



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

Harmonised Reporting Scheme (HRS) on SEAH
April 2024 - September 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, as highlighted by [recent reports](#) of Sudanese women and girls fleeing conflict being sexually exploited by humanitarian works and local security forces. Such violations undermine the integrity and effectiveness of humanitarian and development efforts. To reduce risks, prevent incidents, and respond effectively, the sector must leverage data-driven insights to identify vulnerabilities and address root causes decisively.

In response, the SEAH Harmonised Reporting Scheme (HRS) was developed in 2021 as a unified framework for collecting and reporting anonymous comparable data on SEAH incidents. This system enables comprehensive analysis of trends and patterns, expanding our understanding of SEAH and supporting prioritising corrective actions. Since its scale-up in September 2023, HRS participation has more than doubled, with 74 organisations now contributing, highlighting the scheme's growing importance and sector-wide relevance.

This report covers 178 SEAH incidents reported through the HRS between April 1 and September 30, 2024, including cases with unknown dates reported during this timeframe.

The report is divided into two sections:

1. The first section addresses sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment against aid recipients and their communities (representing 63% of incidents)
2. The second section focuses on incidents of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment within the workplace affecting staff (representing 37% of incidents).

LIMITATIONS

Under-reporting remains a significant challenge across the sector, and HRS members currently represent only a fraction of aid organisations. As a result, this report does not capture sector-wide SEAH trends or provide a comprehensive account of SEAH incidence and prevalence. While the insights highlight critical issues for targeted interventions, a more nuanced understanding of trends, fluctuations, and patterns will require broader participation.

Fluctuations in the data should be interpreted with caution, as they may result from changes in the number of organisations participating in the HRS between reporting periods rather than reflecting genuine shifts in practice. For example, variations in the use of community-based complaint mechanisms (CBCMs) could indicate that newly joined organisations rely more on CBCMs rather than signalling an improvement across the sector.

However, some consistent findings across reports, such as the recurring statistic that one in three victims/survivors are children, provide reliable insights. These constants offer meaningful trends, whereas isolated variations should be cautiously considered in context, particularly when analysing at a regional or country level. This approach helps avoid over-interpretation and ensures data is used responsibly.

As HRS membership grows and a stable critical mass of organisations consistently contributes data—particularly at the country level—the analysis will become increasingly representative. This will enhance the ability to contextualise fluctuations, identify improvements and emerging risks, and strengthen targeted prevention and response efforts.

REFERENCE

To reference this report, please use the following citation:

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If quoting specific sections, please ensure accurate attribution and include the page number where relevant. For further inquiries, please contact seah.hrs@chsalliance.org.

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I. SEAH TRENDS AGAINST AID RECIPIENTS

WHERE WERE INCIDENTS REPORTED FROM?

During this reporting period, SEAH incidents were reported across 30 countries, highlighting the current reporting mechanisms' reach and limitations.

- Africa accounted for 62% of incidents, with **Central Africa** alone contributing 38%, consistent with previous trends.
- **Southern Asia** followed with 14% of reports.
- **South America** (4%), **Eastern Europe** (0%), **the Caribbean** (0%), & **Western Africa** (7%) reported persistently low levels, despite significant humanitarian operations.

This uneven reporting landscape raises critical questions about the factors that encourage or inhibit SEAH disclosures in different operational contexts.

At the country level, the highest numbers of reported incidents were in:

- **Democratic Republic of the Congo** (DRC): 33%, consistent with previous trends.
- **Bangladesh**: 10%
- **Central African Republic** (CAR): 5%
- **Nigeria**: 5%

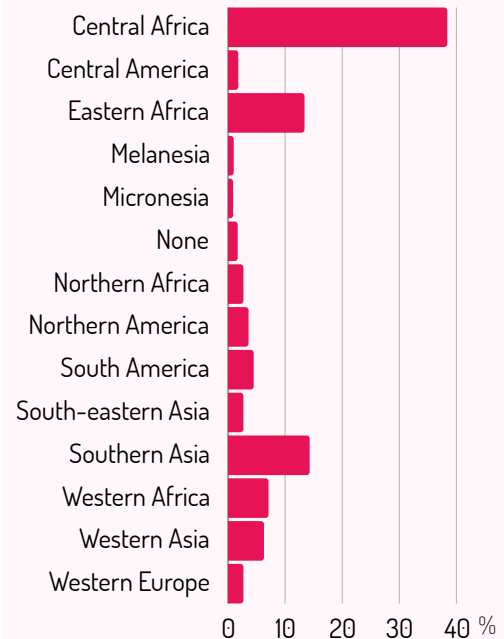
Due to the vast geographical range of incidents, all other countries represented less than 5% of total reported incidents.

An examination of the number of SEAH incidents relative to the operational presence of HRS participants in the 15 highest-risk countries, as ranked by the [IASC SEA Risk Overview](#) (SEA RO), reveals several notable trends:

Countries like **DRC**, **Bangladesh**, and **Nigeria** have **higher percentages of reported SEAH incidents in the HRS**, which could be attributed to multiple interrelated factors.

- **High SEAH risk and effective reporting mechanisms:** in regions with significant SEAH risk, organisations are likely to invest in robust reporting systems.
- **Established humanitarian presence:** A long-standing humanitarian presence helps build trust within communities, fostering incident reporting through established relationships.
- **Community awareness and knowledge:** Regular SEAH information sessions and accessible reporting and support systems empower communities to report. Additionally, widespread knowledge of SEAH incidents often acts as a catalyst for increased reporting.

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 indicating that these are the countries where the most SEAH incidents occur. The absence of reported incidents from a particular country in this report does not imply a lower occurrence of SEAH in that region, and a high number of reports does not necessarily indicate a higher prevalence of SEAH.

Despite significant HRS presence, countries such as **Yemen, Afghanistan, Sudan, Haiti, Mali, and Chad report NO SEAH incidents**. Countries like **Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan exhibit low reporting percentages** (3.6%, 1%, and 2%, respectively) despite having multiple HRS organisations operating within their borders. This absence of reporting certainly doesn't indicate an absence of incidents, as was recently highlighted by reports in Chad, and can be attributed to several critical barriers to reporting:

- **Access and trust barriers:** Poor access and security constraints often prevent aid actors from directly engaging with communities. They must rely on intermediaries to deliver aid, increasing SEAH risks and often leaving communities unaware of reporting mechanisms or sceptical of their effectiveness.
- **Fear of retaliation/loss of assistance:** Victims/survivors often fear retaliation from perpetrators, including death, or losing access to aid, highlighting critical protection gaps that silence victims and hinder reporting.
- **Cultural stigma and social norms:** Fear of shame, retaliation, exclusion, or even threats to personal safety (death) discourages individuals from reporting. In regions where gender inequality is pervasive, and SEAH issues are taboo, victims/survivors may remain silent rather than risk social repercussions or jeopardise their physical safety.
- **Limited support services and weak accountability:** A lack of trusted support services, weak accountability, lengthy investigations, limited feedback, and unsatisfactory outcomes undermine trust in organisations' ability to respond effectively, discouraging victims/survivors from reporting.

Some regions, such as **Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Western Africa**, have consistently shown low SEAH reporting rates in the HRS across all reporting periods despite a significant presence of HRS participants. This trend suggests that under-reporting extends beyond SEARO-identified high-risk countries and may reflect broader, region-specific barriers to reporting.

15 highest ranked countries - [SEA RO Ranking \(IASC\)](#)

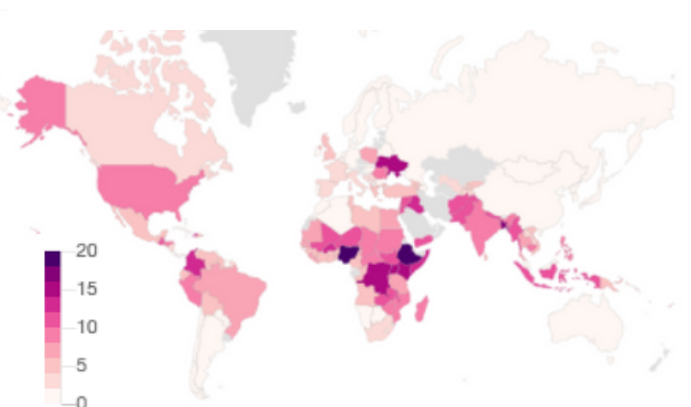
1. **Yemen** – 7.7
2. **Syria** – 7.5
3. **Somalia** – 7.5
4. **Afghanistan** – 7.4
5. **South Sudan** – 7.4
6. **Sudan** – 7.2
7. **Ethiopia** – 7.0
8. **Myanmar** – 7.0
9. **DRC** – 6.8
10. **Mali** – 6.7
11. **CAR** – 6.7
12. **Haiti** – 6.7
13. **Palestine** – 6.6
14. **Niger** – 6.2
15. **Chad** – 6.2

updated November 2024

Map of reported incidents



Map of HRS operational presence



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Conduct regular, contextual, and participatory assessments of reporting barriers:** Under the coordination of PSEA Networks, conduct participatory assessments of reporting barriers, with a particular focus on the experiences of women and girls who are at heightened risk of SEA. These assessments should identify local barriers to SEAH reporting and inform the adaptation of reporting systems to be accessible, gender- and age-sensitive, and responsive to community needs. This is especially critical in regions like Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Western Africa, where reporting rates are low despite significant humanitarian presence.
- 2. Endorsement of the HRS by PSEAH Networks:** PSEAH Networks can endorse and promote the HRS to encourage more organisations, particularly national ones, to join. Endorsement aligns reporting systems with the HRS and grants access to automated, country-specific SEAH trend data, improving data accuracy and enabling better-targeted prevention and response efforts.

WHO REPORTED INCIDENTS & HOW?

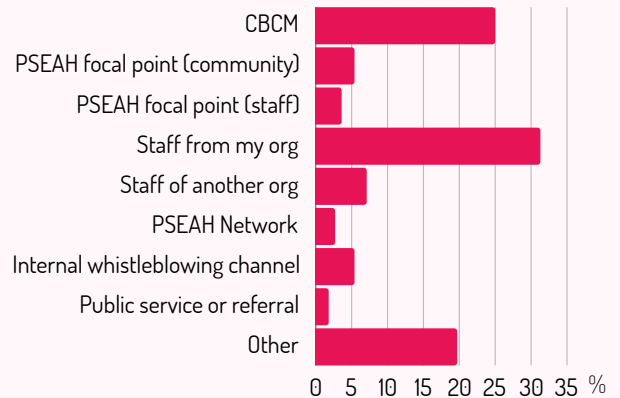
As in previous reports, almost **a third of the incidents were reported directly to staff members** of the organisation, while the proportion of **incidents reported through community-based complaints mechanisms (CBCMs) reached 25%** (compared to 11% in the last report).

When looking at the reporting channel used per type of incident, **CBCMs are used most frequently for sexual exploitation** (in 36% of reports vs 23% for sexual abuse and 18% for sexual harassment). No other important notable differences in reporting appeared per typology of the incident.

In line with the last report, most reports came from staff members, with 40% submitted by staff from the organisation involved in the incident and 10% by staff from external organisations. **Reports from victims/survivors or their communities increased to 35%**, up from 18% last semester. Of these, 6% came directly from victims/survivors, 10% from family members, and 9% from community members.

16% of organisations still do not record the source of reported incidents, highlighting a gap in data collection.

Reporting channel used



31%

ALMOST A THIRD OF INCIDENTS WERE REPORTED DIRECTLY TO STAFF MEMBERS

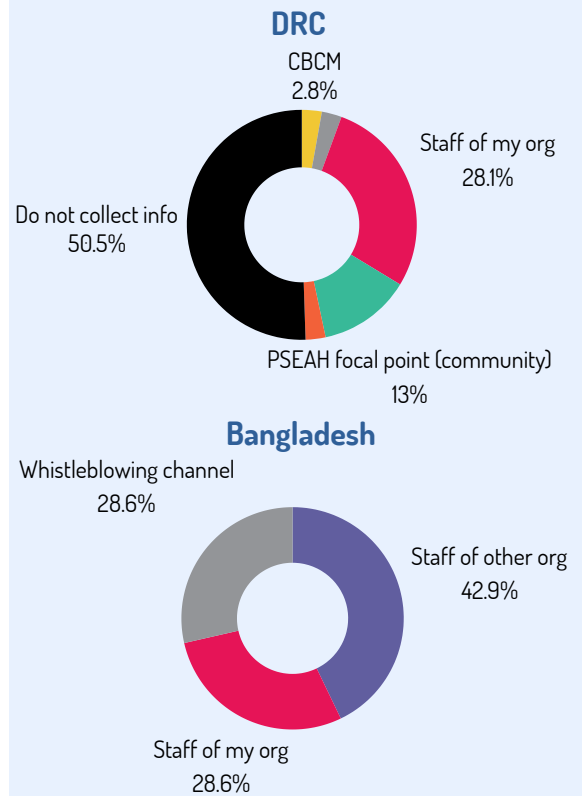
Victims/survivors most often report harassment, while family members mostly report sexual abuse cases. When looking at reports specifically from victims/survivors, CBCMs were used in 39% of cases, up from 18% last semester. Reports directly to staff members have declined to 33%, down from 72%.



This shift in reporting channels is complex to interpret globally and may require country-specific analysis. The countries with the highest reported incidents, DRC and Bangladesh, highlight significant differences.

- **DRC:** Nearly half of the incidents lack specified reporting channels. CBCMs are rarely used (2%), with most reports coming through staff members (28%) and community PSEAH focal points (13%).
- **Bangladesh:** Reports primarily go through organisational channels, including staff members (43%), external staff (29%), and whistleblowing mechanisms (29%).

Reporting channel used per country



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen and promote community-based complaints mechanisms (CBCMs):

- **Community feedback:** Regularly consult with community members, especially women and girls, to identify and address barriers to using CBCMs. Co-design culturally appropriate, accessible, and trusted mechanisms and train staff to handle in-person disclosures when preferred.
- **Visibility and accessibility:** Increase awareness of CBCMs through community engagement and clear signage in local languages.
- **Trained community focal points:** Train respected community members or intermediaries in confidential, survivor-centred disclosure handling to build trust.
- **Transparency and trust:** Provide regular updates to those who report incidents, ensuring confidentiality to foster trust and accountability.

2. Enhance staff training for handling SEAH disclosures:

With an important proportion of incidents directly reported to staff members, organisations should ensure that staff are well-equipped to collect and handle sensitive disclosures:

- **Disclosure training:** Equip staff with step-by-step guidance on responding to SEAH disclosures, including immediate actions like referring survivors to services (medical, legal, psychosocial) and safely reporting incidents using a survivor-centred approach.
- **Organisational reporting channels:** Offer confidential internal reporting options such as whistleblowing mechanisms or designated PSEAH focal points.
- **Staff care:** Provide care and resources for staff handling complex SEAH cases.

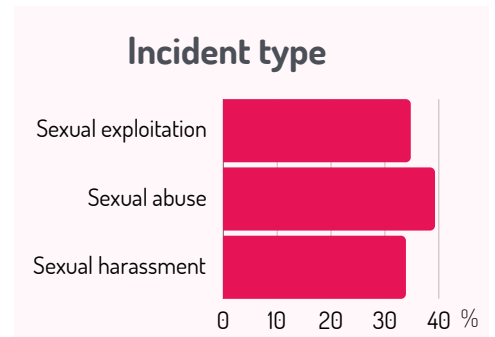
3. Collect and analyse reporting data to identify and address context-specific gaps:

- **Data collection:** Record detailed information about each incident, including the reporting channel and the profile of the person who reported the incident, to identify trends and gaps.
- **Data review and analysis:** Regularly review data by region, incident type, and reporter demographics to identify barriers and improve strategies.
- **Tailored interventions:** Use insights to adapt reporting channels and interventions to local contexts, ensuring a responsive, survivor-centred approach.

WHAT TYPE OF INCIDENTS WERE REPORTED?

Reported incidents were nearly evenly split, with **35% involving sexual exploitation, 40% sexual abuse, and 34% sexual harassment** (percentages exceed 100% as some incidents fell into multiple categories).

Cases of sexual exploitation have dropped significantly from 61% last semester. However, harassment may be underreported, as not all HRS participants include it in their SEA(H) definitions.



Most incidents involved only one type of misconduct, but some combined multiple types:

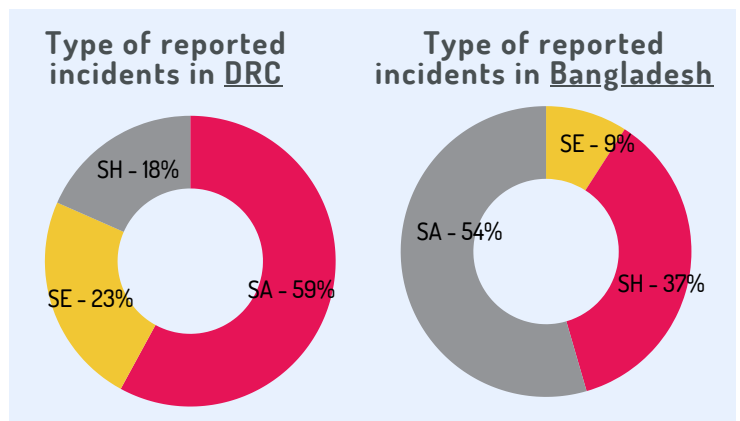
- 5% involved both exploitation and abuse.
- 1% involved exploitation, abuse, and harassment.
- 1% involved exploitation and harassment.

The actual number of cases involving multiple misconduct types is likely higher, as incidents are often classified under the most prominent allegation.



Significant differences in reported incident types are seen between DRC and Bangladesh:

- **Sexual abuse:** most reported misconduct in both countries (59% in DRC and 54% in Bangladesh).
- **Bangladesh:** most victims/survivors are under 18 (57%)
- **DRC:** most victims/survivors (66%) are adult women



RECOMMENDATION

Standardise the inclusion of harassment in the definition of SEAH across the aid sector, recognising its role as a precursor to abuse and exploitation, and ensuring proactive measures are taken against it to prevent further incidents.

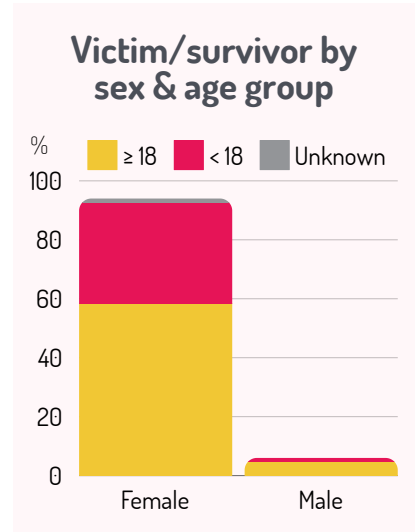
WHO WERE THE VICTIMS/SURVIVORS?

Most victims/survivors are female (97%), with women over 18 being the most represented at 60%. **Minors (under 18) make up 36% of incidents** (35% girls and 1% boys), and males only 2%.

Across all analytical reports, a consistent and alarming trend is that around 1 in 3 survivors of SEAH are girls under 18, highlighting the heightened vulnerability of this group.

This is aligned with the [UN iReport data](#) from the same period, where 94% of victims/survivors are female, 3% male, and 3% unknown, and where minors account for 31% of victims/survivors.

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



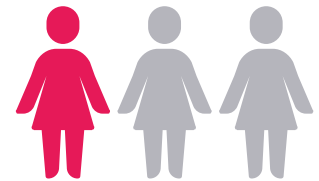
- **Bangladesh:** 57% of victims/ survivors are minors, above the global average.
- **DRC:** 31% of victims/survivors are minor, slightly below the global average.

Incidents without an identified victim/survivor accounted for only 8% of incidents (in contrast with a far higher 22% in the last report).

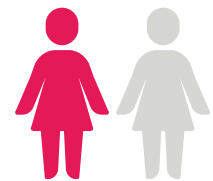
When analysing the type of incident by the sex and age group of the victim/survivor, several trends emerge:

- **Sexual abuse:** Girls account for 55% of cases, adult women 43%, and 2% involve unidentified victims/survivors.
- **Sexual exploitation:** Adult women are most affected (70%), followed by minors (23%), with 7% of cases having no identified victim/survivors.
- **Sexual harassment:** Adult women comprise 73%, minors 17%, and men 3%. In 4% of cases, victims are unidentified.

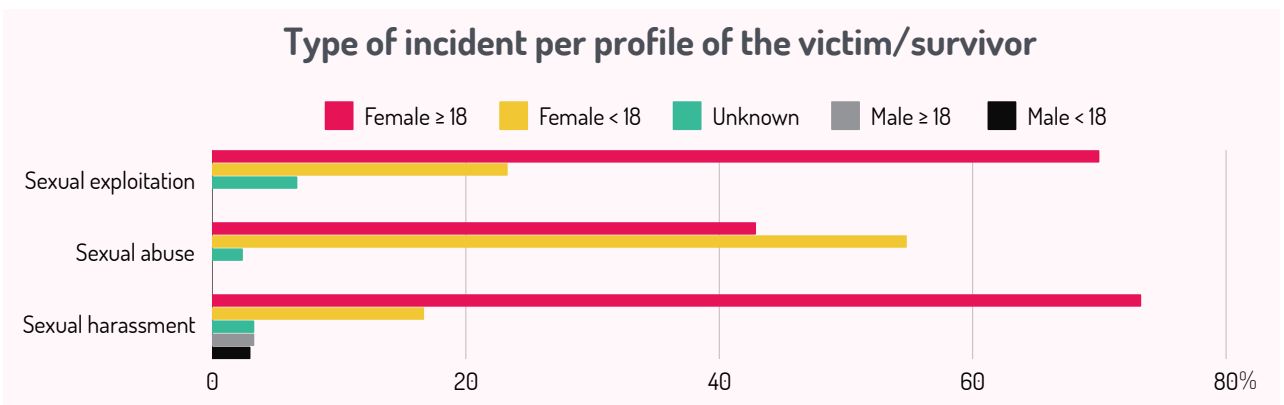
It is important to consider that these trends may reflect not only the actual frequency of incidents but also the varying reporting dynamics within each category. For instance, the absence of boys or men as victims/survivors of abuse may be due to the greater difficulty in reporting such cases.



36% OF VICTIMS/SURVIVORS ARE UNDER 18.



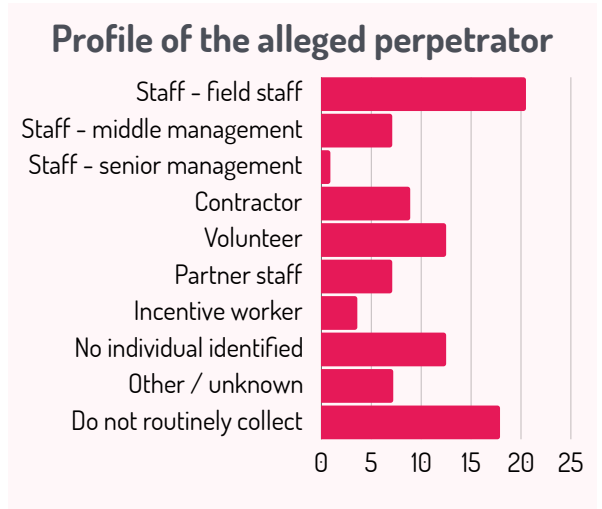
1 IN 2 VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE ARE GIRLS UNDER 18



WHO WERE THE ALLEGED PERPETRATORS?

- **Affiliated personnel** (32%) were the largest group. This includes volunteers (12%), contractors (9%), partners (7%), and incentive workers (4%).
- **Field staff in direct contact with aid recipients** were the second-largest group, accounting for 20%.
- **Managerial staff** made up a smaller share, with middle managers at 7% and senior managers at 1%, a sharp drop from 15% last semester. However, incidents involving managers may be underreported due to power imbalances and fear of retaliation.

Detailed information on alleged perpetrators is missing in 18% of incidents, likely due to new organisations recently joining the HRS and still aligning their data collection processes. This limits a complete understanding of trends in perpetrator profiles.



1 IN 3 ALLEGED PERPETRATORS ARE AFFILIATED PERSONNEL

Alleged perpetrators by incident type:

Incident type	Field staff	Managerial staff	Affiliated personnel	Unidentified perpetrator
Sexual harassment	34%	10%	32% (Volunteers: 13, Partners: 8, Contractors: 8, Incentive Workers: 3)	3%
Sexual exploitation	18%	8%	33% (Volunteers: 13, Partners: 10, Contractors: 8, Incentive Workers: 3)	23%
Sexual abuse	14%	0%	34% (Volunteers: 16, Contractors: 11, Incentive Workers: 7, Partners: 4)	9%

- **Field staff** are heavily implicated in harassment cases due to their frequent, close interactions with vulnerable communities, where inappropriate behaviour may be normalised or overlooked. Limited oversight and power imbalances further increase risks, and the actual prevalence may be higher as not all organisations classify harassment under SEA(H).
- **Affiliated personnel:** volunteers are often linked to abuse and harassment, likely due to weaker oversight, while partner staff are frequently involved in exploitation, potentially because of their role in aid distribution. Contractors are notably implicated in abuse cases.
- The higher rate of **unidentified perpetrators** in exploitation cases reflects the subtle pressures and power dynamics involved, where victims may fear losing access to aid. This marks a shift from last semester, where unidentified perpetrators were more common in abuse cases.

An analysis of victim/survivor age by perpetrator profile reveals distinct patterns:

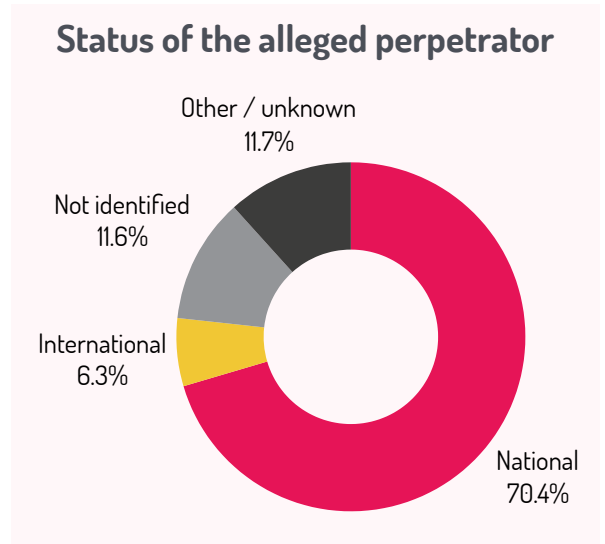
- Incidents involving **managers** exclusively affect adults.
- For **field staff** and partner staff, minors represent 20% and 12% of victims, respectively.
- **Volunteers** and **contractors** show much higher proportions of minors, with 57% and 50% of their victims under 18. In contrast, all victims of **incentive workers** are adults.

These findings align with the previous report, where contractors were most frequently implicated in cases involving female minors.

Status of the alleged perpetrators:

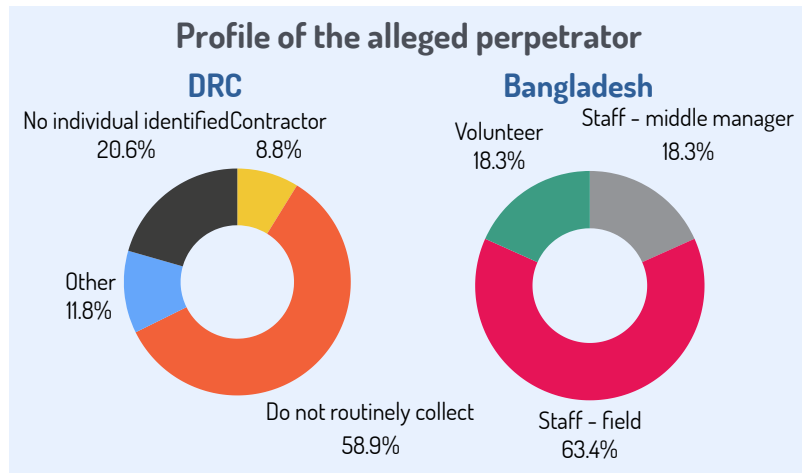
Most alleged perpetrators are **national staff** (70%), while **international staff** account for 6%, a slight increase from 4% last semester. This proportion remain notable given the smaller number of international staff in aid operations. International staff are most frequently linked to sexual harassment, reflecting the involvement of managerial staff in such cases.

Most perpetrators are male (83%), with females representing just 3%. Information on the remaining 14% was not reported or collected



- **DRC:** Perpetrator profiles are missing in 80% of incidents, an increase from last semester. This shows gaps in reporting mechanisms and/or poor outcomes of incidents, resulting in reticence or fear from victims/survivors to report information on perpetrators

- **Bangladesh:** Nearly two-thirds of perpetrators are volunteers, reflecting heightened risks in contexts where aid delivery relies heavily on volunteers.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enhance oversight and training for affiliated personnel:

Volunteers, contractors, and incentive workers are frequently implicated in SEAH cases, especially those involving minors. Strengthen safeguards by implementing:

- **Pre-engagement risk assessment and screening:** Conduct Partner/Contractor Due Diligence Assessments to ensure safeguarding standards are in place before agreements. Use rigorous vetting processes, including reference checks and the [Misconduct Disclosure Scheme](#), to prevent hiring individuals with prior SEAH issues.

- **Mandatory training and code of conduct:** Provide tailored SEAH training during induction and require signed agreements to a clear code of conduct outlining expected behaviours and consequences for breaches. Reinforce these standards through periodic refresher training.
- **Defined roles and supervision:** Assign supervisors or focal points for all affiliated personnel to oversee compliance, such as logistics managers for contractors or field officers for volunteers and incentive workers.
- **Audits and reporting mechanisms:** Conduct regular safeguarding audits and spot checks, gather anonymous feedback from beneficiaries, and ensure accessible reporting channels for SEAH concerns, promoting accountability.
- **Incident response and improvement:** Establish clear protocols for SEAH incidents, including immediate investigation, suspension of alleged perpetrators, and referrals to authorities. Provide regular feedback to improve safeguarding measures and continuously reinforce zero-tolerance policies.

2. Develop context-specific strategies: Perpetrator profiles and risks vary by country. Use local data to identify patterns and vulnerabilities and work with the PSEAH network to design safeguarding mechanisms tailored to specific contexts.

3. Strengthen child safeguarding policies to protect minors: Given the high proportion of cases involving minors, organisations should:

- Enforce mandatory reporting to local authorities (where safe).
- Develop age-appropriate reporting mechanisms to empower children to disclose concerns.
- Provide enhanced child safeguarding training for all personnel working with minors.
- Establish clear protocols to protect children from exploitation and abuse.
- Prioritise these measures in high-risk locations to better protect vulnerable children.

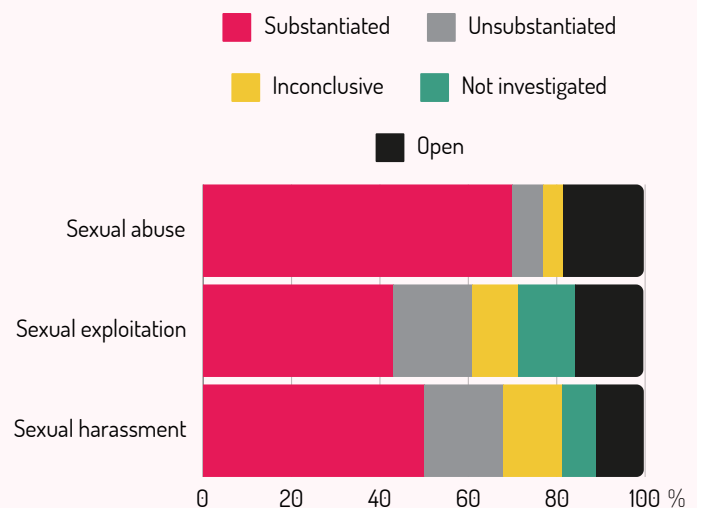
WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME OF INCIDENTS?

At the global level, **55% of incidents were substantiated**, 13% unsubstantiated, and 10% inconclusive. The proportion of uninvestigated cases dropped to 7%, down from 17% last report, while 14% remained open at the time of reporting.

The accompanying graph shows that **most SEAH incidents reported over the last six months were substantiated, regardless of the type of incident.**

Sexual abuse cases are those who were most frequently substantiated, whereas incidents of sexual exploitation and harassment were more likely to result in unsubstantiated or inconclusive outcomes or left un-investigated.

Status of the allegation per incident type



Reporting to authorities has also increased, with 17% of incidents now being reported, 63% of which involve sexual abuse. This rate rises to 38% for cases involving minors but remains insufficient.



HRS participants continue to face challenges in aligning administrative investigations with judicial systems, citing procedural and coordination barriers that hinder effective reporting and accountability. Additionally, judicial systems are not always survivor-centred, which can create further risks and discourage reporting, particularly in cases involving vulnerable populations like minors

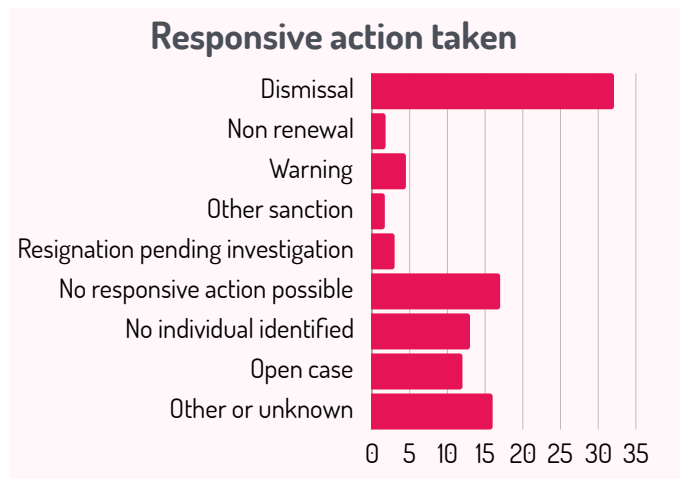


Outcomes by country show similar patterns, with most incidents substantiated: **70% in DRC** and **72% in Bangladesh**. Reporting to authorities remains low, with 13% of incidents reported in DRC compared to 18% in Bangladesh.

Disciplinary actions were taken in 38% of incidents, with most resulting in dismissals (32%), followed by warnings (4%) and other sanctions (2%). In 17% of cases, no action was taken.



1 IN 3 ALLEGED PERPETRATORS WERE DISMISSED



Reasons provided when no action was taken:

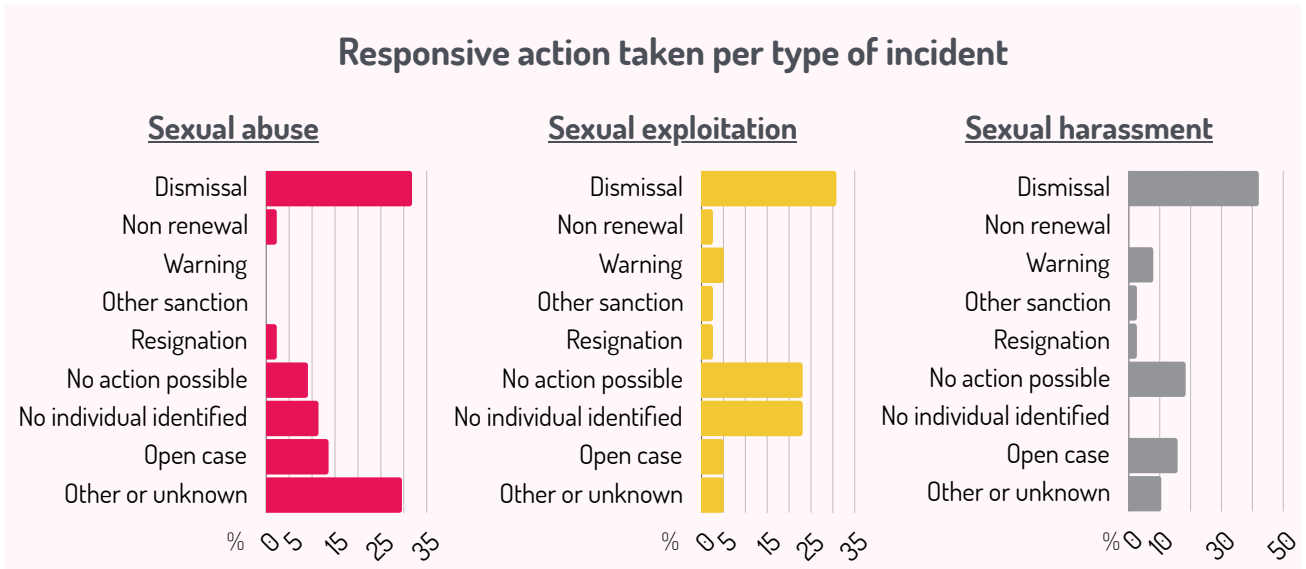
- **Unknown or undocumented reasons:** In over 50% of cases, no explanation was provided
- **Lack of authority:** In 15% of incidents, organisations reported no authority over the allegation, often involving partners. Terminating partnerships was sometimes the only option, though this does not guarantee sanctions for the perpetrator.
- **Insufficient information:** Another 15% of cases could not be assessed due to limited details, all involving incidents of sexual exploitation.

In 15% of incidents, other measures were implemented, such as suspending contracts with contractors or partners or gathering additional information to substantiate the claims. 12% of cases remained open at the time of reporting.

Disciplinary actions taken varied by the type of incident:

- **Sexual exploitation had the highest rate of cases with no responsive action possible** (23%), likely reflecting challenges in substantiating claims, as opposed to 9% for sexual abuse and 18% for harassment.
- The identification of perpetrators also varied, with **sexual exploitation cases seeing the highest proportion of unidentified perpetrators** (23%), followed by sexual abuse (11%). In contrast, all incidents of sexual harassment had identified perpetrators. This could be linked to safety concerns and perceived risks of reporting the perpetrator’s identity.
- **Warnings and other sanctions** were more commonly issued for sexual exploitation (8%) and sexual harassment (11%). They were not used in cases of sexual abuse, which is a positive trend indicating that more serious disciplinary actions are being reserved for abuse cases.

- Dismissal rates were similar for sexual abuse and exploitation (32% & 31%, respectively) but notably higher for harassment (42%).



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

- **Managers:** Dismissals occurred in 62% of cases, with only 12% resulting in no action, reflecting stronger accountability at this level compared to last semester.
- **Field staff:** Dismissals were taken in 43% of cases, but 25% had no action due to challenges in substantiating claims, potentially linked to limited managerial training on identifying misconduct.
- **Volunteers:** Dismissals were highest among all roles (64%), with warnings or other actions issued in 14%. This may reflect fewer contractual constraints when disciplinary actions are taken against volunteers.
- **Partner staff:** No action was possible in 25% of cases—the highest amongst all categories. This is likely due to difficulties in enforcing measures within partner organisations, where terminating partnerships may be the only recourse.

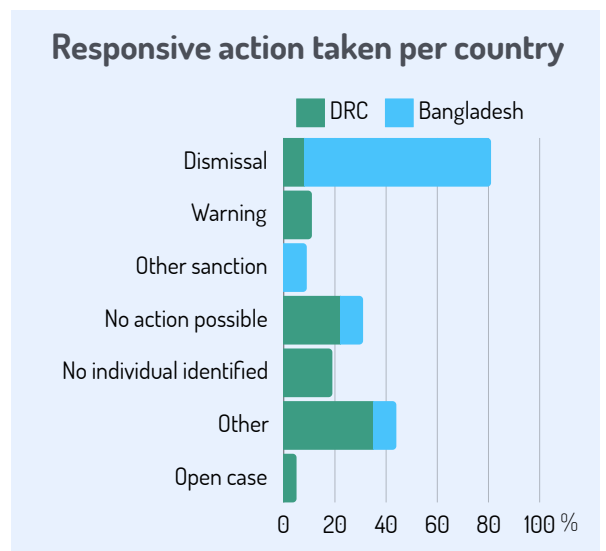
For incidents involving minors, dismissal rates were higher (35%) and unidentified perpetrators lower (8%) compared to 20% last semester, showing progress in addressing such cases).



Actions taken in response to incidents vary significantly by country:

- **DRC:** "Other" actions were reported most frequently, though their description was unspecified. Dismissals occurred in only 8% of cases, while no action was possible in 22%.
- **Bangladesh:** Most incidents (72%) resulted in the dismissal of alleged perpetrators.

These differences highlight how global averages can mask local realities. While global data suggests dismissals are common, country-level figures range from as low as 8% to over 70%. This underscores the important of country-level analysis.



RECOMMENDATIONS

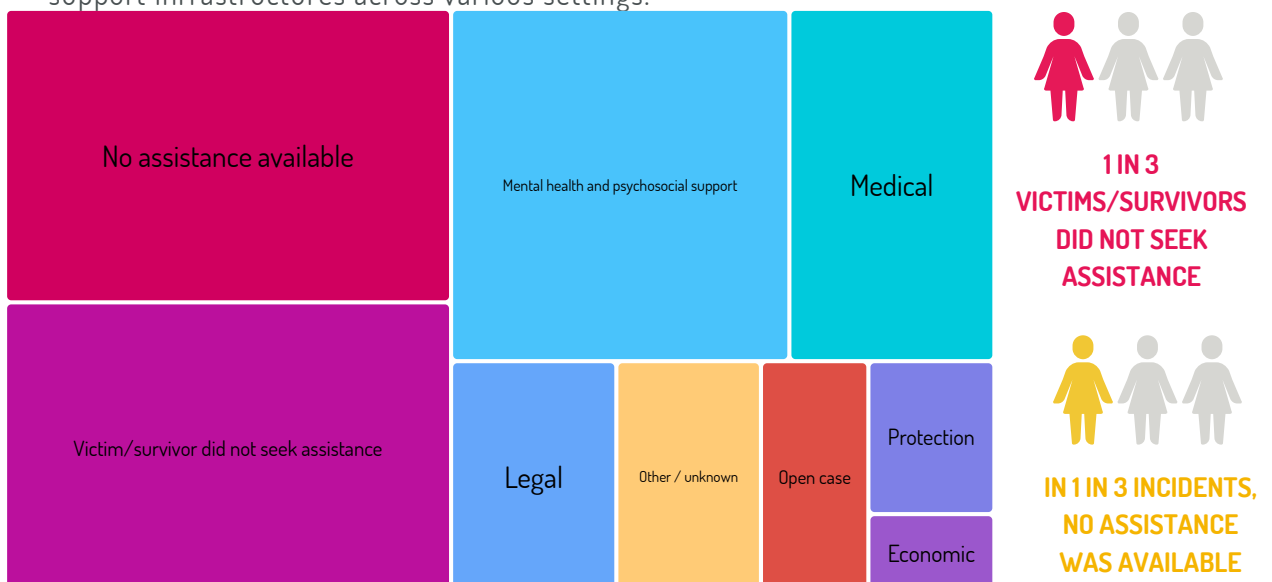
- 1. Strengthen criminal accountability for SEAH cases:** Develop clear guidelines for safely reporting substantiated incidents, especially those involving minors, to local authorities. These guidelines should prioritise victim/survivor safety, consider local risks like retaliation or distrust in authorities, and ensure a victim-centred approach. Escalation processes must assess safety risks to protect those involved. Resources like the Interpol Soteria project can support collaboration with law enforcement to improve accountability.
- 2. Enhance training for handling complex SEAH cases:** Provide specialised training to help staff address challenges like coercion, power dynamics, and dependency relationships in exploitation and harassment cases. Focus on skills such as trauma-informed interviewing, cultural sensitivity, and risk assessment to improve case handling and survivor support. Utilise resources like the CHS Alliance’s [Investigator Qualification Training Scheme \(IQTS\)](#) to standardise and professionalise SEAH investigations, equipping staff with advanced skills for sensitive cases..

%

WHAT ASSISTANCE WAS RENDERED?

The data reflects significant gaps in supporting victims/survivors of SEAH incidents:

- In 30% of cases, victims/survivors did not seek assistance.** This may reflect fears of stigma, rejection, reprisals or distrust in the confidentiality and effectiveness of available services. Reluctance to seek help may also stem from past failures of support systems or a sense of resignation in settings where SEAH incidents are common and often ignored. Additionally, some victims/survivors may be unaware of available support, highlighting the need for clear information on accessible resources. A significant contributing factor is that organisations often prioritise initiating investigations over ensuring victim/survivor assistance, which can disrupt the trust-building process and result in victims/survivors never receiving the support they need.
- Another 30% of incidents involved no available support options,** pointing to critical gaps in support infrastructures across various settings.



These figures are consistent with findings from the previous report, highlighting that the availability and accessibility of assistance for victims/survivors remains a pressing and unresolved issue. This issue was also identified in UN iReport data from the same period, where 26% of victims/survivors did not receive assistance.

Despite barriers, some victims/survivors access assistance, though the type and extent of support varies:

- Most common types of support:
 - **Mental health and psychosocial support** is the **most accessed** form of assistance, provided in 27% of cases.
 - **Medical care** is accessed in 16% of cases.
 - **Legal assistance** is notably low at 9%, while **physical protection and economic support** are even rarer at 4% and 2%, respectively.



- **Minors:**
 - Minors are more likely to seek assistance, with only 15% refraining compared to 30% across all groups.
 - **Mental health and psychosocial support (47%) and medical care (31%)** are the **most accessed** forms of assistance **for minors**, though 28% of cases involving minors still lack accessible support.
 - **Legal assistance for minors remains critically low at 12%**, despite the criminal nature of sexual offences against children, most of whom are girls. This reflects a drop from 17% last semester, highlighting a gap in addressing legal needs.

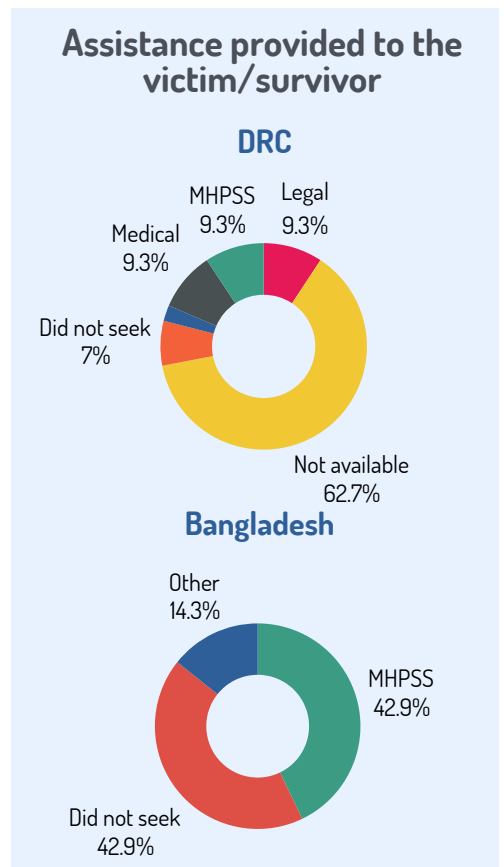
The consistent reliance on mental health and medical support for minors (55% and 34% of cases, respectively) suggests these remain the primary focus areas, with legal and economic assistance significantly under-prioritised.



- **DRC: No assistance was available in 62% of incidents**, highlighting severe challenges in service provision and accessibility across this vast nation. When support was provided, it was evenly distributed among medical care (10%), mental health and psychosocial support (10%), and legal aid (10%).

- **Bangladesh: 43% of victims/ survivors did not seek assistance**, possibly due to gaps in referrals or distrust in services. With 53% of cases involving sexual abuse, the lack of medical care sought is concerning and points to potential issues with service quality or communication. Mental health & psychosocial support was accessed in 42% of cases, making it the most utilised form of assistance.

These patterns underline significant disparities in the availability and use of services, with critical gaps in both countries that need urgent attention.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Ensure accessible, informed, and victim/survivor-centred support services:** Organisations should adopt a victim/survivor-centred approach at all stages, including by ensuring that all victims/survivors have access to necessary support services (e.g. medical, psychosocial, legal, and economic assistance).
- **Proactively inform victims/survivors about available services** in a clear, accessible manner to empower them in their recovery.
- **Regular training of staff on victim/survivor-centred care** is essential to create an environment that respects the dignity, rights, and informed consent of victims/survivors at every step.
- It is crucial to have a **comprehensive and reliable « referral service mapping »** ready to respond to incidents. Ideally maintained by the PSEAH focal point, this map allows quick and reliable referrals without delay. Coordinate with networks like the GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR), the PSEAH Network, and the Child Protection (CP) AoR to stay updated on available services. If service gaps are found, notify coordination bodies to improve coverage and prevent duplication.

WHAT REMEDIAL ACTIONS WERE TAKEN?

Community awareness (54%) and **staff training** (32%) are the most common remedial actions after SEAH incidents.

In **20% of cases, programmatic risk mitigation actions were implemented**, while 14% led to human resources-related actions.

The rate of incidents with no remedial action dropped significantly, from over 20% in the previous report to 9%.



Trends by types of incident:

- **Sexual harassment:** Often has the fewest remedial actions, reflecting persistent accountability gaps for this type of misconduct.
- **Sexual abuse:** Frequently leads to community awareness initiatives to inform individuals of their rights to report abuse. However, staff training is less commonly conducted for these cases, undermining efforts to identify and respond effectively. This highlights the urgent need for targeted training to address abuse.
- **Sexual exploitation and harassment:** Programmatic risk mitigation measures are applied more often but remain underutilised, with only 19% of cases implementing them. Systematic application of these measures could significantly improve safety for both staff and communities.

These trends underscore the need for more comprehensive and consistent remedial measures, particularly targeted training and programmatic risk mitigation, to address the root causes of SEAH incidents and foster safer environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Conduct lessons-learned exercises for continuous improvement:** Before closing any SEAH case, organisations should hold lessons-learned sessions to identify areas for improvement. Focus on:
 - **Response effectiveness:** Evaluate if initial responses met victims/survivors' needs and were timely. Address delays to improve future responses.
 - **Service gaps:** Review whether all necessary services (medical, psychosocial, legal, etc.) were accessible. Update service mapping or explore partnerships to fill gaps.
 - **Communication and coordination:** Assess how information was shared while maintaining confidentiality. Identify miscommunications and improve coordination.
 - **Risk mitigation:** Reflect on changes to activities, recruitment, or safeguarding policies to prevent similar incidents.
 - **Victim/Survivor feedback:** Collect sensitive, voluntary input from victims/survivors about their experience with support, investigations, and communication. Use this feedback to strengthen victim/survivor-centered approaches.

Limit participation to essential personnel and share key insights safely with relevant stakeholders (e.g., program heads, HR) to inform preventative actions while maintaining confidentiality.

2. **Leverage trend analysis to strengthen policies and culture:** Review SEAH incident trends annually or biannually to identify risks and update an action plan with key steps to mitigate risks of SEAH. Focus on:
 - Identifying underrepresented groups in reporting data.
 - Targeting high-risk roles with added safeguards based on perpetrator profiles.
 - Ensuring support services, disciplinary actions, and follow-ups are consistent.
 - Regularly updating the action plan helps organisations adapt proactively and create safer, more responsive environments.

Regularly updating the action plan helps organisations adapt proactively and create safer, more responsive environments.

II. SEAH TRENDS AGAINST STAFF MEMBERS

This second section of the report focuses on **SEAH incidents that were committed only against staff members or affiliated personnel.**

Definitions of SEAH vary across organisations, leading to differences in how incidents are classified. Some classify all staff-related incidents, including abuse or exploitation, under harassment, while others distinguish between misconduct types. As a result, some staff-related incidents may be excluded from SEAH reports if handled by human resources instead.

The CHS Alliance defines harassment **as unacceptable and unwelcome behaviours or practices of a sexual nature perceived as offensive or humiliating.**

To improve data accuracy and reduce biases, the HRS requires organisations to specify whether incidents involve staff or aid recipients and to analyse these categories separately. However, classifying all staff-related SEAH incidents as harassment can inflate harassment data and lead to misclassification, particularly for exploitation cases. This context should be considered when interpreting trends.

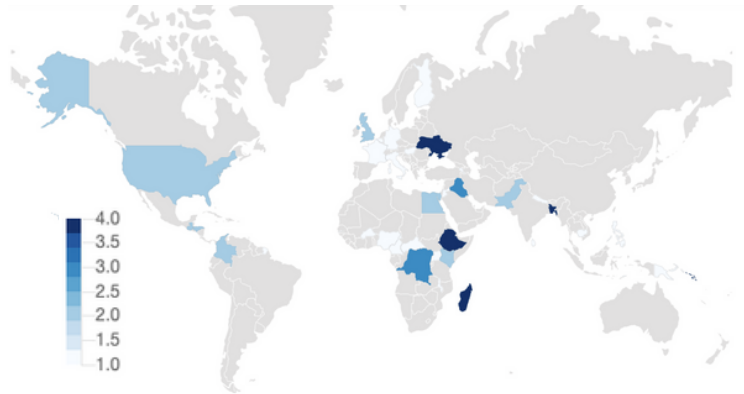
WHERE WERE INCIDENTS REPORTED FROM?

Incidents involving staff members were reported across 38 countries, with many countries accounting for only a small share of cases, often just two or three. To protect identities of victims/survivors, alleged perpetrators and organisations, detailed country-level analyses are not conducted in this section to ensure confidentiality.

The regions with the highest number of reported incidents are:

- Eastern Africa: 17% of all cases
- Southern Asia: 13%
- Central Africa, Eastern Europe, Melanesia, and Western Asia: 8% each

Map of reported incidents



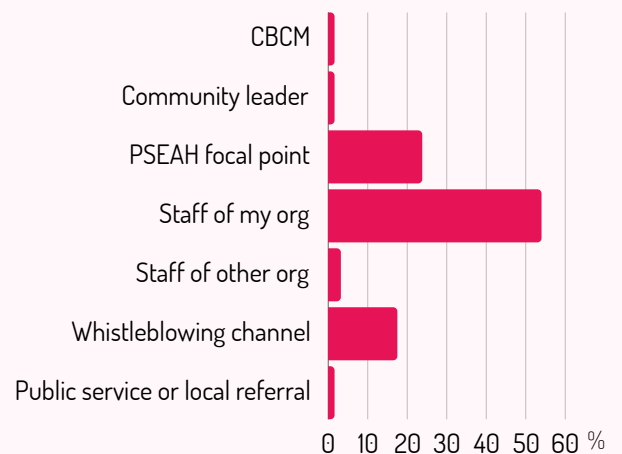
WHO REPORTED INCIDENTS AND HOW?

Most incidents are reported directly to **staff members** (54%) or **PSEAH focal points** (21%), with **whistleblowing channels** (17%) being another key mechanism.

Trends by incident type reveal:

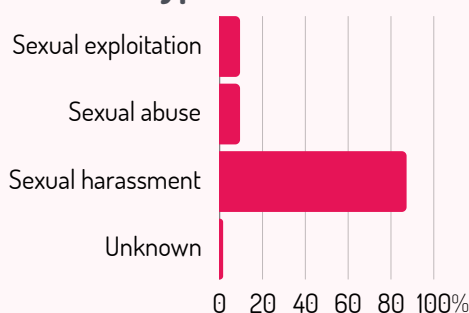
- **Sexual abuse:** Most often reported in person to staff members (50% of cases).
- **Sexual exploitation:** Whistleblowing channels are the preferred mechanism, used in 33% of cases.
- **Sexual harassment:** Commonly reported to PSEAH focal points (22%), but the majority (58%) are still reported directly to staff members.

Reporting channel used



WHAT TYPE OF INCIDENTS WERE REPORTED?

Type of incident



Among SEAH incidents involving staff, **sexual harassment accounts for 87% of cases, while sexual abuse and sexual exploitation each represent 9%**. The typology of the incident is unknown in 1% of cases. Most incidents involved a single type of misconduct, with only one case reported as both sexual exploitation and abuse.

The high proportion of harassment cases may reflect organisational practices where all staff-related SEAH incidents, even rape, are broadly categorised as harassment.

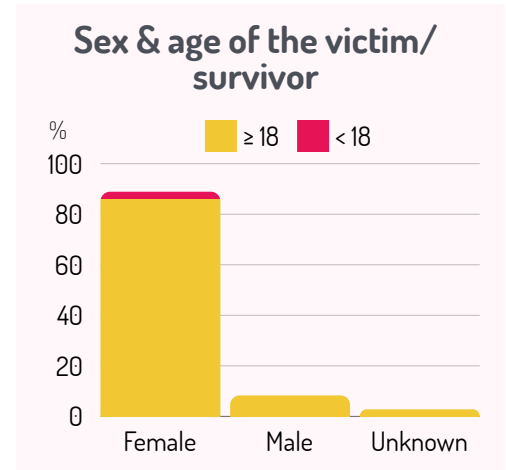
! This misclassification limits a clear understanding of workplace SEAH dynamics and highlights the need for organisations to adopt clearer, more specific definitions. Improving these classifications would enhance trend analysis and support more effective prevention and response strategies.

WHO WERE THE VICTIMS/SURVIVORS?

The vast majority of victims/survivors are female (90%), with males accounting for 8%. A small minority (2.8%) of survivors are girls under 18, which may indicate either a misclassification—where a community member was incorrectly recorded as staff—as recruiting children would constitute a serious violation of child labor laws and safeguarding policies.

In 3% of cases, the victim/survivor was not identified.

Among male victims/survivors, most incidents involved sexual harassment, but 33% were cases of sexual exploitation, and 16% involved sexual abuse.



WHO WERE THE ALLEGED PERPETRATORS?

SEAH incidents involve staff across all hierarchical levels within organisations. The breakdown is as follows:

- **Field staff:** 32% of incidents
- **Middle managers:** 28% of incidents
- **Senior management:** 11% of incidents (up from 6% in the last report)

These figures highlight that SEAH risks are widespread, not limited to a specific group. The involvement of **field staff and middle managers** reflects deeper organisational challenges, while the rise in **senior management** cases points to gaps in leadership and accountability. Comprehensive actions are needed to address risks at every level, ensure accountability, and foster a safer organisational culture.

Additionally, **international** staff account for 17% of alleged perpetrators—a notable figure given their smaller workforce representation—while **national** staff are implicated in 72% of incidents, underscoring systemic issues that require targeted interventions.



2 IN 5 ALLEGED PERPETRATORS ARE MANAGERS

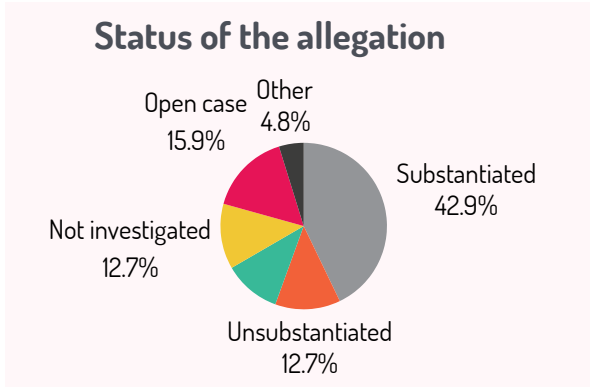
THEY ARE INTERNATIONAL STAFF IN 17% OF INCIDENTS

WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME OF INCIDENTS?

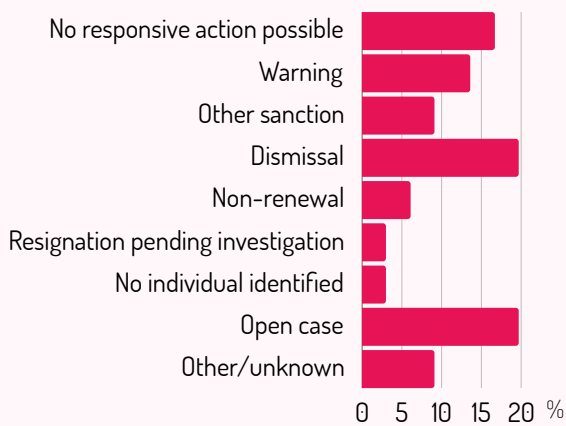
Nearly half of the incidents (43%) were substantiated, and 13% unsubstantiated, reflecting progress in conducting investigations—an improvement from the previous report, where 28% of incidents went un-investigated. 16% of cases remain open, likely due to the complexity and length of HR processes in addressing such cases.

11% of incidents were inconclusive, highlighting challenges in gathering sufficient evidence, particularly where organisational codes of conduct intersect with national labour laws.

These figures indicate progress but underscore the need for continued improvements in the speed and effectiveness of investigations and better support for those involved in these processes.



Responsive action taken



Disciplinary action was possible in 48% of incidents, with outcomes including:

- **Dismissal:** 20%
- **Warning:** 14%
- **Other sanctions:** 9%
- **Non-renewal:** 6%

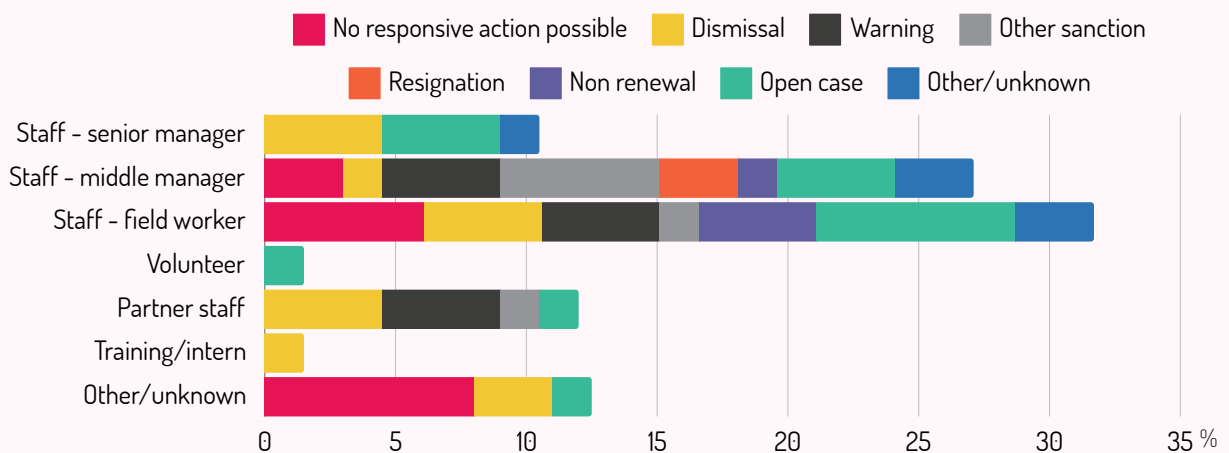
These figures are consistent with the previous report.

In 3% of cases, alleged perpetrators resigned before investigations could begin.

The main reasons for not taking action in SEAH incidents include:

- **Lack of consent from victims/survivors (33%):** Victims often withhold consent due to fears of retaliation, mistrust, or concerns about confidentiality. Addressing these barriers requires fostering trust, ensuring confidentiality, and training investigators to use a victim/survivor-centred approach. Without this, victims/survivors remain silenced, and perpetrators go unpunished.
- **No jurisdiction or authority (33%):** Many cases involve partners or external actors, highlighting the need for clear safeguarding standards and accountability frameworks when working with third parties.
- **Insufficient information (17%):** Lack of necessary details prevents investigations. Training staff on victim/survivor-centered information collection is crucial for properly assessing allegations.

Responsive action taken per profile of the alleged perpetrator



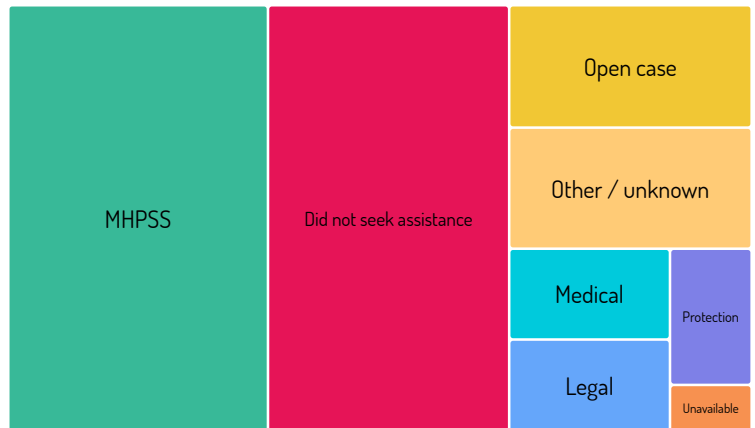
The graph above shows responsive actions taken per profile of the alleged perpetrator.

- **Middle managers:** Least likely to face dismissal (5%), with warnings (17%) and other sanctions (23%) being the most common responses.
- **Senior managers:** Higher dismissal rate (43%), but 43% of cases remain open, and 14% led to other sanctions.
- **Field staff:** Highest proportion of cases with no action possible (19%). Among resolved cases, 14% resulted in dismissal, 14% in non-renewal of contracts, and 14% in warnings.

WHAT ASSISTANCE WAS RENDERED?

Trends reveal significant gaps in providing adequate support to staff victims/survivors:

- **42% did not seek assistance.** Poor confidentiality, distrust, fear of stigma or reprisals, and services that are not victim-survivor centered could explain this trend.
- Nonetheless, **45% of victims/survivor accessed mental health and psychosocial support.**
- 6% received **legal assistance**, exposing a gap in organisational support for more comprehensive measures beyond basic psychosocial care.
- Only 1% of incidents involving staff **lacked available assistance**, a stark contrast to the 30% of cases involving community members where no support was accessible.



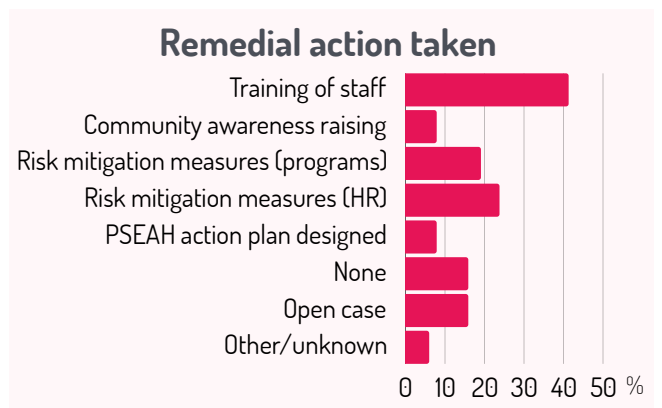
These findings emphasise the need to improve trust in support systems and expand access to legal aid and other reparative measures for staff victim/survivors. This is part of organisations's duty of care towards its staff.

WHAT REMEDIAL ACTIONS WERE TAKEN?

Organisations addressed incidents through staff training in 41% of cases and human resources risk mitigation strategies in 24%, showing positive efforts to reduce risks. Remedial actions were more consistently applied to incidents involving staff compared to those involving community members.

Findings in this report are nearly identical to the previous one, highlighting persistent cultural issues within organisations. These

trends emphasise the need for ongoing organisational change, stronger investigation procedures, and robust accountability frameworks to address SEAH at its root. By monitoring trends in incidents, perpetrator profiles, support measures, and reporting channels, organisations can identify gaps, improve their culture, and create safer, more accountable workplaces.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Organisational culture change involves transforming values, behaviours, and norms to create a safer, more inclusive, and accountable environment. This section outlines actionable steps to initiate and sustain this change, focusing on addressing SEAH and promoting respect, accountability, and zero tolerance for misconduct.

- 1. Commitment from leadership:** Leadership at all levels must demonstrate a visible and sustained commitment to tackling SEAH. Senior management must take proactive steps to recognise SEAH as a pervasive issue, integrating it into the organisation's core priorities and ensuring that it is addressed across all layers of the organisation.
- 2. Conduct a thorough cultural audit:** Carry out an organisational assessment to understand the current state of culture, including gathering feedback from staff on their perceptions of SEAH, reviewing existing policies, and identifying barriers to reporting and addressing misconduct. Involving staff in this process ensures that the assessment reflects the broader cultural dynamics at play.
- 3. Invest in training and capacity-building:** Develop a comprehensive training program that equips staff with the knowledge and skills to recognise, prevent, and respond to SEAH. Training should include a focus on understanding power dynamics, biases, and effective reporting channels.
- 4. Strengthen safe reporting mechanisms:** Develop or improve accessible, confidential, and trustworthy reporting systems, available to all employees and clearly communicated to staff, to ensure that those who experience or witness SEAH feel confident in using them.
- 5. Encourage a culture of speaking up:** Foster an environment where employees feel comfortable raising concerns without fear of retaliation. Leadership must lead by example, demonstrating openness to feedback and protecting those who speak up.
- 6. Adopt victim/survivor-centered approaches:** Support victims/survivors through tailored, respectful services that meet their needs, including psychological support, legal assistance, and other resources. The process should prioritise their safety and well-being, ensuring they are empowered to navigate their options at their own pace. Intentionally seek survivors' input and feedback following incidents, when they choose to provide it, to continuously improve the support and response processes in ways that reflect their experiences and needs.
- 7. Ensure accountability across all levels:** Create clear policies and procedures to hold staff accountable for SEAH-related misconduct. This includes developing transparent processes for addressing violations and ensuring that accountability extends to all levels of the organisation, including senior leadership.
- 8. Track progress and make adjustments:** Refine strategies, and address challenges by regularly monitoring the effectiveness of culture change initiatives through anonymous surveys, feedback loops, and organisational assessments.
- 9. Engage external oversight:** Involve external evaluators to assess the organisation's efforts in addressing SEAH and fostering a positive culture. Independent reviews can offer valuable insights and ensure that internal processes are fair, unbiased, and transparent.

Key Resources:

- [A Selection of Promising Practices on Organizational Culture Change](#), UNHCR / IASC
- CHS Alliance Resources on [Organisational Culture and People Management](#)

III. CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

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

- **Complex allegations:** Many reports come from secondary witnesses, making assessments difficult and prolonging investigations, especially in communities with low SEAH awareness and reluctance to report.
- **Security risks and community dynamics:** Investigations are frequently hindered by threats to confidentiality and security risks, which may discourage community cooperation.
- **Obstruction and corruption:** Whistleblowers often face threats, and there have been instances of staff being compromised to conceal evidence. Furthermore, incidents were reported where perpetrators attempted to mislead inquiry committees with false evidence, while witnesses may withdraw from participation due to fear of repercussions within their communities.
- **Cultural sensitivity and context:** Conducting investigations in culturally diverse and sensitive environments requires careful handling to respect local norms. Moreover, historical abuse concerns can overshadow current cases, complicating community trust and engagement.
- **Legal coordination issues:** Organisations often face difficulties in coordinating their administrative investigation processes with formal judicial systems. This misalignment can lead to challenges in ensuring that evidence is handled appropriately and that the rights of all parties are respected throughout the investigation.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Engagement with community leaders:** In some instances, engaging community leaders was helpful in fostering an environment conducive to reporting, which facilitated effective SEAH incident management.
- **Timely reporting and guidance:** : Quick reporting of incidents enhances response effectiveness.
- **Improved preparation for third-party contractors:** Quick reporting of incidents enhances response effectiveness.
- **Guidance on safeguarding for affiliated personnel:** Developing comprehensive guidance to integrate safeguarding practices into contractor or partner agreements and training is essential to ensure that all partners are equipped to handle SEAH incidents effectively.
- **Legal coordination and literacy for communities:** Aligning legal requirements with administrative processes is crucial for streamlined investigations, alongside promoting legal literacy within communities to ensure evidence is safely and effectively collected.
- **Victim/survivor centered support:** Providing empathetic care to victims/survivors is critical to empower them through the investigation process, highlighting the importance of the victim/survivor centered approach in making investigations successful.