



How Takaful Al Sham improved their ability to protect crisis-affected people from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment by using the CHS

A group of volunteers established **Takaful Al Sham** in 2012 to respond to the Syrian crisis. They work in Syria and Turkey to ensure equal rights, an opportunity to live in dignity and security, and to end human suffering for all those caught up in the conflict.

Takaful Al Sham started its certification process in 2020 to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of their systems and policies. They were granted a subsidy through HQAI's Facilitation Fund to cover 90% of the audit costs.⁵¹

In the initial CHS certification auditors found that Takaful Al Sham was not fully ensuring that communities and people affected by crisis were aware of the expected behaviour of staff, including organisational commitments made on the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (CHS indicator 5.6). They were given one year to improve this weakness.

The organisation was already working on protecting communities from sexual abuse, exploitation or harassment from staff, but not in a systemic way. The CHS certification audit made clear that their organisational policies needed to be explicit on staff duties around PSEAH and communicate these expectations with the people they served.

In response, Takaful Al Sham leadership created a new PSEAH policy and updated others to be clearer on banned and accepted behaviour, including in their complaints policy. Practically, they became more systematic in raising awareness with staff of what acceptable behaviour around SEAH looks like in practice, making it part of the project management cycle.

They created new project management guidelines, which also included CHS indicator 5.6 (people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of humanitarian staff) for the first time.

The guidance explains how to ensure affected communities know about the PSEAH commitments of the organisations, their importance, and how to feedback if these are not met.

As a result, Takaful Al Sham started raising awareness of expected staff behaviours directly with the communities they assist for the first time, with a focus on how to complain if people saw or experienced unacceptable behaviour.

Takaful Al Sham asked the communities they work with how they would prefer to communicate with the organisation, and then set up channels based on this. All project locations now have posters which detail what to expect from Takaful Al Sham staff, and this information is also shared via WhatsApp (including videos) on burner phones provided to community members. The complaints and PSEAH helpline numbers are regularly shared on WhatsApp too.

Takaful Al Sham acted fast, rolling out these improvements in early 2021. By the next audit in the CHS certification cycle, auditors saw the new policies and heard community members say that they knew what to expect from staff on PSEA.

This evidence meant that in Takaful Al Sham's 2021 CHS certification audit report, the weakness against indicator 5.6 had been resolved.

Now, Takaful Al Sham hear from the people they assist that they have more trust in the organisation, particularly in terms of their information, accountability, and complaints systems.

They are seeing more complaints across all their projects, to which they respond well, and so encourage more to come forward. Before CHS certification, around 65-75% of programme participants knew how to complain; since the implementation of changes, this has increased to 90%.

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