



TRENDS IN SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, ABUSE & HARASSMENT (SEAH) IN THE AID SECTOR: A SIX-MONTH OVERVIEW

Harmonised Reporting Scheme (HRS) on SEAH
October 2023 - March 2024



HARMONISED REPORTING SCHEME
On sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) continue to pose significant challenges within the aid sector, undermining the integrity and effectiveness of humanitarian and development efforts, violating the do no harm principle and going against the very purpose of the sector's commitment to serve affected communities. To reduce risks, prevent incidents, and respond effectively, the aid sector must have evidence that highlights critical vulnerabilities and permissive settings, in order to guide its actions to stop SEAH.

The SEAH Harmonised Reporting Scheme (HRS) was developed as a unified framework to facilitate the collection and reporting of comparable anonymous data on SEAH incidents.

This system enables a comprehensive analysis of trends and patterns, enhancing our understanding of SEAH and informing the prioritisation of corrective actions. The HRS started collecting data on SEAH in September 2023, and currently, 30 organisations are actively participating in the SEAH HRS by contributing anonymous data on SEAH incidents bi-annually.

This report covers the period from October 1st, 2023, to March 31st, 2024, during which a total of **169 incidents were reported through the SEAH HRS.** It is important to note that despite

these efforts, under-reporting of SEAH remains a persistent issue. Aid organisations participating of the SEAH HRS only represent a small fraction of the myriad organisations operating within the sector. Consequently, this report is not intended to be representative of the sector-wide trends of SEAH, nor does it claim to encompass the total incidence or prevalence of these issues across the sector. However, the trends identified in this report provide a valuable foundation for understanding key issues and identifying effective starting points for intervention.

The strength and utility of the SEAH HRS trends analysis will keep increasing as more organisations join the system, with more comprehensive evidence generated, thereby enhancing our capacity to effectively tackle SEAH issues across the sector.

If your organisation is interested in joining this important initiative, please contact seah.hrs@chsalliance.org.

The first section of the report covers sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment incidents **against aid recipients and their communities**, whereas the second section of the report covers sexual misconduct **on the workplace and against staff of the organisation**.

Member of the Harmonised Reporting Scheme (HRS) on SEAH



I. SEAH TRENDS AGAINST AID RECIPIENTS

GEOGRAPHY OF REPORTED INCIDENTS

The reported incidents spanned a broad geographic area, occurring in a total of 40 countries.

75% of reported incidents were concentrated in several key regions – 3 of which are in Africa:

Central Africa 32% **Eastern Africa** 20% **Western Asia** 13% **Western Africa** 10%

Specifically, the highest numbers of reported incidents were in:

- **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC):** 29% (IASC SEARO rating: 6.9 / 3rd)
- **Syria:** 7% (IASC SEARO rating 6.8 / 4th)
- **Nigeria:** 4% (IASC SEARO rating 6 / 14th)
- **Kenya:** 4% (IASC SEARO rating 5.2 / 27th)
- **Egypt:** 4% (not included in IASC SEARO)
- **Bangladesh:** 4% (IASC SEARO rating 5.9 / 15th)

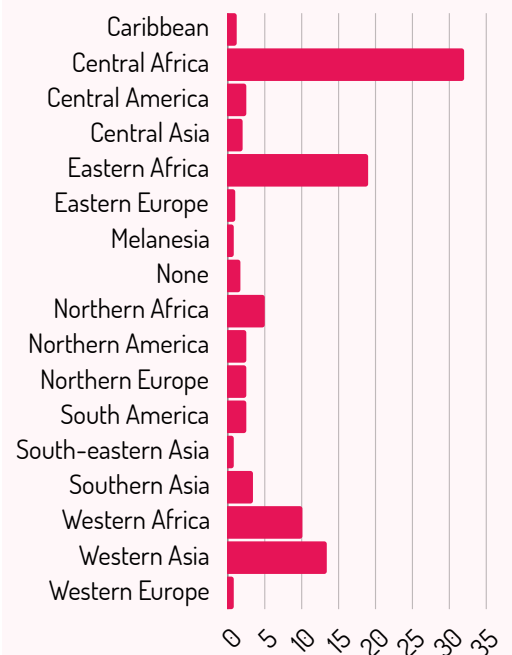
Notably, the **DRC and Syria continued to rank among the top three countries with the most reported incidents**, consistent with the previous semester's HRS data, and with the [IASC SEA Risk Overview \(SEARO\)](#).

Higher numbers of reports can be explained by multiple factors including:

- Proven risk (the higher the risk, the greater the reporting case load – if reporting systems work), long humanitarian presence in the country (allowing organisations to engineer trust with communities resulting in higher reporting)
- Dedicated community engagement on PSEAH (the more aware the communities are of SEAH and reporting mechanisms available, the higher the reports)
- Cultural and social norms (in In some communities, cultural stigma and social pressures discourage reporting)
- Available support systems (victims/survivor are more likely to report when they know they can access support)
- Regular assessment on the effectiveness of CFMS and reporting barriers.

Most countries will see a combination of these factors, which should be assessed at the country level to contextualise reporting numbers.

Regions of reported incidents



This report focuses solely on incidents reported through the HRS. Consequently, the information on geographical locations should not be interpreted as an indication that these are the countries where the most SEAH incidents are occurring. To accurately understand the prevalence of SEAH, this data must be correlated with the countries where SEAH HRS partners are actively reporting (see maps below). For instance, a country where no SEAH HRS partners are operating may not have incidents reported in the HRS, despite potentially experiencing numerous incidents. Conversely, a country with many reports is not necessarily the country with the highest occurrence of SEAH. Therefore, the absence of reported incidents from a particular country does not necessarily indicate a lower occurrence of SEAH in that region, and a high number of reports does not necessarily indicate a higher occurrence

Additionally, the HRS also allows the identification of countries with high operational presence of HRS participants, but low reporting numbers.

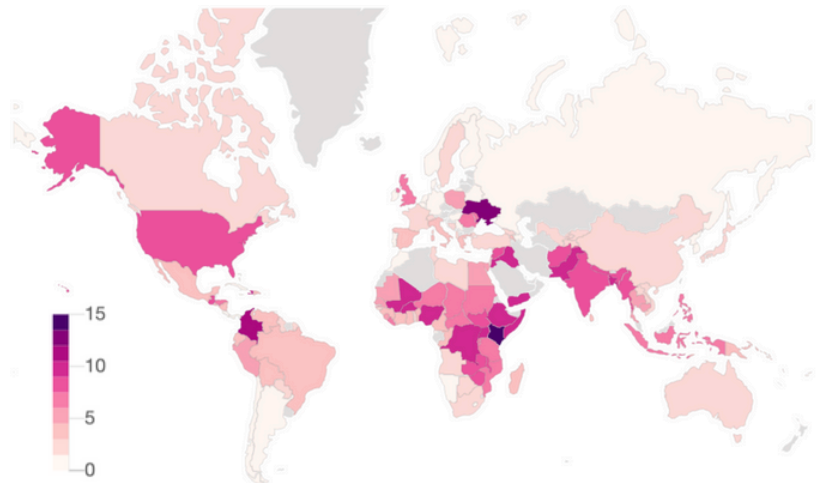
This is the case of **Ukraine, Colombia, Mali, and Pakistan** where despite a significant operational presence of HRS participants, few or no incidents were reported, suggesting that underreporting may be particularly prevalent in these regions.

Similarly, looking at countries with high-risk ratings on the SEARO but no reporting in the HRS can also be alarming with regards to under reporting. Notably, **Yemen and Afghanistan** have the highest risk level on the IASC SEARO but have a low number of reported incidents in the HRS, despite several HRS partners being active in those countries

Map of reported incidents



Map of operational presence of HRS participants



TYOLOGY OF INCIDENTS

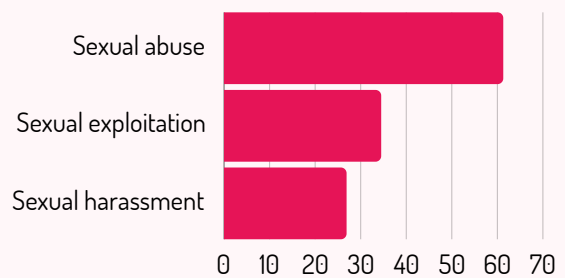
Reported incidents were predominantly **sexual exploitation**, accounting for 61% of all incidents. This is followed by sexual abuse, which constitutes 34% of incidents, and sexual harassment at 27%.

This report shows a significant increase of **sexual abuse and exploitation incidents**, which respectively represented 29% and 26% of incidents in the previous report.



3 IN 5 INCIDENTS WERE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

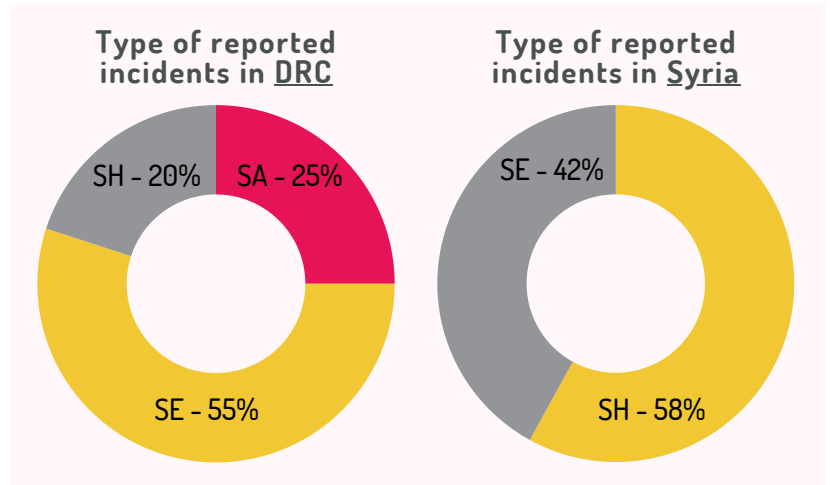
Typology of incidents



It is important to note that not all HRS participants include harassment in their definitions of SEAH, which may account for the lower percentage of reported harassment incidents.

Significant differences are evident when examining the typology of incidents in the two countries with the highest number of reports, DRC and Syria respectively.

In the DRC, sexual exploitation is the most prevalent type of misconduct (55% of incidents). Conversely, in Syria, sexual harassment most widespread (58% of incidents)



However, it's worth noting that cultural and linguistic difference may play a role in how definitions of sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment are understood which may have an impact on how incidents are classified. For instance, in Arabic, the word "taharos" is the popular term to refer to both SEA and SH, which may mean that some SEA incidents may be classified as SH.

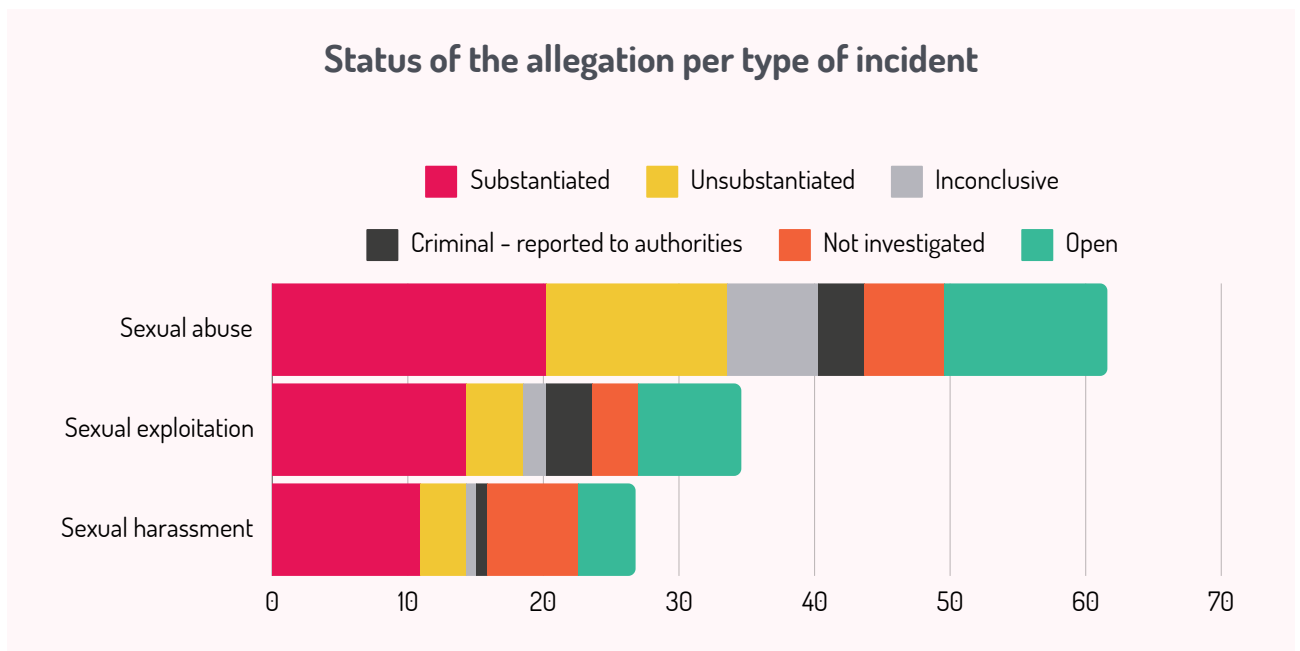
Regarding the outcomes of incidents, 36% were substantiated, 17% were unsubstantiated, and 8% were inconclusive.



1 IN 3 INCIDENTS WAS SUBSTANTIATED

Notably, 17% of incidents went un-investigated, and only 4% were escalated to authorities as criminal cases. At the time of reporting, 16% of incidents were still under investigation.

The graph below outlines the status of allegations by incident type. A significant concern is the high proportion of sexual harassment incidents against members of the communities/populations that remain un-investigated (almost 1 in 5 incidents, as opposed to 1 in 10 for sexual exploitation or sexual abuse), underscoring a critical area for improvement within the sector.



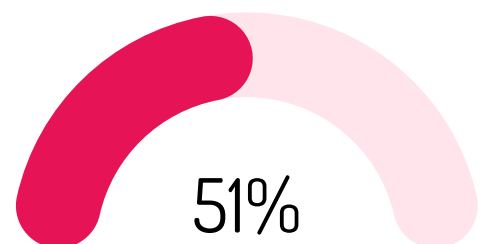
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Strengthen sections on sexual exploitation in training and awareness programs** to ensure a better understanding amongst all staff, including contractors, partners, and volunteers as well as community members. These should clearly explain power dynamics and informed consent, using relatable, contextual, and less obvious examples. For instance, do not only use the example of a request for a sexual relationship in exchange for goods, such as a bag of rice, but also include an example of a staff member coercively obtaining an aid recipient's phone number in exchange for access to aid.
2. **Standardise the inclusion of harassment in the definition of SEAH across the aid sector**, recognizing its role as a precursor to abuse and exploitation, and ensuring proactive measures are taken against it to prevent further incidents.
3. **Establish clearer guidelines for escalating substantiated SEAH criminal incidents to local authorities:**
 - Conduct a risk assessment to identify if it is safe to escalate substantiated SEAH criminal incidents to local authorities to increase criminal accountability.
 - In collaboration with the PSEA Network in country, develop clear victim/survivor centred guidelines on escalating substantiated incidents of SEAH to local authorities.
 - When escalating incidents, always respect victim/survivor centred approaches. Consider the potential risks to victims/survivors and others in certain locations.
 - Organisations can refer to the [Soteria project](#) led by Interpol, bringing the law enforcement and aid sector together to prevent SEAH and strengthen the capacity of law enforcement to investigate, prosecute and arrest those who abuse aid recipients.
4. **Establish a register of barriers to reporting SEAH:** To address under-reporting of SEAH, establish a register of barriers to reporting, updated regularly based on feedback from communities. Understanding both global and contextual barriers will help develop effective, context-specific strategies to encourage reporting.

REPORTING CHANNEL USED

Half of the incidents were reported directly to a staff member of the reporting organisation. Internal whistleblowing mechanisms accounted for 20% of reports, while protection from sexual abuse, exploitation abuse and harassment (PSEAH) focal points were utilised in 12% of incidents.

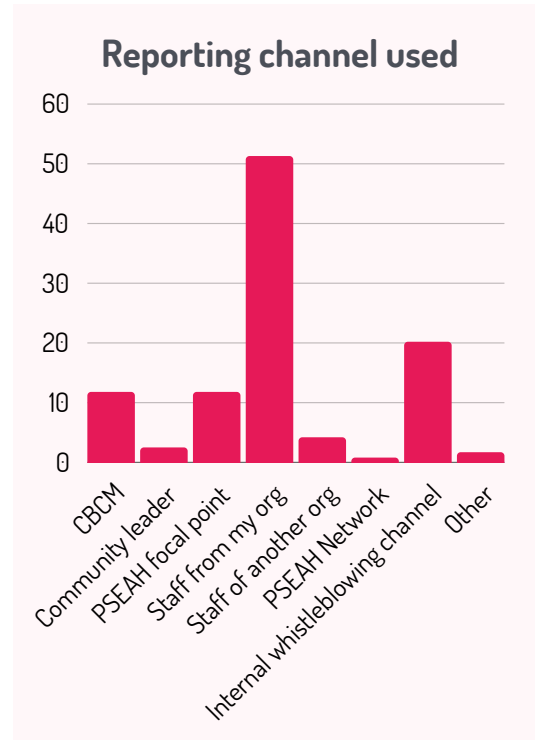
Despite a slight improvement, community-based complaints mechanisms (CBCMs) remain seldom utilised, serving as the entry point in only 11% of incidents, compared to 7% in the previous report.



HALF OF THE INCIDENTS WERE REPORTED TO STAFF MEMBERS

The IASC defines **CBCMs** as “a system blending both formal and informal community structures, built on engagement with the community, where individuals are able and encouraged to safely report grievances - including SEAH incidents - and those reports are referred to the appropriate entities for follow-up”.

Knowing there is a system and a network of people protecting a safe environment is key for disclosure. CBCMs should combine formal entry points (e.g. hotlines) and community structures (e.g. focal points) to create safe and effective environments for disclosure and thereby reduce under reporting of SEAH.



43% of reports came from staff members (34% from the organisation involved in the incident and 9% from staff of other organisations), whereas **reports from the victims/survivor or their community only account for 18%** (direct reports from victims or survivors made up 9%, with their families contributing another 7% and community members outside the immediate family 2% of incidents). 8% of reports were anonymous.

The method of reporting didn't change significantly with the type of incident, though sexual abuse was more often reported face-to-face to staff or a PSEAH focal point, suggesting that more sensitive cases tend to be reported in person. Similarly, incidents against men and boys, which tend to be considered very sensitive in many contexts, are reported to a staff member in 80% of incidents.

Profile of person reporting the incident



Reports of sexual abuse most often came from the victim/survivor themselves or their families (24%), unlike sexual exploitation (18%) and harassment (12%), which were more commonly reported by staff (43% for SE and 52% for SH vs only 27% of SA)

This could suggest that while victims/survivors often recognise sexual abuse as a violation of their rights and feel empowered to report it, they are less aware that sexual exploitation and harassment also violate their rights.

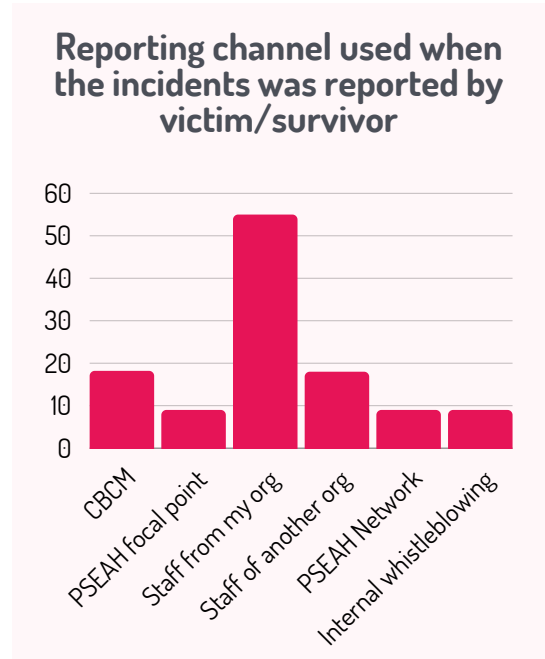
This is particularly true when aid recipients mistakenly think that agreeing to a sexual relationship for aid is consent, putting the burden on themselves and preventing them from reporting it as exploitation.

Harassment is also often frequently perceived as a routine or expected behaviour within these settings, leading to under reporting by aid recipients. This lack of awareness highlights the need for targeted information dissemination to inform aid recipients on the full range of their rights and how to report all types of violations.

When victims/survivors reported incidents, they most often report directly to staff members (72% of incidents), and use CBCMs in only 18% of incidents. Reports involving minors are also usually made directly to staff members (47%).

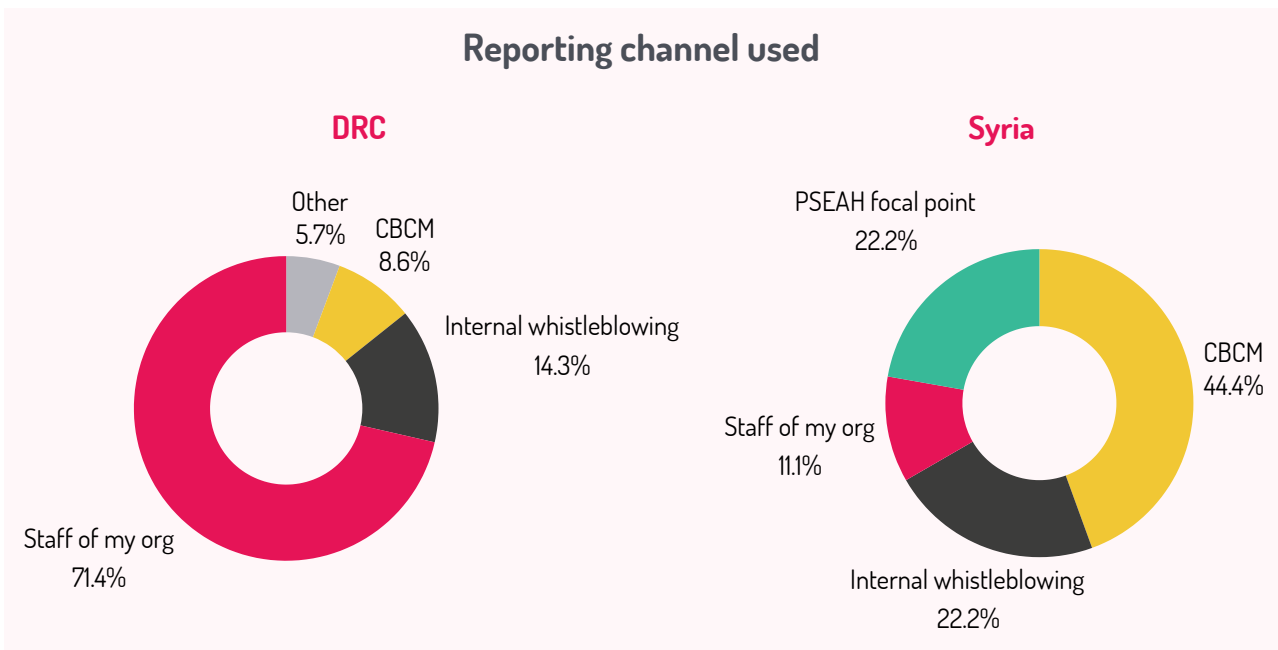
However, **when staff report an incident, they primarily report to another staff** (most likely their manager or another trusted colleague, in 40%), use internal whistleblowing mechanisms (36%), or the organisation's PSEAH focal point (14%).

The high proportion of incidents reported to another staff members could also flag a lack of knowledge of SEAH reporting processes within organisations (e.g. PSEAH focal point systems) resulting in staff members speaking to their managers or another colleagues, potentially compromising confidentiality.



If we zoom in on the two countries with the most reported incidents in the HRS - DRC and Syria- we note significant differences in reporting practices.

In the DRC, 71% of incidents were reported to organisation staff, with only 8% using CBCMs. In contrast, in Syria, CBCMs were utilised for 44% of incidents, and staff reports constituted only 11% of the total. In Syria, PSEAH focal points were also much more widely used with 22% of incidents reported to a PSEAH focal point.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Training of all staff on SEAH disclosure:

Recognising that all staff and volunteers can witness SEAH or receive a disclosure, train all staff and volunteers on how to receive these disclosures safely and respectfully, emphasising victim/survivor-centred approaches. Although most staff have access to online trainings on SEAH, their effectiveness is limited. Frequent in-person training is key to ensure in-depth understanding of SEAH and confidence in safely receiving a disclosure and effectively operationalising a victim/survivor centred approach.

2. Review the effectiveness of and improve community-based complaints mechanisms (or feedback and complaint mechanisms), in particularly in countries with low reporting:

- **Feedback:** Regularly discuss with and ask community members, including vulnerable groups, for their input on how to improve complaint systems and make them more adequate and trusted for their context and needs. As highlighted by the country-level trends, preferences can change from one context to another, and it is organisations' responsibility to understand what trusted mechanisms for victims/survivors are.
- **Visibility & accessibility:** Increase the visibility of these mechanisms through regular community engagement sessions and visible signage in local languages.
- **In-person CBCMs / PSEAH focal points:** Train community liaisons who are respected local figures to manage these mechanisms, ensuring they are perceived as both approachable and confidential.
- **Trust building:** Implement a secure feedback system to provide regular updates to complainants about their case progress, maintaining safety and confidentiality. This transparency helps build trust by showing that complaints are taken seriously and followed up.

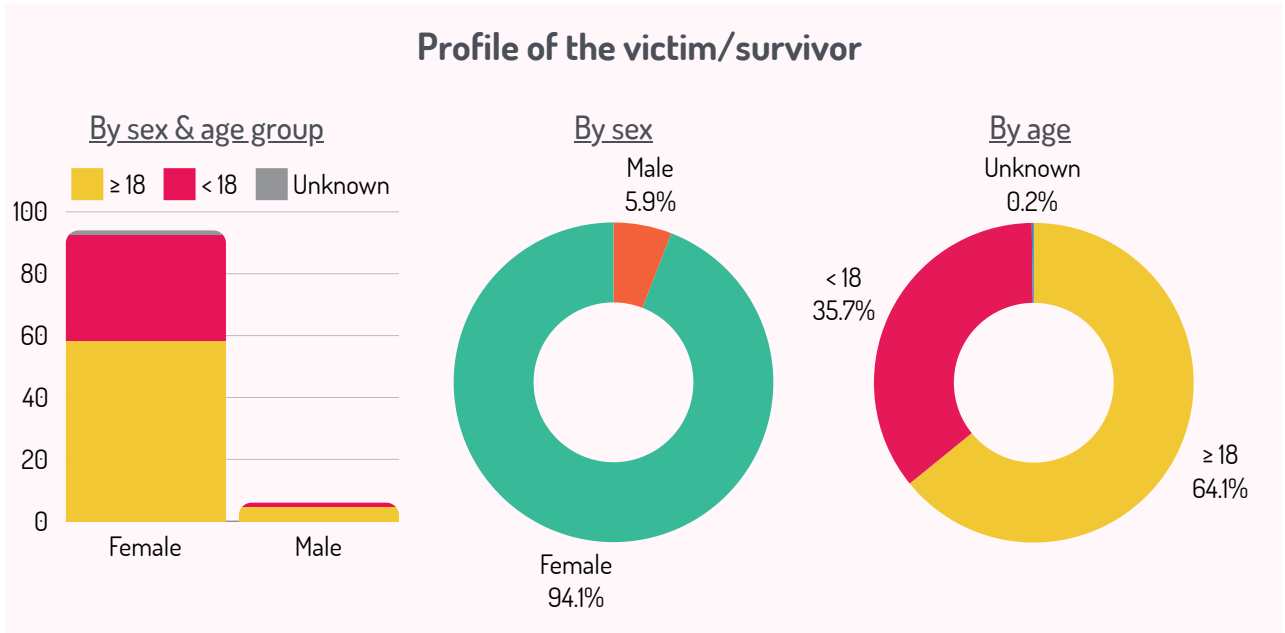
3. Increase awareness of SEAH and reporting rights:

Launch targeted awareness raising campaigns using multiple mediums to inform aid recipients about what constitutes SEAH, and their rights to report these violations and seek redress. Use relatable and local/contextualised examples or scenarios to clarify concepts and ensure understanding. Always explain that agreeing to sexual favours in exchange for aid never constitutes informed consent and is a reportable offense of sexual exploitation. Similarly, provide clear examples of what constitutes harassment and abuse (including of sexual nature), emphasising that sexual activities with minors (under 18) are strictly prohibited, regardless of the majority age in the context

VICTIMS/SURVIVORS & ALLEGED PERPETRATORS

The majority of victims/survivors in reporting incidents are female, accounting for 94%, with women over 18 being the most represented at 59%. Minors make up 35% of incidents (34% girls and 1% boys), and males only 6%. In 22%, no victim/survivor was identified

It is important to note that while most reported incidents are from women and girls, there may be significant underreporting of incidents involving men and boys.

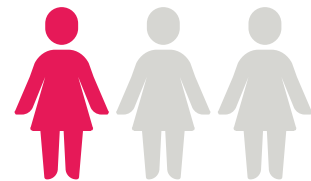


When analysing the type of incident by the sex and age group of the victim/survivor, several trends emerge:

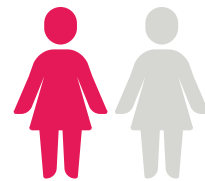
- **Women are the most frequently targeted group across all types of SEAH**, accounting for 50% of victims/survivor of sexual abuse, 57% of sexual exploitation, and representing the vast majority of victims/survivor of sexual harassment (79%).
- **Men are survivors/victims mostly in incidents of sexual abuse and exploitation** (5% of victims/survivors are men), and less in incidents of harassment (3%).
- **Victims/survivors were boys under 18 only in incidents of sexual exploitation**, accounting for 2% of incidents. There were no boys in victims/survivors of sexual abuse or harassment.
- **Girls under 18 are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse (47%) and exploitation (33%)**. They are less affected by harassment (16%).

The countries with the highest number of incidents involving minors, listed in descending order, are the DRC first, followed by Mozambique, Sudan, Malawi, Egypt, and Jordan.

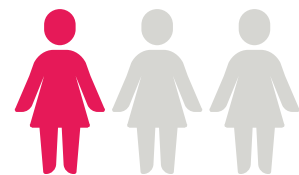
The majority of perpetrators of SEAH are males, with female perpetrators accounting for only 1% of the incidents.



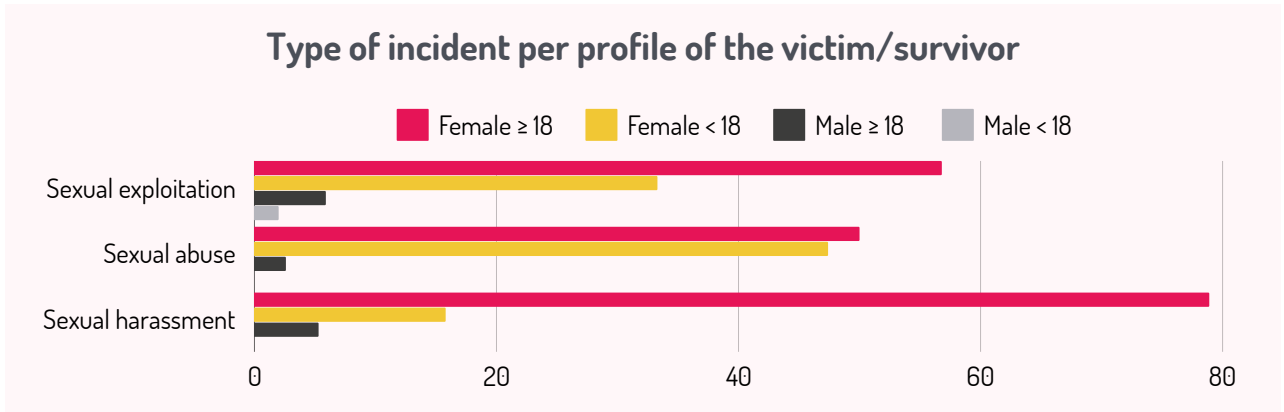
35% OF VICTIMS/ SURVIVORS ARE UNDER 18.



1 IN 2 VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE ARE GIRLS UNDER 18



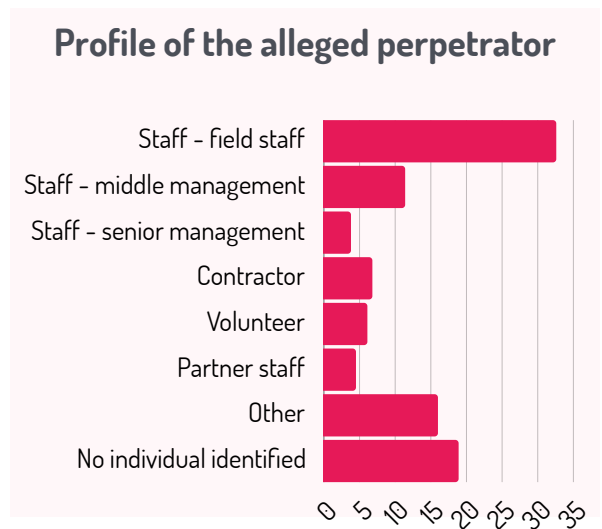
1 IN 3 VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION ARE GIRLS UNDER 18



It is important to consider that these trends may reflect not only the actual frequency of incidents but also the varying reporting dynamics within each category. For instance, the absence of boys as victims of abuse may be due to the greater difficulty in reporting such cases or inadequate reporting channels. The lack of reports involving boys and girls under 18 in harassment incidents might result from their inability to recognise or identify the behaviour as problematic.

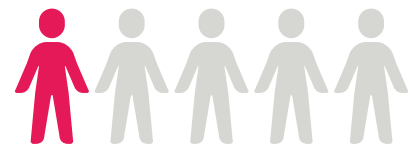
Staff working at the field level in direct contact with aid recipients make up 32% of alleged perpetrators. Middle and senior managers also account for a significant share, 11% and 4% respectively. Given the smaller number of managerial staff relative to field workers, their involvement is disproportionately high.

Contractors and volunteers are also found amongst alleged perpetrators in 7% and 6% of incidents, respectively. In 19% of incidents, no perpetrator is identified, complicating efforts to hold individuals accountable and potentially fostering a culture of impunity.

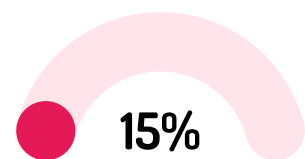


Specific patterns emerge when examining the profile of alleged perpetrators by incident type:

- Senior managers are more often implicated in cases of sexual harassment and exploitation (8% and 11%, respectively) than in sexual abuse (5%).
- Middle managers show similar trends, involved in 13% of harassment and 11% of exploitation cases, compared to 5% in abuse cases.
- Field staff are more frequently identified in harassment and exploitation incidents (30% and 36%, respectively) but less so in abuse cases (22%).
- A significant number of sexual abuse cases (24%) have no identified perpetrator, compared to 8% in sexual harassment and 17% in exploitation.
- Volunteers are highly represented in incidents of sexual abuse, accounting for 12% of perpetrators. Contractors account for 7%.

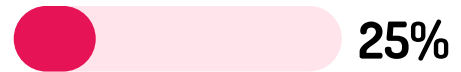


IN 1 IN 5 INCIDENTS, NO ALLEGED PERPETRATOR WAS IDENTIFIED



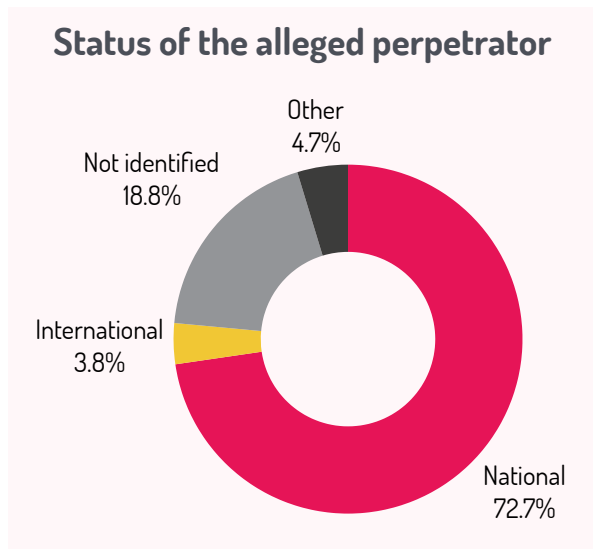
15% OF ALLEGED PERPETRATORS OF SEAH ARE MANAGERS

The high percentage of sexual abuse incidents with unidentified perpetrators likely reflects a heightened fear among victims/survivors about disclosing the identity of their abusers, possibly due to concerns about retaliation, stigma, or the personal and emotional difficulty of the disclosure process, the low availability of trained staff to receive these disclosures, and the lack of trust in the safety and security of reporting mechanisms.



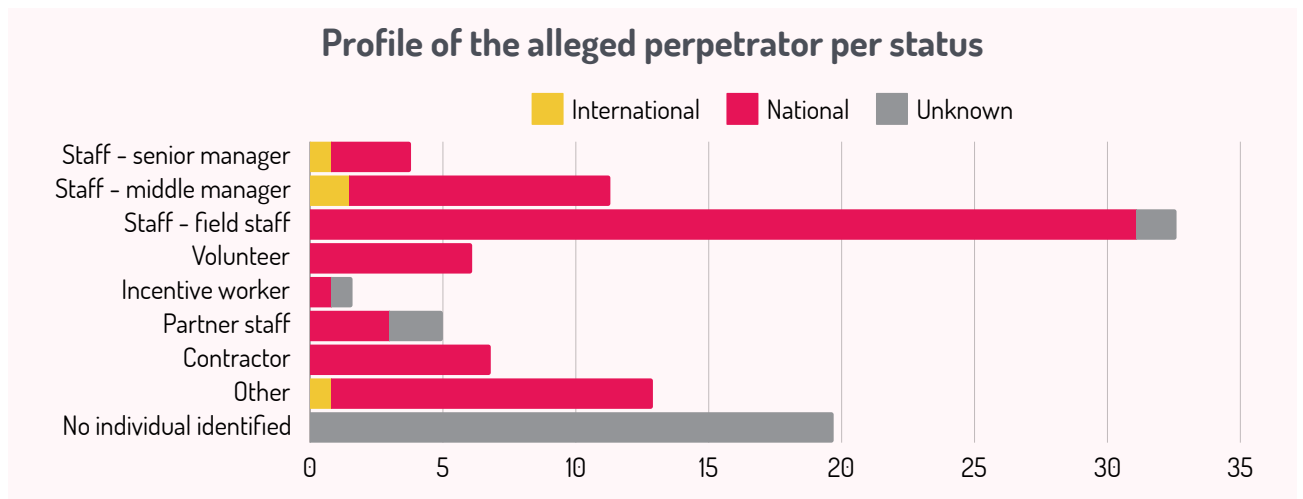
25% of sexual abuse incidents have no identified alleged perpetrator

This pattern might also suggest issues with trust or effectiveness in the reporting mechanisms available to victims/survivors, hindering their willingness or ability to name the perpetrator.



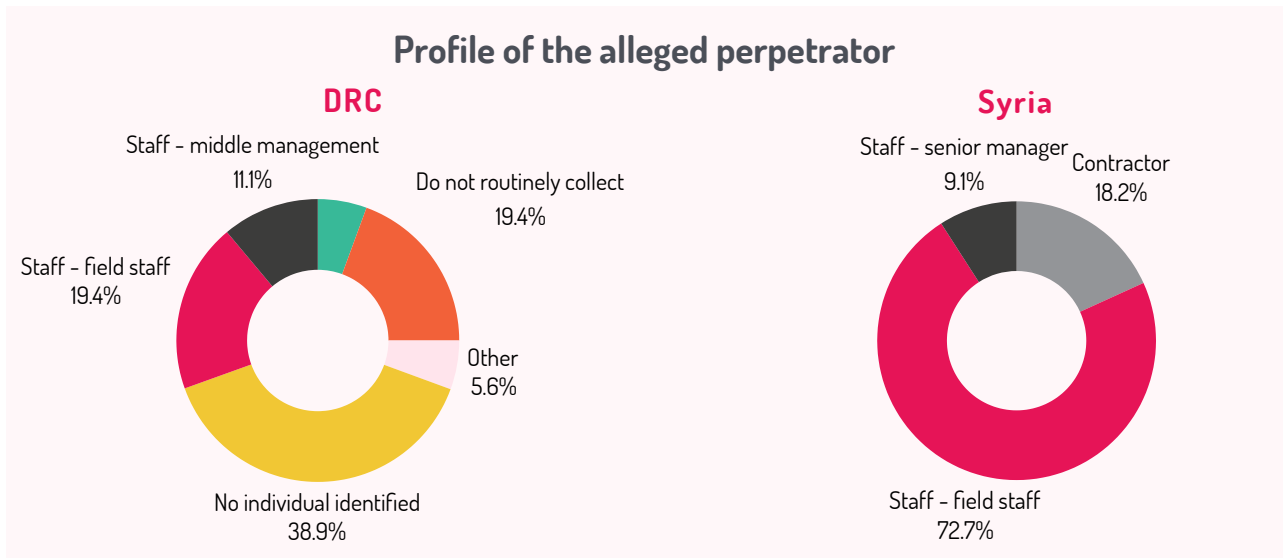
Most alleged perpetrators are national staff (73%), with international staff making up 4%. This latter percentage is notably high considering the smaller number of international staff typically involved in aid operations. International staff have specifically been identified as perpetrators in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, accounting for 8% and 5% of such allegations respectively.

Perpetrators who are international staff are also predominantly found in managerial positions (middle and senior managers) and as consultants. The profile of the alleged perpetrator per status is summarised in the graph below.



When analysing the profile of the alleged perpetrator in countries with the highest number of reported incidents, two notable trends emerge:

- In the DRC, a significant 39% of alleged perpetrators remain unidentified, suggesting challenges in the reporting and/or investigation processes, possibly due to fear among victims/survivors, as well as issues with reporting mechanisms or insufficient training for staff receiving complaints.
- In Syria, contractors form a substantial portion of alleged perpetrators, accounting for 18%. This trend indicates a potential oversight in the vetting and monitoring processes for contractors, underscoring the need for stricter control measures and ethical training.



When looking specifically at the status and profile of alleged perpetrator per type of victim/survivor (sex & age), we can note that **international staff and senior managers have only committed sexual offenses against adult females**, keeping in mind that offenses against men and boys often go unreported.

One incident in three against an adult male was committed by a middle manager, whereas the rest were committed equally by volunteers, incentive workers, and partner staff. For females under 18, when the individual was identified, the most represented profile were contractors (16%).

**CONTRACTORS
WERE THE MOST
COMMON ALLEGED
PERPETRATORS IN
INCIDENTS
AGAINST GIRLS
UNDER 18**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen child safeguarding policies and prevention activities:

Revise child safeguarding policies to include mandatory training for all staff and volunteers and establish clear guidelines to ensure safe reporting pathways for children. Coordinate with child protection actors to ensure assistance is available for child victims/survivors.

2. Implement performance evaluations with SEAH criteria:

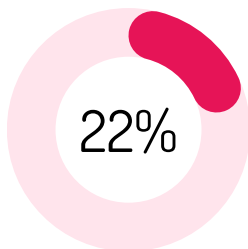
- Revise performance evaluation templates to include specific criteria assessing compliance with SEAH policies.
- Include questions or metrics related to managers' understanding and enforcement of SEAH policies.
- Ensure managers are aware that their adherence to SEAH policies will directly impact their performance reviews.
- Require all managers to complete annual SEAH training using real-world scenarios and conduct performance reviews that specifically evaluate their adherence to SEAH policies to ensure ethical standards are upheld (e.g. understanding of the code of conduct, behaviours to promote safeguarding or a safer organisational culture, specific actions taken to promote safeguarding during the period, etc).
- Set clear consequences for non-compliance with SEAH policies.
- Communicate these consequences during training sessions and ensure they are understood by all managers.

- Enforce these measures consistently to reinforce the importance of ethical standards
- 3. Make leaders accountable for PSEAH:**
- Ensure top leadership publicly supports the SEAH training and compliance initiatives.
 - Highlight the importance of ethical behavior and accountability in internal communications.
 - Provide resources and support to leaders and managers to help them comply with SEAH policies.
- 4. Improve vetting and training for volunteers and contractors:**
- Implement a mandatory vetting process for all contractors and provide a SEAH scenario training specially designed for contractors and volunteers. Establish continuous monitoring to ensure adherence to ethical standards.

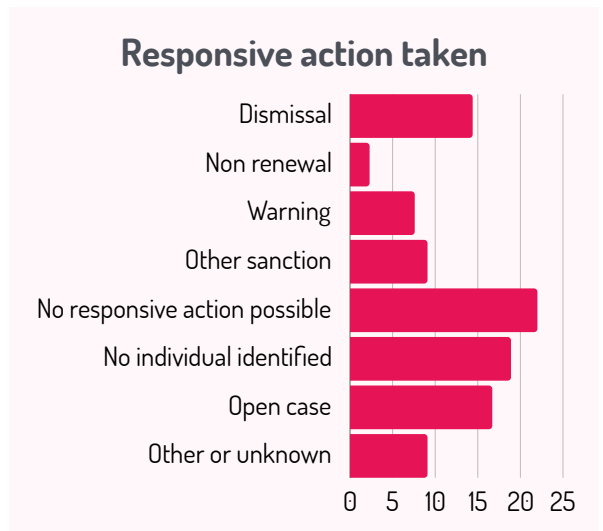
ACTIONS TAKEN: RESPONSIVE

In one incident in five, no responsive action was possible (22%). In a third of cases (33%), disciplinary actions were taken: 15% resulted in dismissals, 9% other sanctions, 7% warnings, and 2% non-renewal of contracts.

In 19% of cases, no perpetrator was identified.



**IN 1 IN 5 INCIDENTS,
NO RESPONSIVE
ACTION WAS
POSSIBLE**



Disciplinary trends vary by incident type:

- **Sexual harassment often leads to dismissal (30%), while sexual abuse (15%) and exploitation (10%) see fewer dismissals.**
- The likelihood of taking no action does not vary significantly by type of incident.
- Warnings or sanctions are more common in sexual exploitation cases (22%) than in sexual abuse (14%) or harassment (11%).

These findings are concerning, especially since sexual abuse and exploitation, which are severe forms of SEAH, would typically warrant more decisive actions like dismissal.

THE ALLEGED PERPETRATOR WAS DISMISSED IN ONLY 15% OF SEXUAL ABUSE INCIDENTS AND 10% OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION INCIDENTS.

The fact that a light sanction is applied in 22% of sexual exploitation cases, compared to dismissal occurring only in 10% of incidents, highlights a significant gap in addressing these serious offenses, which should more systematically lead to heavier sanctions, such as dismissal. This can also indicate that communities may not be empowered enough to claim their rights and for justice to be served when those have been violated.

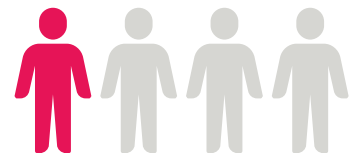
The outcomes of incidents based on the perpetrator's role within the organisation also vary:

- **Senior managers often face decisive actions;** 40% are dismissed and another 40% are under investigation. Yet, no action was taken in 20% of these cases, highlighting possible challenges in managing misconduct at higher organisational levels.
- **Middle managers often evade serious consequences,** with no action taken in 60% of incidents. In the remaining cases, about 17% resulted in either a warning or dismissal, showing a potential reluctance to impose harsher penalties on mid-level positions.
- **Responses to incidents involving field staff show a mix of consequences.** No action was taken in 32% of incidents, whereas warnings or other sanctions were issued in 23%. Dismissals were enforced in 16% of incidents, and contracts were not renewed in 5%.
- **Contractors faced strict repercussions in nearly half the cases,** with 45% receiving a sanction or being dismissed. However, 44% of these cases are still pending resolution, indicating ongoing deliberations or complexities in handling contractor-related incidents.

IN 60% OF INCIDENTS WHERE THE ALLEGED PERPETRATOR WAS A MIDDLE-MANAGER, NO ACTION WAS TAKEN.

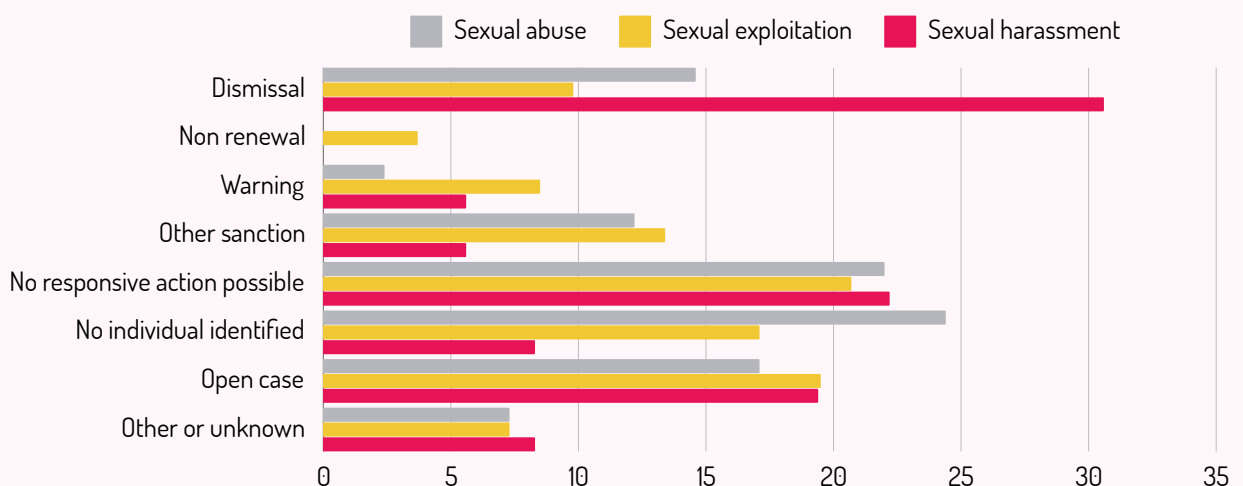
When examining the responses to incidents involving minors, several patterns emerge that point to both the challenges and actions taken within the system:

- **In 25% of these cases, no individual was identified as the perpetrator,** which raises concerns about the effectiveness of the reporting and investigative processes in situations involving vulnerable groups.
- Currently, 22% of these cases remain open, indicating ongoing investigations or perhaps complexities inherent in cases involving minors.
- **Decisive action was taken against the identified perpetrators in 35% of the incidents,** with:
 - 19% resulting in dismissal,
 - 13% leading to sanctions other than dismissal,
 - 3% receiving a formal warning.



IN 1 IN 4 INCIDENTS INVOLVING MINORS, NO ALLEGED PERPETRATOR WAS IDENTIFIED

Responsive action taken per type of incident



When no action was taken following an incident, the reasons provided by reporting organisations included:

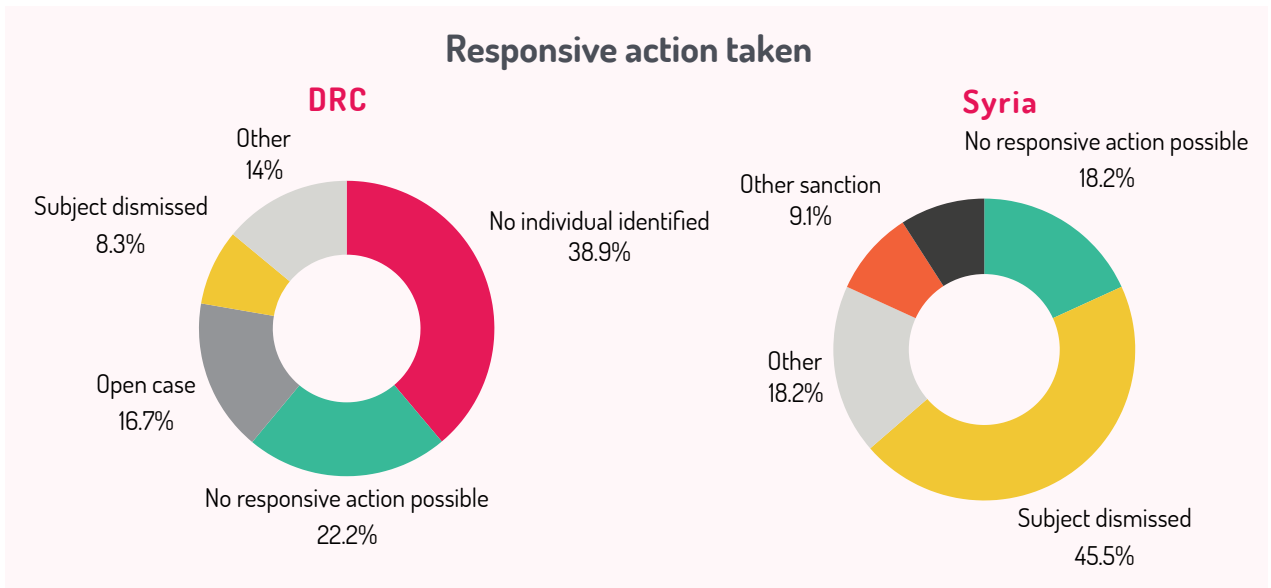
- **Lack of jurisdiction or decisional-power over the allegation** (44%).
- The incident was determined not to be SEAH (25%) following an investigation (unsubstantiated or mistakenly reported as SEAH).
- A range of factors such as non-cooperation from the complainant, insufficient information to assess the allegation, high risk to the victim/survivor, or lack of consent from the victim/survivor (6%)



Many incidents where the organisation lacked jurisdiction over the allegation involved partner staff, emphasising the need for thorough vetting and due diligence processes before starting partnerships.

When looking at the responsive actions taken in the countries where most incidents were reported, we can identify the following trends:

- **In the DRC**, the proportion of incidents where no perpetrator was identified is significantly high, with almost 2 incidents in 5 with no identified alleged perpetrator. In 1 incident in 5, no responsible action was possible. The alleged perpetrator was separated in only 8% of incidents.
- **In Syria**, organisations resorted to dismissals in almost half of the incidents (45%), non-renewal and other sanctions in 9% of incidents respectively. In only 18% of incidents no responsive action was possible.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen vetting process for staff, contractors and partners:

- Enhance the vetting process for all staff, contractors and partners by conducting thorough recruitment processes and due diligence to verify adherence to SEAH policies before engagement.
- Join the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme to prevent the impunity associated with mobility and extend MDS checks to contractors. Ensure that past SEAH incident checks are part of the vetting process for hiring staff or volunteers and choosing contractors, and that reference checks are always conducted.
- Set clear SEAH expectations at the beginning of the contract and provide necessary induction, continuous training and technical support to ensure ongoing compliance throughout the partnership.

2. Accountability for middle managers:

Incorporate SEAH policy adherence into the performance evaluation of middle managers. Provide training on SEAH and on leadership responsibilities regarding SEAH and establish clear consequences for non-compliance to strengthen their role in fostering an organisational culture with zero tolerance for SEAH and for inaction to SEAH.

ACTIONS TAKEN: ASSISTANCE

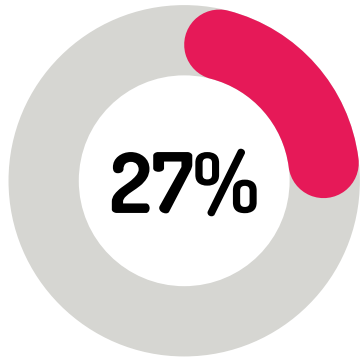
In the majority of incidents (31%), victims/survivors did not seek any assistance, potentially reflecting fears of stigma or a mistrust in the effectiveness and confidentiality of support services, which could be due to previous experiences where services failed to provide adequate help or ensure confidentiality.



1 IN 3 VICTIMS/SURVIVORS DID NOT SEEK ASSISTANCE



In environments where SEAH incidents are frequent and systematically unaddressed, a sense of resignation may discourage victims/survivors from seeking help. Additionally, victims/survivor may simply not be informed about what assistance is indeed available, preventing them from seeking it at all, reminding us of the importance of information provision.



IN 27% OF INCIDENTS, NO ASSISTANCE WAS AVAILABLE

Alarming, in over one-fifth of cases (27%), no assistance was available to begin with, highlighting a significant shortfall in support infrastructures across many settings.

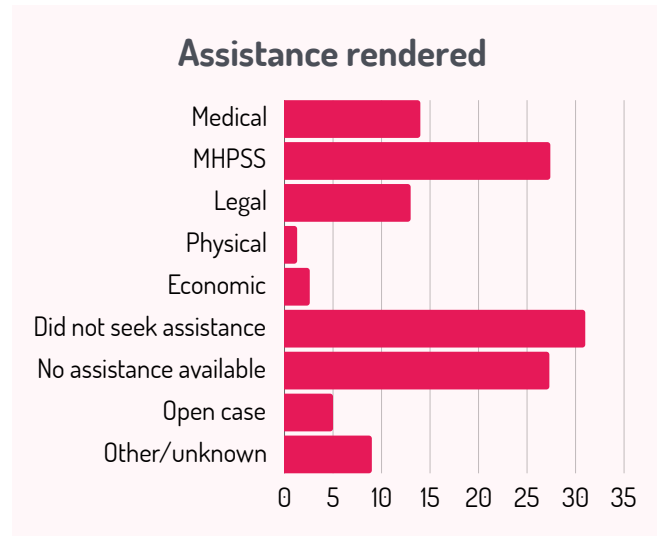
Despite the significant barriers that many face in seeking help, for those who do access assistance, the types and extent vary. Among the victims/survivors who received support, the breakdown is as follows:

- Mental health and psychosocial assistance were the most accessed, with 28% of victims/survivors receiving this type of aid.
- Medical and legal assistance each accounted for 14%
- Economic assistance was provided to 3% of the individuals
- Physical protection was the least accessed, with only 1% receiving this support.

It is encouraging to note that **among minors, the likelihood of victims/survivors not seeking assistance drops significantly, with only 13% refraining from doing so.**

However, the availability of assistance remains a critical issue, as 27% of incidents involving minors still lack support options.

Legal assistance, notably low at 17%, is particularly concerning given the criminal nature of sexual offenses against minors. Half of the victims of sexual abuse are girls, which should warrant legal action and thus legal assistance.



Predominantly, the majority of minors received mental health and psychosocial support (55%) and medical assistance (34%), highlighting these as primary areas of intervention as opposed to legal or economic assistance.

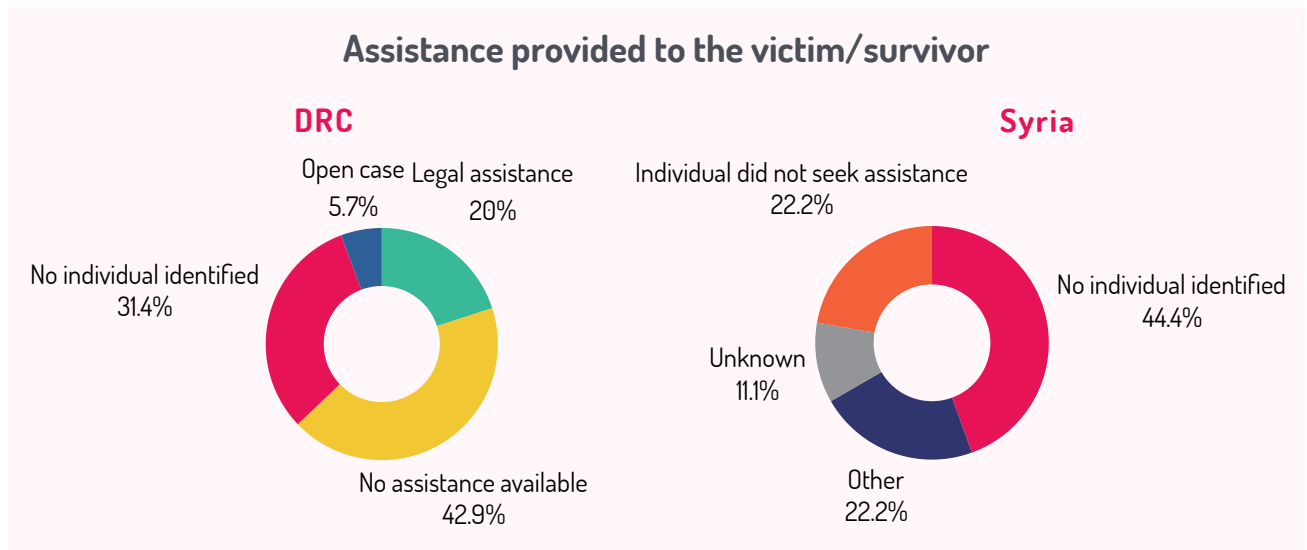


ONLY 17% OF VICTIMS/SURVIVOR UNDER 18 RECEIVED LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Analysing the assistance rendered in the countries with the highest incidences also reveals interesting patterns. In the **DRC and Syria**, a substantial number of cases involved unidentified victims/survivors, accounting for 31% and 44% respectively.

In the DRC, assistance was unavailable in 43% of incidents, although legal assistance was accessed in 20% of cases.

Conversely, in Syria, 22% of victims/survivors did not seek assistance, and another 22% received some other form of support which was unspecified.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Collaborate with gender-based violence (GBV) and Child Protection (CP) services to strengthen referral pathways and access to services:

Work closely with local GBV/CP services to ensure support for victims/survivors. Each organisation should have a service map for all their areas of operation with referral pathways for SEAH, so they can explain support options when a victim/survivor is identified. Coordinate with the PSEA/GBV/CP coordination to fill gaps in service availability when needed. In particular, ensure access to legal assistance for victims/survivor, relying on the expertise of those networks, to streamline processes for legal action, prioritising the protection and rights of victims/survivors, in particular minors. More information can be accessed in the IASC [Inter-Agency SEA Referral Procedures](#)

ACTIONS TAKEN: REMEDIAL

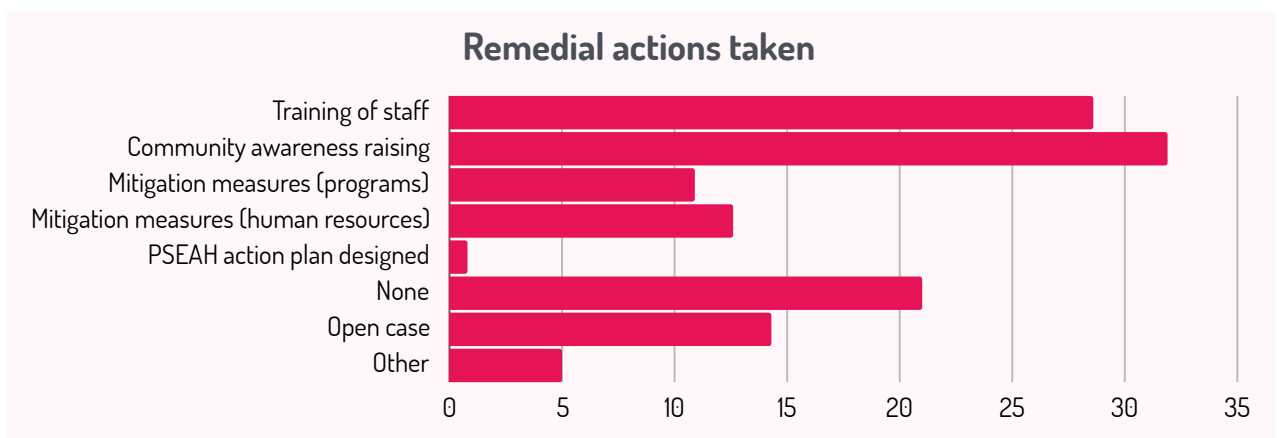
Overall, **community awareness raising (31%)** or **staff training (28%)** are the most common remedial actions, but in 22% of cases, no action is taken. Programmatic or human resource risk mitigation measures were taken in a minor number of incidents (respectively 10% and 12% of incidents), which is concerning as it shows limited learning from organisations on SEAH incidents.

An analysis of the remedial actions taken in response to different types of incidents reveals distinct trends:

- **Sexual harassment often sees the least remedial actions taken**, suggesting a gap in addressing this pervasive issue.



- **Sexual abuse prompts the most community awareness efforts**, probably reflecting an attempt to make communities aware of their rights to report such behaviours. However, it's concerning that staff training is less frequently conducted for sexual abuse cases.
- **Sexual harassment is the type of incident where human resources risk mitigation measures are more commonly implemented**, indicating a positive step towards culture change. However, with these measures only taken in 18% of cases, there remains a lot of room for improvement.
- **Sexual exploitation is the type of incident where programmatic risk mitigation measures are most frequently implemented**, marking an essential move towards safer programming. Yet, with just 16% of cases seeing such actions, a minority of organisations are undertaking this approach.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Systematically conduct a "lessons learned" review for SEAH incidents

Expand risk mitigation strategies by implementing a standard practice of conducting a "lessons learned" review at the conclusion of every SEAH incident. This should involve recognising any risk factors that led to the incident, analysing the handling of the incident, identifying any gaps in responses, and updating policies and practices accordingly (with regards to programming and human resources).

II. SEAH TRENDS AGAINST STAFF MEMBERS

TYOLOGY OF INCIDENTS

Most SEAH incidents involving staff members are sexual harassment, accounting for 87% of all incidents. The victims are predominantly female (96%), and the perpetrators are overwhelmingly male (98%).

It is important to note, however, that the definitions of harassment fluctuate from one organisation to another, which could cause issues with interpretation and reporting consistency.

For instance, all incidents against staff are classified as harassment, meaning that the rape of a staff member by another staff member would be classified under sexual harassment, and not sexual abuse.

These incidents are mainly reported through internal whistleblowing channels or directly to other staff members, each method used in 38% of cases. Another 19% are reported to a PSEAH focal point within the organisation.

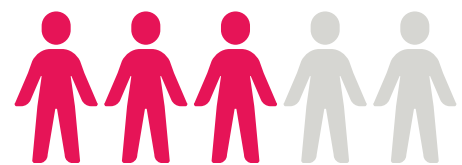
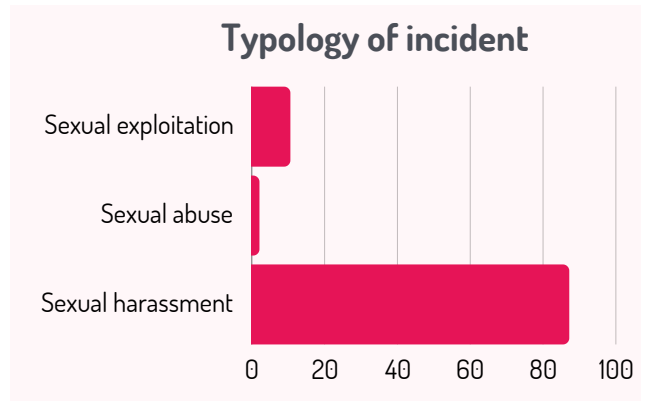
The profile of alleged perpetrators shows that:

- **Middle managers are involved in 53% of incidents**, highlighting risks associated with their authority and control over other staff.
- Senior management, though making up a smaller part of the workforce, still account for 6% of cases.
- Field staff are implicated in 25% of incidents, showing that SEAH risks are present at various levels of the workforce.

Additionally, international staff make up 15% of alleged perpetrators, a significant figure given their smaller number in the workforce.

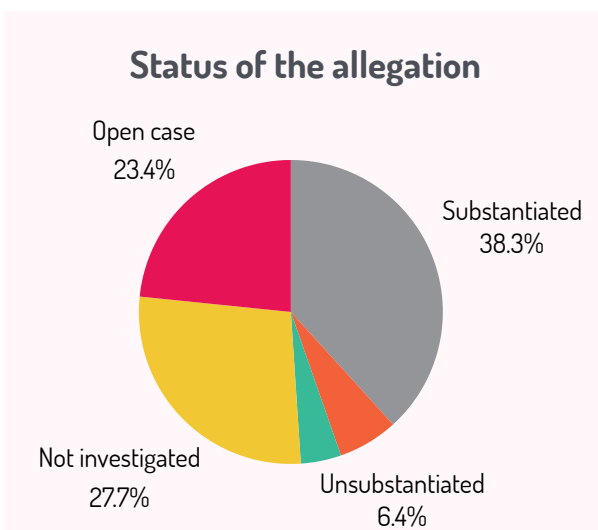
This figure is also higher than in incidents against aid recipients (where they account for 4% of perpetrators), highlighting the poor example they are setting for the staff and the negative repercussions this can have on their behaviour internally and externally.

Additionally, this suggests international staff might feel they can act with impunity, moving between organisations or regions without consequence. In contrast, national staff are implicated in 81% of incidents, pointing to broader systemic issues.



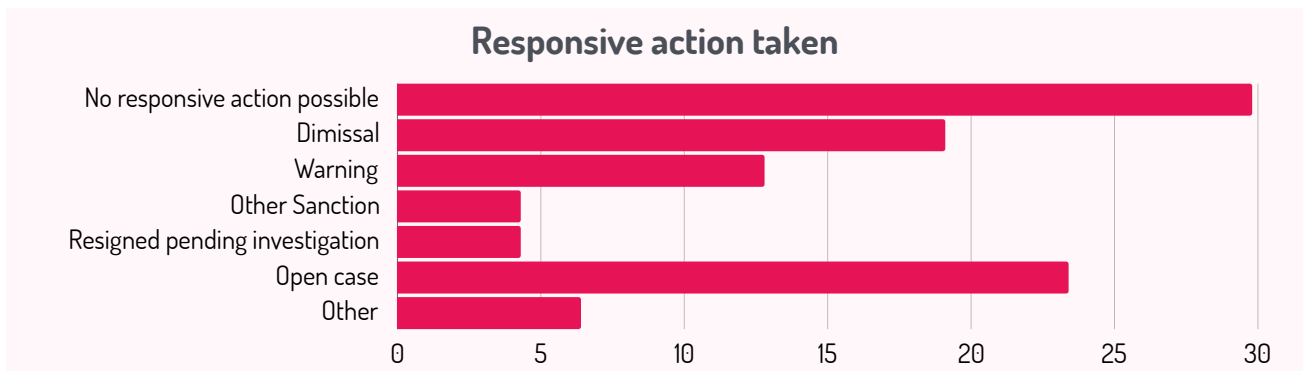
IN 59% OF INCIDENTS, ALLEGED PERPETRATORS OF SEAH INCIDENTS ON THE WORKPLACE ARE MANAGERS.

ACTIONS TAKEN



While 38% of incidents were substantiated, a significant 28% were not investigated at all. Additionally, 23% of cases remain open, pointing to the often complex and lengthy HR processes involved in resolving these incidents.

Disciplinary action was possible in 36% of incidents, but no action was taken in 30% of cases. When an action was taken by the organisation, it included dismissal in 19% of cases, a warning in 13%, and other sanctions in 4%. In some instances (4%), alleged perpetrators resigned before investigations could begin.

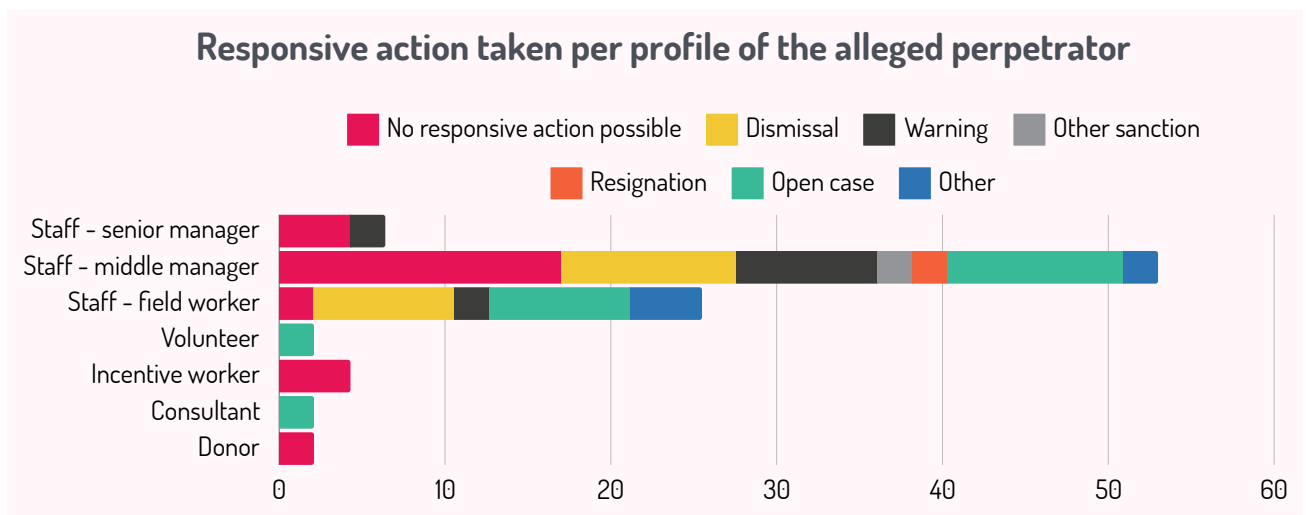


The main reasons for not taking action included:

- 45% of incidents were determined not to be SEAH.
- In 27% of cases, the victim/survivor did not give consent to proceed.
- 18% lacked sufficient information to assess the allegations.
- 9% were outside the organisation’s jurisdiction.

Senior managers were never dismissed. No responsive action was taken in two-thirds of their cases, while one-third resulted in a warning.

In contrast, middle managers and field staff faced more severe consequences, with dismissals or other sanctions occurring in 40% of incidents for middle managers and 41% for field staff. Notably, no action was taken in only 8.2% of cases involving field staff, compared to 66% for senior managers and 32% for middle managers. This discrepancy highlights a possible hesitancy or difficulty in taking action against those in higher power positions within organisations.



Nearly half of the victims/survivors (49%) did not seek assistance, likely due to fear of stigma or distrust in available support services. However, a significant portion (45%) did access mental health and psychosocial assistance. Only a small minority received legal assistance (2.1%), highlighting a gap in organisational support that often provides basic psychosocial care but lacks in offering comprehensive reparative measures.

Organisations often responded to incidents by providing staff training, with 34% of cases involving such measures. Additionally, 28% of incidents saw the implementation of human resources risk mitigation strategies, which is encouraging. It's also notable that remedial actions are more consistently applied in cases involving staff members compared to those against community members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Invest in improving your organisational culture:

- Promote a culture of respect and zero tolerance for SEAH by ensuring leadership consistently models and sets expectations of good behaviour and prioritizes PSEAH in all organisational activities.
- Conduct mandatory, regular training sessions for all staff levels, particularly targeting middle and senior managers.
- Implement a transparent sanction system that holds all staff accountable, regardless of their position, and regularly assess the organisation's cultural climate through open forums and anonymous surveys to address issues promptly.

2. Disciplinary actions across all levels:

- Ensure that disciplinary actions are applied uniformly across all levels, including senior management or international staff.
- Publicise anonymised case outcomes internally to demonstrate that actions are taken seriously and equitably.

3. Strengthen whistleblowing mechanisms:

- Create internal safe and confidential reporting systems that ensure victims/survivors can report incidents securely, even if the perpetrator is their manager, close collaborator, or someone in a position of power within the organisation.
- Enforce a zero-tolerance policy for reprisals, protecting anyone who reports SEAH from retaliation.
- Publicise and regularly train staff on these internal reporting mechanisms to reinforce their importance and ensure understanding across the organisation.
- Regularly check-in with staff to gauge whether they feel safe in using the whistleblowing mechanisms, and seek feedback on how to improve it and make it more trustworthy/safe.

4. Expand support systems for victims/survivors:

Strengthen support mechanisms for those who report SEAH in the workplace. This could include access to counselling services, access to legal support, a reassurance of their safety in the workplace, and regular follow-ups to ensure their continued well-being.

5. Invest in bystander training:

Empower employees through bystander intervention training to recognise and safely address inappropriate behaviour before it escalates, to help create a community of accountability.

III. CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED BY HRS PARTICIPANTS

Participants of the HRS have identified key challenges and lessons learned in managing SEAH incidents; the following list summarises these recurrent issues and outlines effective strategies.

CHALLENGES

- **Security and access limitations:** Investigations often face security risks that prevent direct access to victims/survivors or areas of interest, such as in volatile regions or due to geopolitical constraints. This leads to cases being delayed or closed without proper investigation.
- **Reluctance to share information:** There is frequently reluctance to participate in investigations from victims/survivors, witnesses, and reporters who are often hesitant in sharing detailed information due to fear or mistrust, complicating the substantiation of allegations.
- **Challenges with third-party partners or contractors:** Incidents involving employees of partner organisations or third-party contractors often lead to complications, lack of capacity in SEAH investigations and failure to adopt victim/survivor-centred approaches. This sometimes results in terminated partnerships and additional operational challenges. This could lead to further under reporting as partners may fear to report if partnership and therefore assistance is terminated, warranting the importance.
- **Impact on parties involved in an incident:** Even when allegations are unsubstantiated, alleged perpetrators or victims/survivors may face stigma and damage to their trust within their community and workplace.
- **Weak evidence and vague reporting:** Vague or anonymous reporting, which typically lacks specific details such as dates or locations or information on the alleged perpetrator, further hinders the progression of investigations.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Enhanced training and supervision:** It is crucial to provide thorough training for all staff and to supervise interactions between staff and program participants to mitigate risks of SEAH.
- **Improved preparation for third-party contractors:** It is important to set clear expectations on safeguarding and training for third-party contractors to prevent SEAH.
- **Structured partnership agreements:** Vetting partners thoroughly and ensuring constant monitoring is critical for maintaining standards in handling safeguarding incidents. It is also essential to have clear expectations outlined in partnership agreements, specifying roles, responsibilities, and standards to follow when incidents occur. Additionally, training partners on safeguarding is crucial, particularly when they may lack immediate capacity. Support during investigations is also necessary to ensure comprehensive and effective handling of cases. If partnerships need to be terminated due to safeguarding concerns, it is important to be transparent with the community, to ensure that we don't emphasize the perception that reporting is what cause the cut in the service, which would lead to new barriers to reporting.