



AHDS' Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and anti-Harassment Policy

Goal

The goal is to promulgate policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) for all AHDS' employees and related personnel and ensure that roles, responsibilities and expected standards of conduct in relation to SEA are known within AHDS. AHDS creates and maintain a safe environment, free from SEA, by taking appropriate measures for this purpose, internally and in the communities where AHDS operates, through robust prevention and response work.

In order to further protect the most vulnerable populations, especially women and children, the following specific standards (or six core principles) are promulgated:

1. SEA by AHDS employees and related personnel constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defense.
3. Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behavior is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
4. Any sexual relationship between AHDS employees or related personnel and beneficiaries of assistance or other vulnerable members of the local community that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
5. Where an AHDS employee or related personnel develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same organization or not, he or she must report such concerns via established reporting mechanisms.
6. All AHDS employees and related personnel are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents SEA and promotes the implementation of this policy. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.

Definitions

1. **Harassment** is committing actions and movements or using words by any means or in any way that causes damage to a person's personality, body and mind.
2. **Sexual exploitation** means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.
3. **Sexual abuse** means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Principles

1. The policy applies to all AHDS' employees, volunteer workers, partners and sub-contractors.
2. All AHDS employees and related personnel are expected to uphold the highest standards of personal and professional conduct at all times, and to provide humanitarian assistance and services in a manner that respects and fosters the rights of beneficiaries and other vulnerable members of the local communities.

3. Zero tolerance towards SEA, religious, linguistic, ethnic, racial or disability discrimination.
4. Necessary measures are taken to prevent any kind of physical, mental, sexual and emotional harassment or abuse in the working environment.
5. People with a history of violent thoughts or actions, especially towards women and children, shall not be employed.
6. The use of inappropriate, harassing, exploitative, sexually stimulating, humiliating, vulgar or culturally inappropriate words or attitudes is strictly prohibited.
7. Watching and sharing vulgar pages are prohibited.
8. Any allegations of exploitation, abuse and harassment must be promptly reported and followed up appropriately.
9. The alleged victims of SEA shall be referred for immediate, professional assistance.

Procedures

1. Roles and responsibilities

- a. The Management Committee oversee PSEA prevention, investigations of SEA allegations and response.
- b. The Head of each Project, Department, Office or Mission, as appropriate, is responsible for creating and maintaining an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in their respective premises.
- c. The Head of each Project, Department, Office or Mission, as appropriate, appoints an official to serve as a focal point for receiving reports on cases of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.
- d. The focal points in coordination with the Grievance Redress Management Officer and the Gender Officer of AHDS, conduct training and awareness-raising, receive reports of SEA allegations and coordinate the response and report concerned issues to senior management.
- e. The Human Resources conduct screening for past SEA violations as part of recruitment process, integrate a PSEA clause in contract agreements and ensure all personnel sign the organization's code of conduct.
- f. All personnel report allegations of SEA, participate in investigations of SEA allegations as appropriate and identify and mitigate/avoid SEA-related program risks.
- g. The Head of each Project, Department, Office or Mission, as appropriate, is responsible for taking appropriate action in cases where there is reason to believe that any of the standards listed above have been violated.
- h. In case of any allegation, a committee of three people will be appointed immediately to investigate.
- i. In case of any violation or crime, the final decision-maker for the type of punishment is the Management Committee of AHDS.
- j. In case of allegation against a member of the Management Committee, the case will be handed over to the Board of Directors of AHDS.

2. Prevention

- a. AHDS systematically vets all prospective job candidates in accordance with established screening procedures.
- b. Conduct background checks for prior misconduct, involvement in SEA or other safeguarding concerns; that may include reference checks, police records and Google searches.
- c. Contracts and partnership agreements include a standard clause requiring staff, contractors, suppliers, consultants and sub-partners to commit to a zero-tolerance policy on SEA.
- d. Require applicants to self-declare prior issues of sexual or other misconduct, termination of past employment, criminal records, and concerns registered with government authorities regarding contact with children, and to consent to the disclosure of any such information by their former employers during verification of references.

3. Training

- a. AHDS holds mandatory induction and refresher trainings for all employees and related personnel on the AHDS' SEA policy and procedures.
- b. All employees and volunteers are given the necessary training on how to protect their colleagues and beneficiaries, and avoid harming and abusing others.
- c. Develop core PSEA messages for beneficiaries, community members and personnel.

4. Reporting

- a. Establish safe, confidential and accessible mechanisms for personnel, beneficiaries and communities, including children, to report SEA allegations.
- b. Design, translate and widely disseminate awareness-raising and reporting mechanisms posters in all work sites.
- c. Widely publicize all available reporting channels to personnel, beneficiaries and local communities.
- d. Reporting any misconduct is mandatory for every employee, volunteer, consultant and contractor of AHDS.
- e. Allegations must be recorded in writing with its date, signed and reported as soon as possible.
- f. The recording of the incident should be detailed, accurate and without guesswork. That is, what was heard or seen, who was present, what happened.
- g. Respect confidentiality, protecting identifying information of all those involved in the alleged incident.
- h. Consider potential risks for survivors (and their families) and take safety precautions, as needed.
- i. As long as the truth of a statement or complaint has not been established, the confidentiality of its registration and reporting shall be maintained.

5. Investigations

- a. AHDS shall properly and without delay conduct an investigation of SEA by its employees or related personnel or refer to the proper investigative body if the perpetrator is affiliated with another entity.
- b. Every suspected or reported incident of harassment or abuse of a person is taken seriously and is followed up in a way that can ensure the victim's safety now and in the long-term.
- c. The management should deploy a team of experienced, impartial and trained investigator who are qualified to handle cases.
- d. AHDS management may hire external experts for investigations where in-house capacity does not exist.
- e. The assigned teams must provide evidence that it has appropriately dealt with past SEA allegations, if any, through investigation and corrective action.
- f. The management should take adequate protection measures to survivors, witnesses, whistleblowers, and alleged perpetrators.
- g. The case should be handled confidentially to the extent that it allows for sufficient investigation.
- h. In all cases, efforts are made to collect reliable information based on sufficient evidence and take corrective measures as soon as possible.
- i. If the criminal police start investigating the incident, the accused will be suspended until the case is clarified.

6. Referral to national authorities

- a. If, after proper investigation, there is evidence to support allegations of SEA, these cases may be referred (considering severity, consent and safety of the survivor) to national authorities for criminal prosecution.

7. Victim assistance

- a. The locally available support services and service providers for professional assistance to SEA survivors should be identified.

- b. SEA survivors should be promptly referred to available services, based on their needs and consent.

8. Actions

- a. The final decision-maker for the type of punishment is the Management Committee of AHDS.
- b. In cases of confirmed misconduct, robust disciplinary action will be taken (e.g., dismissal, suspension, written censure or other administrative/corrective measures).
- c. The aggressor committed physical violence will be dismissed.
- d. Any kind sexual acts with consent in the work environment will cause the parties to be dismissed.
- e. Where the misconduct involves possible criminal conduct, consider reporting the incident to local law enforcement authorities.
- f. Maintain an internal database documenting any disciplinary measures on personnel, including dismissals, to avoid rehiring them at a later point in time.

9. Cooperative arrangements

- a. All AHDS contracts and partnership agreements include a standard clause requiring contractors, suppliers, consultants and sub-partners to commit to a zero-tolerance policy on SEA and to take measures to prevent and respond to SEA.
- b. The failure of those entities or individuals to take preventive measures against SEA, to investigate allegations thereof, or to take corrective action when SEA has occurred, shall constitute grounds for termination of any cooperative arrangement.

This policy was revised by the Management Committee on 18th Sept 2023 and approved by the Board of Directors on 2nd Nov 2023.