

International Development Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 1223 Email: indcom@parliament.uk Website: www.parliament.uk/indcom Twitter: [@CommonsIDC](https://twitter.com/CommonsIDC)

From Sarah Champion MP, Chair

Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
Secretary of State
Department for International Development

10 March 2020

The Government's Response to the International Development Committee's Report on sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector follow-up

Dear Anne-Marie

Thank you for the Government's reply to our predecessor IDC's follow-up report on sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector. We will be publishing it as our first Special Report of this session.

Last week the Charity Commission reported "serious failures" at Save the Children in its handling of sexual harassment allegations against senior managers. This was a timely reminder of the impact of ignoring, downplaying and possibly covering up, such behaviour and denies victims and survivors justice. It continues to be a priority for the new Committee that progress on combatting workplace sexual harassment and abuse at charities, as well as actions perpetrated against aid beneficiaries are followed up and steps towards the necessary reforms are monitored and encouraged so that past failures are not repeated. This includes finding an independent mechanism through which individual complaints can be efficiently and effectively dealt with before becoming a widespread problem.

The Committee wishes to consider DFID's response carefully and seeks further detail on the basis of the questions set out below. These arise from the reply and relate to DFID's ongoing commitment to tackling sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in the aid sector.

Questions

The Department writes that the Resource and Support Hub (RSH) will go live in Spring 2020 with the expectation that it will "focus on signposting to professional services via regional hubs, rather than providing services themselves."

- 1. Who has taken responsibility for the provision of the professional services to which RSH signposting will point?*
- 2. What arrangements are in place to enable the RSH to assure itself, and reassure stakeholders like us, that the professional services to which it is signposting are in place, likely to remain in place and are of the required standards?*
- 3. Who is responsible for the regional hubs to which you refer?*
- 4. Are there areas where adequate professional services are not currently available? Is there a plan in place to (a) identify and fill those gaps, and (b) ensure services are always available locally to those who need them?*

In response to the Committee's recommendation that the Department should provide a description of the steps it will take to act upon the UN Statement on Victims' Rights, the Department writes that the statement is not available yet so it could not respond to the level of detail required.

5. The UN Victim's Rights Advocate, Jane Connors, reported steps towards crafting a statement planned for 2019 in her 2018 annual report. What is the current state of progress in the development of this statement. Please inform the Committee when this statement is available, setting out the measures that the Government will take to embed and operationalise the rights described in the statement.

The Department writes that it is working with its partners to improve beneficiary accountability, complaints mechanisms and capacity building of downstream partners.

6. Please set out in detail what actions are being undertaken to improve: a) beneficiary accountability; b) complaints mechanisms; and c) capacity of downstream partners?

7. What is the budget for this work and how many DFID staff are allocated to it?

The Department writes that complaints and reporting toolkit is one of three pieces of guidance it has funded to raise safeguarding standards in the NGO sector, but it does not plan to monitor in detail whether the guidance provided in the toolkit is used, instead relying on engagement with Bond and others to check how useful it is.

8. How will the Department track whether the guidance it has funded is leading to improvements in safeguarding if it does not monitor whether and how it is used?

9. What measures will the Department use to evaluate the success of the toolkit?

10. Which organisations, in addition to Bond, will the Department seek engagement with?

The response said there are plans to publish, in the first half of 2020, a synthesis report on the main findings from the central safeguarding enhanced due diligence assessments, which include whistleblowing as one of the six areas covered.

11. Please update the Committee on when the synthesis report will be ready and provide us with an embargoed copy ahead of publication?

The response said the Government will continue to consider actively funding inter-agency community-based mechanisms in specific countries on a case by case basis. [The Progress Report – One year on from the October 2018 London Safeguarding Summit](#) published by DFID in October 2019 indicated that UN agencies will fill gaps to ensure that 26 out of 34 countries with humanitarian crises have preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) coordinators.

12. Which 8 countries with humanitarian crises are not planned to be allocated a PSEA coordinator?

13. Why are PSEA coordinators only planned for in 26 out of 34 countries which have humanitarian crises? On what rationale was this decision made (or what constraints applied in the remaining 8 cases)?

- If these gaps are due to a lack of funding, has DFID considered funding coordinators in the 8 countries itself?

The Department writes there does not seem to be any support for an international aid ombuds. This contradicts the previous Committee's evidence which indicated significantly more support than scepticism for the idea across the NGO sector and practitioners at least.

14. In the light of its position on establishing an Ombuds system, what consideration has the Department given to setting up something less formal, such as an independent panel that could look into cases and give survivors more confidence than a system that relies solely on self-regulation?

15. In September 2018 the Ministry of Justice launched a new cross-government Victims' Strategy to give more powers to the Victims' Commissioner and support victims of crime in the UK. It proposed a revised Victims' Code and a new Victims' Law to underpin the code. Has she considered mobilising this resource and expertise to support victims of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by aid workers employed on British projects overseas?

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Champion MP

Chair of the Committee