
DRIVING A VICTIM/SURVIVOR-CENTRED APPROACH TO PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, ABUSE AND HARASSMENT IN THE AID SECTOR

KEY MESSAGES

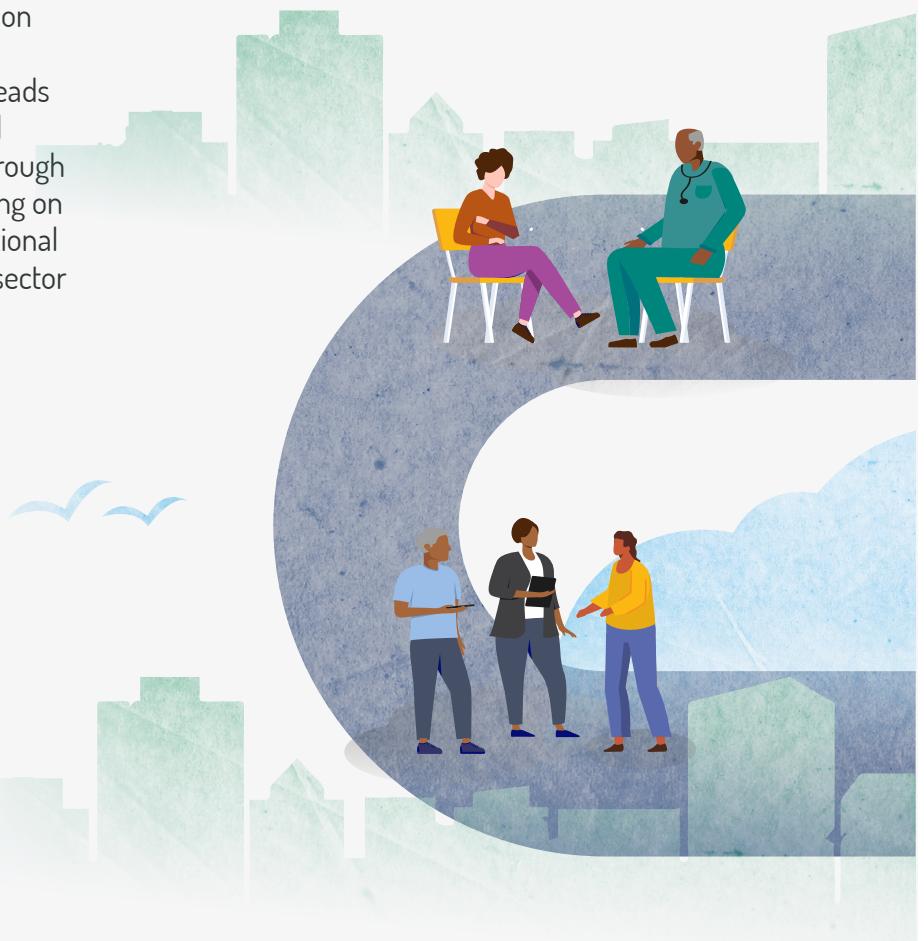
For too long, the aid sector has prioritised institutional compliance over the rights, needs, and dignity of those who have experienced sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment. Traditional approaches have created barriers instead of pathways to justice, leaving survivors silent and unsupported. However, recent years have marked a crucial turning point – as victim/survivor voices have risen through media attention and advocacy, they have achieved more meaningful change than decades of policy-driven approaches.

The evidence is clear and compelling: when we centre victim/survivor voices and experiences, we see tangible improvements in protection outcomes. Time and again, evidence has demonstrated that prioritising survivors leads to increased reporting, restored trust, and more effective prevention. By working through trusted community structures and focusing on victim/survivor needs rather than institutional convenience, we can transform how the sector responds to SEAH.

This transformation requires collective commitment from all stakeholders – governments, international organisations, local NGOs, communities, and the media. **The following messages outline how we can move from policy to practice in implementing a victim/survivor-centered approach.** We must ensure that every action and decision prioritises those who matter most: the victims/survivors themselves. By embracing this approach, we can create real change for survivors, meet our international protection commitments, and strengthen accountability across the aid sector.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands



MESSAGES FOR HUMANITARIAN POLICYMAKERS:

1 Compliance-based protection has failed: Victims/survivors report that institutional policies protect organisations, not people.

Action needed: Implement a victim/survivor-centered approach in your organisation as this reverses the emphasis on compliance and puts victims'/survivors' needs first. Please consult the Implementation Companion on how to deliver a victim/survivor centred approach in your organisation.

2 Low reporting of instances of SEAH: When victims/survivors lead, reporting increases, and trust rebuilds. Evidence from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Palestine shows that centring victim/survivor voices improves PSEAH outcomes.

Action needed: Implement step 1 and 2 of the VCA.

3 Complex reporting systems silence victims/survivors: By simplifying processes and working through trusted community channels, we can break down barriers to disclosure and support.

Action needed: Implement step 2 of the VCA.

4 Justice doesn't end at case closure: Accountability requires comprehensive redress, including compensation and long-term support for victims/survivors.

Action needed: Implement step 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the VCA.

5 Prevention requires proactive engagement: Understanding how and where SEAH happens allows us to identify risks before they become incidents.

Action needed: Implement step 0 and 1 of the VCA.

6 Organisational convenience can no longer trump victim/survivor needs: Every policy decision must prioritise victim/survivor well-being over institutional interests.

Action needed: Implement step 6 of the VCA.

MESSAGES FOR AID WORKERS:

1 You are often the first point of contact for victims/survivors: Your response can either empower or silence them – ensure you're trained in trauma-informed approaches and know your local referral options.

Action needed: Implement step 2 and 4 of the VCA.

2 Trust community knowledge: Local leaders and structures guide effective solutions for preventing and responding to SEAH.

Action needed: Facilitate the work of trusted intermediaries at each step of the VCA.

3 Victims/survivors need options, not mandates: Your role is to provide clear information about available support and respect their choices about how to proceed.

Action needed: Respect the voice and choice of the victim/survivor at every stage. Victims/survivors who cannot speak also have a voice.

4 Documentation matters, but victim/survivor privacy matters more: Always prioritise confidentiality and informed consent over organisational reporting requirements.

Action needed: This applies to all steps of the VCA.

5 Support victims/survivors at their pace: Some may need immediate assistance, others may take time to decide their next steps – both are valid choices.

Action needed: Facilitate the work of trusted intermediaries as they can assist in this.

6 Every case is unique: While protocols are important, flexibility in supporting each victim's/survivor's individual needs and wishes is essential.

Action needed: this applies to step 2 through to step 7 of the VCA.

TO FIND OUT MORE SCAN THE QR CODES

IMPLEMENTATION
COMPANION



PUTTING
SURVIVORS FIRST:
A PATHWAY
TO ACTION

