

Strengthening Reference Checking Systems

Taking steps to prevent perpetrators of sexual misconduct from moving to new roles and organizations is a key issue facing all organizations in our sector. This is a complex and challenging task, and one which requires shared thinking.

Below are brief descriptions and links to different approaches to reference checks as background information for our working group next week, including some proposed new initiatives. We hope will help all of us in thinking through which of these might be effective, useful, and workable.

1. Inter-Agency Misconduct Disclosure Scheme – Being led by the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR)

Currently 14 organizations (mainly large confederations) are signatories of the scheme, and most are rolling out implementation gradually. Around 650 forms have been completed this far. SCHR is supporting a review of the process to iron out issues in its use as well as address legal concerns.

- SCHR information page: <https://www.schr.info/the-misconduct-disclosure-scheme>
- The scheme ‘establishes a minimum standard for organizations to share information as part of their recruitment process about people who have been found to have committed sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual harassment “Misconduct” during employment’
- The scheme requires agencies to hold information on previous employees and share with potential employers via a request form.
- To discuss further, contact SCHR@ifrc.org

2. “Not eligible for rehire” statements

- Usually due to violating policies, rules, or procedures
- Not specific to sexual misconduct. Needs explanation to be interpreted usefully.

3. Disclosure of information informally – “backdoor” reference check

- HR taps into their own network of contacts and finds someone who can give a frank and honest informal opinion on a prospective employee

4. Neutral References

- Employer only verifies the former employee’s dates of employment and job title.

5. References only from HR or Verified Referees

- Restricting those who can provide a reference to those with access to personnel records around misconduct or who have had additional training.
- Risks only provide information on formal complaints and minimal information to future employers.

6. Background/Police checks

- Often routine practice for American/European new employees already
- Sterling – private company offering a range of background checking mechanisms globally:
 - Main webpage: <https://www.sterlingcheck.com/>
 - NGO industry specific webpage:
<https://www.sterlingcheck.com/industries/nonprofit/>

7. INTERPOL pilot: Operation Soteria

- The project's goal is to improve global criminal records background checks for aid workers and provide advice to employers on international vetting and identification of high-risk individuals
- The Advisory Board will include representatives from DFID, INTERPOL, ACRO Criminal Records Office, as well as Save the Children who will coordinate NGOs participating in the project
- The system would include criminal data and not cover misconduct-related information that is not breaking national legislation
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/international-summit-to-crack-down-on-sexual-predators-in-the-aid-sector>
 - Press release from DFID who is partnering with Interpol on the pilot

8. Humanitarian Passport – DFID initiative, essentially acts as a 'White List' providing some confidence that individual has no serious misconduct in past.

- An initiative which seeks to create a new system for the humanitarian sector to identify, recognize, and certify the skills, learning, and experience of humanitarian workers: <https://hpass.org/about/>
- A sort of clearance that shows someone is honest and reliable, does not have serious integrity notes in their personnel file and has never come into contact with the law because of misconduct and abuse
- System of passporting, registration or accreditation of humanitarian and development practitioners
 - <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/voices/alice-sharman-what-has-been-said-so-far-about-humanitarian-passports.html#sthash.zCJY2Z6R.dpuf>

- All individuals working in international development would be registered. In order to demonstrate that they are suitable to work in that sector, and therefore could be quickly deployed, but also risk losing their license to work as a result of inappropriate behavior.

9. United Nations: Clear Check database (internal blacklist)

- Development of “Clear Check” database of UN personnel dismissed owing to substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, or who left during an investigation. Launched June 2018, not well populated yet.
- NGOs don’t have access to this database

Additional Sources of information:

USAID

USAID’s AAPSM (Administrator’s Action Alliance for Preventing Sexual Misconduct) has not specified which approach partners should take. They do want to see partners demonstrate that they are following through on commitments to strengthen hiring mechanisms, in particular that policies are publicized on websites and agencies are transparent about what reference check measures they are taking and how others should understand them. (eg. What does it mean if you state someone is not eligible for rehire in your organization)

<https://www.usaid.gov/PreventingSexualMisconduct/Managers>

- AAPSM managers toolkit

<https://www.usaid.gov/PreventingSexualMisconduct>

- AAPSM main page

IASC: preventing transgressors from moving in the sector

https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/session_1-_psea-sha-_preventing_transgressors_moving_through_the_sector-31_may_2018-principals_meeting.pdf

screening questions, self-declarations or self-certifications; declarations from referees; and, maintaining lists of certified organizational referees