project Soteria with Interpol to strengthen vetting of aid workers and information sharing among law enforcement agencies. We champion the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme which prevented 36 individuals from being offered aid sector jobs in 2019. We created the Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub which provides resources for all aid organisations. In October 2019 we published reports summarising work over the previous 12 months including these and many other measures.

In 2020 as well as continuing with the work above, the UK and 14 other donors agreed common language on safeguarding for funding agreements with multilaterals, aligned with international standards. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is finalising a

programme to support victims and survivors. We regularly convene the groups who signed commitments at the October 2018 London Safeguarding Summit and will publish a further annual progress report this month. Last month the Government published a safeguarding strategy covering all UK aid spend which builds on commitments made at the 2018 Summit.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Sexual Offences

7 Oct 2020 | 97708

Asked by: Layla Moran

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the accuracy of reports of sexual abuse by aid workers in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the 2018 Ebola outbreak; and what steps his Department is taking to help tackle sexual abuse by aid workers during the covid-19 pandemic.

Answered by: James Duddridge | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Sexual exploitation and abuse are completely abhorrent. We regularly assess all of our partners against the highest safeguarding standards and expect thorough investigations whenever allegations are made. We take these recent allegations in DRC very seriously; there is no reason to believe they are not credible. The World Health Organization and other agencies have confirmed that they are urgently investigating. We will scrutinise their findings closely and are in close contact with them.

The UK is committed to driving up safeguarding standards across the aid sector, during the COVID-19 pandemic and at all times. We're working with partners to: prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment; listen to those affected; respond sensitively but robustly when harm or allegations of harm occur; and learn from every case. We will continue to demand the highest standards of our partners and hold ourselves to those same high standards.

In March, the UK commissioned specific guidance for staff and external partners about managing the heightened risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment during the COVID-19 pandemic. This and a wide range of other tools and guidance are on the Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub, which FCDO created last year.

Non-governmental Organisations: Sexual Offences

7 Oct 2020 | 97707

Asked by: Layla Moran

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help prevent sexual abuse by people employed by (a) NGOs and (b) the UN who are delivering (a) UK Official Development Assistance and (b) UK funded humanitarian assistance.

Answered by: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Safeguarding remains a top priority for the FCDO and we require all partners, including NGOs and the UN, to adhere to the highest standards of safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH). FCDO monitors compliance throughout all programmes and staff are provided with guidance and training to do that. If partners do not meet our high standards, we will take swift and robust action.

FCDO convenes eight sets of organisations - including NGOs and the UN - to discuss delivery of the commitments made at the UK-led 2018 Safeguarding Summit to prevent and better respond to SEAH and we publish an annual progress report. FCDO funds initiatives to help partners meet our standards, including the Resource and Support Hub which offers guidance, tools and analysis, focusing on grassroots organisations in developing countries.

FCDO is supporting initiatives to prevent perpetrators of sexual abuse moving around the sector, including the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme which in 2019 prevented 36 people with a history of misconduct from being offered aid sector jobs.

The UK supports safeguarding capability-building initiatives in the UN and uses UN Executive Board discussions and joint initiatives with other major donors to ensure continued focus and improvement in this area.

6. Statements

[Aid Update](#)

17 Oct 2019 | HCWS17

Alok Sharma (Secretary of State for International Development):

This week marks one year on since the UK Department for International Development hosted the 2018 Safeguarding Summit, Putting People First: tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector.

In early 2018 the aid sector's failure over many years to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) came into sharp relief.

The shocking stories that emerged exposed how aid workers had been allowed to get away with sexual misconduct. Their actions undermined trust in the whole sector and all the positive work that it does.

So from February 2018 DFID set out to work with others to change the way the aid sector tackles SEAH, from root to branch.

The October 2018 summit in London was an important milestone. More than 500 organisations came together to make commitments for change. This included 22 donors - who provide 90% of global ODA. We committed to global standards on prevention and improved processes covering ethical behaviour, robust recruitment and complaints processes.

These were not empty promises. Work is ongoing to put victims and survivors first and drive real culture change across the aid sector. This includes:

DFID's £10 million project with INTERPOL to help stop perpetrators of SEAH moving around the aid sector by strengthening criminal record checks and information sharing between countries. Regional hubs are being set up and priority countries have been identified.

The Misconduct Disclosure Scheme, which means employers can share data on conduct and disciplinary records related to sexual misconduct with greater confidence. It is still early days, but the over 1,500 requests for information since January have prevented the hiring of at least 10 individuals.

Awarding the contract this month for DFID's £10 million Resource and Support Hub to provide guidance, support and training to NGOs and others and access to independent investigators for smaller charities.

Today, DFID is publishing three reports showing some of the progress made and the challenges remaining.

The first has updates from each of the eight groups which made commitments at the summit: donors, UK NGOs, private sector suppliers, the United Nations, International Financial Institutions, CDC, research

fundings, and Gavi and the Global Fund. Initiatives include new tools and guidance for NGOs; mechanisms to collaborate and learn lessons among private sector suppliers; a new reporting tool for United Nations staff; the development of a Good Guidance Note by International Financial Institutions and CDC; an evidence review of safeguarding challenges by research funders; and the rollout of new training by Gavi and the Global Fund.

The second covers how donors are meeting their commitments. This includes the adoption of a new OECD Development Assistance Committee recommendation on ending SEAH in the aid sector; work to align donor SEAH clauses in funding agreements with multilateral agencies; and collective leverage to drive change across the UN. Donors are continuing to strengthen accountability, build more robust systems and drive culture change across the whole international system. The third gives more details about what DFID has done.

We have been clear that any sexual misconduct is totally unacceptable. But we know that sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector still happens far too often.

The international work led by DFID over the last year has generated good momentum and is starting to deliver results. But we must collectively keep working until every individual feels able to speak up and challenge abuses of power wherever they occur.

We must continue to do all we reasonably can to make zero tolerance a reality, by which we mean responding appropriately to every single report or case.

We must prevent SEAH from happening, listen to those affected, respond appropriately when allegations are made, and learn from every single case.

This is just the beginning of a long-term process.

I will build on the work of my predecessors to maintain momentum, to ensure the failings of the past do not happen again and to deliver better results for the people we serve.

If we do not get things right on safeguarding, and ensure the protection of the most vulnerable, then we fail in our ultimate goal to support the world's poorest and jeopardise all the positive work aid does.

The commitments made at the London summit are having a positive impact. But more is required by every organisation and every programme if we are going to stop sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the aid sector. Something which we must achieve.

7. Further reading

7.1 Committee inquiries and publications

[Welcome FCDO clarification that sexual relations between FCDO staff and ODA beneficiaries will be treated as potential gross misconduct](#)

International Development Committee
22 October 2020

[Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary dodges attempts to appear before Committee](#)

International Development Committee
14 October 2020

[Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: next steps](#)

International Development Committee
HC 605 2019-21 [Inquiry opened 6 July 2020]

Oral evidence

- [20 October 2020](#)
- [13 October 2020](#)
- [6 October 2020](#)
- [22 September 2020](#)
- [16 July 2020](#)

Written evidence

- [Sightsavers](#)
- [World Vision UK](#)
- [Liberty Shared](#)

[Follow-up: sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government response to the First Report of the Committee, Session 2019](#)

International Development Committee
HC 127 2019-21
13 Mar 2020

[Follow-up: sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector](#)

International Development Committee
HC 111 2019-20
17 Oct 2019

[Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government response to the Committee's Eighth Report](#)

International Development Committee
HC 1764 2017-19
6 Dec 2018

[Sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector](#)

International Development Committee
HC 840 2017-19
31 Jul 2018

7.2 Other publications

[Cross-Sector Progress Report on Safeguarding Against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(SEAH\) 2019-2020](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
20 October 2020

[FCDO Progress Report on Safeguarding Against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(SEAH\) in the International Aid Sector, 2019-20](#)

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
October 2020

[Sexual exploitation and abuse by international peacekeepers: An accompanying report to the ICAI review of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative](#)

ICIA [Independent Commission for Aid Impact]
30 September 2020

[Safeguarding against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(SEAH\) in the aid sector](#)

Guidance from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
20 August 2020

[Tackling Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment: 2020-2022 Strategy and Action Plan](#)

UNHCR
August 2020

[Interim Guidance: Checklist to Protect from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during COVID-19](#)

IASC [Inter-Agency Standing Committee]
26 June 2020

[Safeguarding children from sexual exploitation and abuse in the context of UN peacekeeping operations](#)

Keeping Children Safe [KCS]
Conor Foley and Sarah Blakemore
June 2020

[Interagency Community Outreach and Communications Fund on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\)](#)

IASC [Inter-Agency Standing Committee]
April 2020

[NGO collection and reporting of data on sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment](#)

Institute of Development Studies
Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development Programme [K4D]
Jenny Birchall
16 March 2020

[Sexual Abuse in UN Peacekeeping: The Problem of Viewing Women as a 'Quick Fix'](#)

E-International Relations

Brianna Nicole Hernandez
20 February 2020

[Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse – Report of the Secretary-General](#)

UN General Assembly
A/74/705
17 February 2020

[Litigating Peacekeeper Child Sexual Abuse](#)

Redress and Child Rights International Network [CRIN]
21 January 2020

[The UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative: Joint review](#)

ICIA [Independent Commission for Aid Impact]
9 January 2020

[Progress Report – One year on from the October 2018 London Safeguarding Summit](#)

Department for International Development
October 2019

[UNA-UK priorities for addressing sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peacekeeping](#)

[letter to Lord Ahmad, Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict]
United Nations Association – UK
28 August 2019

[Sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers - Timeline](#)

CRIN [Child Rights International Network]
March 2019

7.3 Websites

[Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub \[RSH\]](#)

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