Appendix 15. Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy

(Next review by November 2025)

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Introduction

Assisi Aid Projects (Assisi) is committed to providing a safe environment that protects everyone we engage with, whether directly or through our partner organisations from sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment. The nature of development initiatives can exacerbate inequitable power dynamics within the communities we work with and therefore requires vigilant attention to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards. To manage this risk and safeguard vulnerable people, Assisi is committed to non-discriminatory and respectful behaviour, where misconduct is not accepted, where power is not abused, and vulnerabilities and power inequality are not exploited.

Assisi adopts a rights-based approach, which is underpinned by our Code of Conduct, Gender Equality, Disability Inclusion, Child Protection, Whistle Blowing, and Equal Opportunities Policy, as well as our Programming methodology. Assisi also upholds all domestic laws and international commitments that are relevant to our work, including United Nations Conventions. Assisi, our partners, and other agencies are committed to the important work of further improving standards, practice and culture to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

Assisi does not tolerate sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment (SEAH) of any kind. Assisi is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct and is committed to the safeguarding of those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. This policy also aligns to Assisi's obligation as a DFAT Australian NGO Cooperation Project (ANCP) partner to ensure the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. This policy includes a zero tolerance, survivor centric, risk-based approach and a requirement for procedural fairness.

This Policy outlines expectations and requirements for Assisi staff, members, Governing Body members (including both Committee of Management and subcommittee members), volunteers, representatives, contractors, and visitors to project sites, as well as our partners

to manage the risk of SEAH and SEAH incidents that could occur in the course of program delivery and operations. Preventing SEAH (PSEAH) is a shared responsibility. All staff, members, Governing Body members (including Committee of Management and subcommittee members), volunteers, representatives, contractors, visitors to project sites and partner organisations are required to play an active role in addressing SEAH and safeguarding vulnerable people. This policy applies during and after work hours.

Children are at high risk of SEAH, particularly those affected by lower socio-economic backgrounds, children impacted by disaster and/or displacement, children with disabilities, children living in residential care, children who have experienced previous trauma or abuse, and children with diverse genders and sexual orientations. Assisi is committed to safeguarding children, who are protected under our Child Protection Policy.

Purpose

This Policy outlines Assisi's commitment to ensuring that those we work with directly or through partners are protected from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment by:

- Promoting a culture of mutual respect, equal opportunity, and transparency.
- Undertaking a thorough gender, disability and community analysis of projects to ensure that factors impacting gender relations in projects are understood, considered in design and risk assessment.
- Implementing systems, policies and processes to ensure the prevention of sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment.

Principles

This policy is underpinned by the following Principles (adapted from the <u>DFAT Preventing Sexual Exploitation</u>, Abuse and Harassment policy, 2019):

Zero tolerance of inaction of incidents of SEAH – Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment are never acceptable. Sector wide commitment is needed to reduce incidents of SEAH. Reports of incidents may occur or increase as awareness grows, reporting mechanisms are developed and culture changes. Assisi defines zero-tolerance as acting on every allegation in a fair and reasonable way, with due regard for procedural fairness.

Victim/survivor-centred – Action to address SEAH will be undertaken prioritising a 'do no harm' approach which prioritises the rights, needs and wishes of the victim/survivor, whilst ensuring procedural fairness to all parties. This includes:

- Treating the victim/survivor with dignity and respect
- Involving the victim/survivor in decision-making and respecting their wishes, whilst respecting their privacy and confidentiality
- Providing the victim/survivor with comprehensive information
- Not discriminating based upon gender, age, race/ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, or other characteristics

• Considering the need for health services, counselling, or other psychosocial support, to assist the victim/survivor, and their family with their recovery.

Shared responsibility for the Prevention of SEAH – Preventing SEAH is everyone's responsibility. Assisi requires the commitment, support and investment of all staff, members, Governing Body members (including Committee of Management and subcommittee members), volunteers, representatives, contractors, visitors to project sites and partner organisations to prevent SEAH. Assisi commits to building and regularly reinforcing organisational capacity to deal sensitively and effectively with SEAH.

Gender Inequality and other power imbalances are addressed – Studies to date indicate the majority of SEAH victims/survivors are female, and the majority of perpetrators are male. However other power imbalances lead to increased risk for SEAH, for example distinctions of worker/participant, ability/disability, ethnic or religious status, gender identity and sexual orientation, age, health, and poverty. Engagement with intended participants should be based upon respect for diversity, promotion of gender equality and social inclusion, accountability and a strong 'do no harm' focus.

Accountability and transparency – Strong reporting for SEAH is essential to allow Assisi to monitor SEAH, understand and assess risks, improve assurance and support partner organisations to improve systems and safeguards accordingly. Personnel are made aware of reporting mechanisms, and regular training on the use of these to ensure focus remains on PSEAH; the regular prompt reinforces that PSEAH is an essential responsibility.

Scope

This policy applies to all of Assisi's staff, members, Governing Body members (including Committee of Management and sub-committee members), volunteers, representatives, contractors and visitors to project sites, who will be hereinafter referred to as "personnel". The policy also applies to our overseas partner organisations, who must comply with the policy principles, which must be supported via a local organisational policy and reporting process. All personnel have a moral and legal obligation to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and report suspected or confirmed instances of threat or harm in a timely fashion.

Assisi is firmly committed to working with its in-country partner organisations and other relevant stakeholders to ensure Assisi projects comply with this policy, and to support partners to strengthen their own prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment policies and practices.

Sexual misconduct will include the situations typically referred to by the following characterisations:

- Sexual exploitation and abuse
- Sexual harassment
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation

- Women and men sexually exploited through sex work
- Possessing, controlling, producing, distributing, obtaining or transmitting sexually exploitative images of adults and children

Focal Point

The Assisi Focal Point for PSEAH is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO has responsibility for the development and implementation of the PSEAH policy, and as a focal point for any reports or complaints that are made.

The focal point can be contacted via assisi@assisi.org.au or +61 3 90709040.

Definitions

Assisi adopts DFAT's definitions, as found in DFAT's PSEAH Policy, 2019.

Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH) – occurs against a child or an adult and can occur between people of the same or different genders. It includes situations such as:

- Sexual exploitation and abuse
- Sexual harassment
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation
- Women and men sexually exploited through sex work
- Possessing, controlling, producing, distributing, obtaining, or transmitting sexually exploitative images of adults and children.

Sexual exploitation: Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability,

differential power, or trust for sexual purposes. It includes profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from sexual

exploitation of another.

Sexual abuse: The actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature,

whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. It covers sexual offences including but not limited to: attempted rape (which includes attempts to force someone to perform oral sex); and sexual assault (which includes non-consensual kissing and touching). All sexual activity with someone under the age of

18 is considered to be sexual abuse.

Sexual harassment: A person sexually harasses another person if the person makes an

unwelcome sexual advance or an unwelcome request for sexual favours or engages in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, in circumstances in which a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated the possibility that the person harassed would be offended,

humiliated, or intimidated.

Sexual harassment can take various forms. It can be obvious or indirect, physical, or verbal, repeated or one-off and perpetrated by a person of any gender towards any person of any gender. Sexual harassment can be perpetrated against participants, community members, as well as staff and personnel.

Child or children: In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights

of the Child, 'child' means every human being under the age of 18 unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. For the purposes of this policy, Assisi considers a child to

be a person under the age of 18.

Victim/survivor: A person who is, or has been, sexually exploited, harassed, or

abused.

Fraternisation: Any relationship that involves, or appears to involve, partiality,

preferential treatment or improper use of rank or position including but not limited to voluntary sexual behaviour. It could include sexual behaviour not amounting to intercourse, a close and emotional relationship involving public displays of affection or private intimacy and the public expression of intimate relations.

Policy

Assisi is committed to providing a safe, flexible and respectful environment for personnel and participants, which is free from all forms of sexual exploitation, discrimination, harassment and bullying.

- All Assisi personnel are required to treat others with dignity, courtesy, and respect.
- Assisi has a zero-tolerance approach to SEAH, with the perspective that SEAH is never acceptable. Assisi recognises zero tolerance as acting on every allegation in a fair and reasonable way with due regard for procedural fairness.
- By effectively implementing our Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and
 Harassment Policy we will implement quality projects, attract talented employees, and create and maintain a safe and positive environment for everyone.

Actions to address SEAH will be underpinned by a do no harm approach, prioritising the rights, needs and wishes of the survivor whilst ensuring procedural fairness to all.

As a default, allegations involving sexual misconduct will be reported to local enforcement authorities, regardless of local mandatory obligation. This will not occur if doing so is at odds with the wishes or welfare of the affected person or the life or serious welfare of the alleged perpetrator.

Assisi will document all misconduct incidents, with consideration of the wishes and welfare of the victim/survivor.

Any and all misconduct incidents will be reported to the CEO and the Committee of Management, who will maintain a confidential record of incidents in the incident log.

Respecting victim/survivor needs, Assisi will provide feedback to the person making a misconduct complaint within applicable privacy provisions.

Where appropriate Assisi will support the victim/survivor to access referral and/or relevant services to support their recovery.

Any SEAH incidents will be reported to DFAT through the approved reporting channels within 2 working days.

Recruitment, Screening and Personnel Management

Assisi is committed to preventing the employment of a person who presents an unacceptable risk to others and will follow the recruitment and screening processes as outlined in the Human Resources section of Assisi's Good Practice Manual. The level of checks required varies depending on the position and the potential contact with children, or other vulnerable people.

The checks include:

- Use of child safeguarding awareness interview questions, reference checks, working with children checks, and national Police Checks for all staff members.
- All applicants are required to disclose any proven allegations of SEAH as part of our commitment to protecting participants.
- All job advertisements and position descriptions detail Assisi's commitment to PSEAH.
- Employment and service provider contracts detail clear provisions for dismissal, suspension or transfer to other duties for any personnel who breach the PSEAH Policy, Code of Conduct or Child Protection Policy, and have provisions to dismiss any staff members, or volunteers, if allegations are substantiated.
- Performance appraisals include reference to adherence to the PSEAH policy.
- If allegations of a breach of the PSEAH policy are made, staff may be suspended or transferred to other duties while the investigation takes place. The course of action will be determined by the CEO and President of the Committee of Management as part of the investigation plan.
- Accepting and signing the requirements of the Assisi Code of Conduct.

Humanitarian Response

Whilst Assisi does not routinely engage in humanitarian response, this can occur when there is unmet humanitarian need in our programming locations. Humanitarian programming presents a very high level of risk in relation to SEAH. Therefore, Assisi staff contracts will include clauses prohibiting:

Transactional sex whilst engaged in the delivery of Assisi business

 Fraternisation for all non-national individuals when engaged in the delivery of Assisi Business

Should Assisi personnel who are not contract staff visit project sites during a humanitarian response, they will be required to sign a deployment agreement incorporating the standard PSEAH requirements and these additional clauses.

Code of Conduct

Assisi's Code of Conduct includes clear guidelines as to what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour within the workplace. It establishes a common understanding of the standards of behaviour and appropriate boundaries expected of staff and other personnel and it promotes transparency and accountability. All Assisi personnel are expected to sign and adhere to the Code of Conduct and PSEAH policy.

Reporting Procedure

Assisi has adopted principles that will underpin intervention when abuse has been suspected and/or identified.

- The rights and welfare of the victim/survivor is of prime importance. Every effort will be made to protect the rights and safety of the victim/survivor throughout the investigation. If longer-term support is required Assisi will do their utmost to facilitate this.
- Assisi will treat all concerns raised seriously and ensure that all parties will be treated fairly, and the principles of natural justice will be a prime consideration.
- All reports will be handled professionally, confidentially, and expediently. Reports can be made anonymously but must provide enough information to investigate.
- Those making reports should not try to mediate or investigate, but report and allow Assisi Aid Project to investigate as appropriate
- All reports made in good faith will be viewed as being made in the best interests of the victim/survivor regardless of the outcomes of any investigation. Assisi will ensure that the interests of anyone reporting PSEAH in good faith are protected.
- Reports made in bad faith will be considered a breach of the PSEAH policy and may be subject to disciplinary processes.

1. Who should report?

It is mandatory for all Assisi personnel and partners to report any witnessed, suspected or alleged incidents of sexual abuse or any breach of the Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy and/or the Assisi Code of Conduct. The PSEAH policy is publicly available on the Assisi website, and information on how to report will be provided by downstream partners to community members in local language.

Incidents relating to persons under the age of 18 should be reported following procedures in the Child Protection Policy.

2. What should be reported?

Any disclosure, concern or allegation regarding the safety, abuse, exploitation, or harassment of an individual (this includes actual or suspected risk of abuse or harm to an individual) should be reported. This may relate to personnel or partner staff involved in Assisi's work both in Australia and overseas. It may also include a concern about an individual outside of the organisation programs, such as a community member.

If in doubt, personnel or partner staff should report an incident in line with the zero-tolerance approach.

Overseas sexual abuse investigations that involve a criminal aspect will comply with local laws and penalties, and be reported within Australia, respecting the wishes of the victim/survivor and/or whistle blower if relevant.

3. When to report?

Concerns should be raised immediately, or as soon as is safe to do so.

4. Process for reporting

Making a report:

If Assisi personnel or partner staff become aware of a PSEAH incident in Assisi's work in Australia and/or overseas they must immediately report it to the Focal Point (CEO) via email at assisi@assisi.org.au or phone +61 3 90709040. If it is not possible or appropriate to report to the Focal Point, a report should be made to the President of the Committee of Management via elizabeth.morris@assisi.org.au. If the report is about both the CEO and President, the report should be made to the next appropriate authority within Assisi's Committee of Management.

Participants and community members should also be encouraged to report SEAH incidents, and information on how to do this is communicated to them in local language media as part of project activities.

They should immediately document any relevant information that details what happened, who was involved, when and where the incident took place. The report should also include how they learned of the incident, and/or other witnesses or persons who may have relevant information.

Reports may be made via the Assisi PSEAH reporting form, (which is available in Assisi's Good Practice Manual and website) via email, or over the phone but should include the information outlined above to enable an investigation to take place.

Acting on the report:

Once an incident has been reported to the Assisi CEO, the CEO will report to the President of the Committee of Management.

The Chief Executive Officer and/or Committee of Management President will agree a plan, and if required, gather more information to:

- identify immediate and potential risks to the individual victim/survivor
- Identify an investigator if required. Investigations will be undertaken by experienced and qualified professionals who are trained on sensitive investigations and in a victim/survivor centred approach.
- Develop and implement an Action Plan to ensure the individual victim/survivor's safety.
- Assess the risk to other individuals, or project activities and put in place a risk mitigation plan to safeguard against further incidents.
- Report any PSEAH incidents to DFAT within 2 working days.
- report any PSEAH policy breaches to DFAT within 5 working days.

The Action Plan will include but is not limited to the following actions, which will be implemented or undertaken based upon outcomes of the investigation:

- Report the matter to local police and/or the protection authority; and/or
- Ensure referral to relevant services and support for the victim/survivor; and/or
- Report the incident to the Australian Federal Police when it is suspected or becomes clear that a federal crime has been committed regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by an Australian Citizen or Resident; and/or
- Manage internally in accordance with Assisi's Human Resources procedures if not a criminal matter, identifying the relevant breach in the Code of Conduct and/or PSEAH Policy; or
- Take no further action; and
- Report the incident to DFAT at: seah.reports@dfat.gov.au if the victim/survivor is over the age of 18, or follow the process outlined in the child projection policy if under the age of 18
- Record the incident in the confidential incident log.

Reporting to the Committee Of Management

The Chief Executive Officer will provide a report on PSEAH incidents on a quarterly basis to the Committee of Management as a standing item on the meeting agenda.

Risk Management

Assisi recognises the importance of proactively assessing and managing risks to individuals in order to reduce the risk of harm. This occurs in several ways:

1. Risk Assessment at the organizational level

- Assisi maintains an organisational wide Risk Register that is reviewed every quarter
 or in the case of an incident. This register will assess SEAH risks such as: risk of
 noncompliance with policy, risk of systems and procedures failure, support and
 compliance from in country partners, emergencies and disasters and reputational.
 It will also ensure that mitigation strategies are put in place.
- Assisi will also undertake and review on a quarterly basis operating risk against DFAT's Minimum Standards for the Prevention of SEAH, which will be filed with the organisational risk register.

2. Risk Assessment in projects

- All projects and activities will include assessment of SEAH risks as part of their project level risk assessment. Mitigation strategies will be put in place for any risk identified and these (and any emerging risks) will be actively monitored throughout the activity/program cycle or in the case of an incident.
- As part of the design process for new projects, activities will be assessed against DFAT's Minimum Standards for PSEAH, and appropriate risk mitigations put in place.

Breaches of Policy

A failure to comply with the Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy and/or the Assisi Code of Conduct, or any allegations made in bad faith may lead to disciplinary action, legal action, or criminal investigation and prosecution.

Training and Awareness

Assisi is committed to ensuring all personnel, visitors to project sites, partner organisations and participants are aware of this Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy and Assisi's Code of Conduct.

Upon induction, or after any policy revisions, all stakeholders will be provided with a copy of the Policy; briefed on the Policy as part of their orientation or induction; and required to understand the requirements of the Policy. Assisi's induction and orientation process will cover all aspects of the Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy. All personnel are to receive appropriate training regarding abuse awareness, protection of participants and current legislative environment. This training will be repeated on a biannual basis, and the policy reshared at least once per year.

The PSEAH Policy, as well as the Child Protection Policy, Whistle Blowing Policy and Complaints procedure will be shared on the Assisi website. As part of their commitment to PSEAH, downstream partners will ensure that participants are made aware of our shared commitment to PSEAH in local language using appropriate media – for example referral cards, posters or flyers.

Working with Partners

Partners play a vital role in PSEAH by consulting with communities, raising awareness of expected behaviours and complaints mechanisms, managing behaviour of staff and responding to complaints or incidents. Assisi is committed to working with partners to develop, strengthen and maintain their own organisational policies and procedures to PSEAH. As part of our Partner Assessment process, and following field support visits, Assisi works with partner staff to develop action plans to address areas where improvement is required, including appropriate capacity development support and risk mitigation planning. Implementation of PSEAH policy will also be reported on specifically in the trip report format.

This includes supporting them to develop policies, codes of conduct, participate in training and have an informed understanding of what behaviours are inappropriate and how to report, investigate, document and manage sexual misconduct incidents. In addition, they will be supported to develop reporting procedures in line with the local laws of their country. Assisi will also support partners to develop appropriate awareness raising tools and approaches on PSEAH for their staff and communities they work with, to ensure that programming is accessible and accountable to participants and communities.

All Memorandum of Understanding and Project Agreements will include Assisi's expectations regarding PSEAH, as well as partner obligations as recipients of Australian funding. An assessment of capacity for PSEAH will also be incorporated into the Assisi Partner Assessment process (Outlined in the Program Guidelines) and resulting shared capacity development plans.

Roles and Responsibilities

As outlined in the Policy Overview, there are roles and responsibilities that apply to all policies. In addition, the following apply specifically to this policy.

Responsibilities of the Committee of Management:

- Remain aware of potential breaches in PSEAH and report these as per the reporting procedure.
- Engage proactively in the development of a leadership and organisational culture that recognises the importance of collective action to prevent SEAH.
- Comply with this Policy and Assisi's Code of Conduct.
- To act as an alternate reporting contact should it be inappropriate to report to the CEO and President.

Responsibilities of the President of the Committee of Management

- To support the CEO in undertaking PSEAH investigations, providing guidance to ensure best practice is adhered to.
- To act as an alternate reporting contact should it be inappropriate to report to the CEO.

• Comply with this Policy and Assisi's Code of Conduct.

Responsibilities of Chief Executive Officer:

- Remain aware of potential breaches in PSEAH and report these as per the reporting procedure.
- Ensure risks to vulnerable individuals, including SEAH are considered in the organisational risk register, and in all project risk assessments.
- Proactively put in place measures to promote PSEAH including arranging timely and appropriate training for personnel, visitors to project sites and partners in issues of PSEAH and supporting partners to develop their own child protection policies.
- Ensure all personnel and visitors to project sites are aware of this policy and sign Assisi's Code of Conduct, and PSEAH policy.
- Comply with this Policy and Assisi's Code of Conduct.

Responsibilities of all other personnel, including volunteers, contractors and visitors:

- Remain aware of potential breaches in PSEAH and report these as per the reporting procedure.
- Contribute to the development of an organisational culture that recognises the importance of collective action to prevent SEAH.
- Comply with this Policy and Assisi's Code of Conduct.

Procedures:

Refer to Assisi's Good Practice Manual for procedures relating to:

- Complaints mechanisms
- Recruitment
- Induction and on-going training
- Investigating reports
- Disciplinary actions
- Partner due diligence
- Project risk assessment
- Role of the governing body
- External reporting requirements

Related Documents

Assisi - Code of Conduct

Assisi – Child Protection Policy

Assisi – Human Resources section of the Good Practice Manual

Assisi – Programs Manual

Assisi – Risk Management Procedures outlined in Good Practice Manual

Assisi – Whistle Blowing Policy and Procedure

Assisi – PSEAH Reporting Form

Reference List

In developing this policy Assisi referred to the following policy and guidance documents that were generously shared by other organisations:

ACFID – Guidance for the development of a PSEAH policy

https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/Guidance%20for%20the%20development%20of%20a%20PSEAH%20Policy.pdf

AVI Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy https://www.avi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/AVI-PSEAH-Policy Aug-2022.pdf

Bond - Safeguarding policy templates https://www.bond.org.uk/resources/safeguarding-policy-templates/

DFAT – Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy

https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/preventing-sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment

DFAT – Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment: Risk Guidance Note https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/guidance-on-assessing-the-risk-of-seah.pdf

IWDA SUBMISSIO - ACFID Independent review into prevention of sexual misconduct and DFAT Policy Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment 2018 https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/IWDA-SUBMISSION ACFID-Independent-review-2018.pdf

Save the Children – Child Protection Policy

https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/save-children-child-protection-policy/

United Nations - Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/SEA%20Glossary%20%20%5BSecond%20Edition%20-%202017%5D%20-%20English 0.pdf