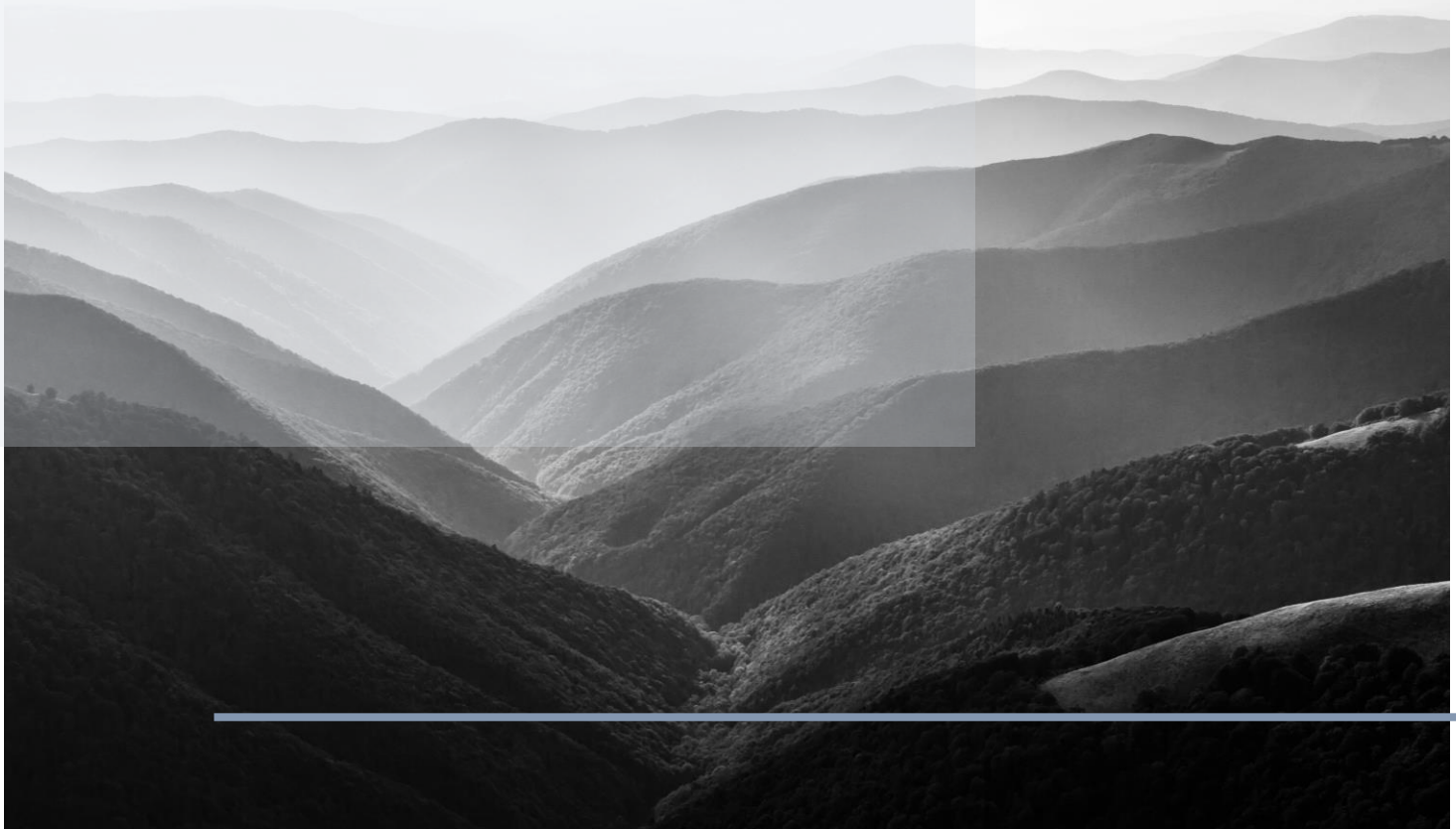
SAFEGUARDING RESOURCE AND SUPPORT HUB (RSH)

GLOBAL EVALUATION REPORT

JULY 29TH 2025



About the Project

The Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH) is a United Kingdom (UK) Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) -funded programme that aims to support organisations working in the international development sector in enhancing their safeguarding measures against sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH). It has a strong focus on building the capacity of small, local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the 'Global South'. The RSH consists of a global online Hub that provides a "one-stop shop" of tools, guidance, and resources on safeguarding against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH), including a consultant directory, webinars, and e-learning available in multiple languages. Alongside this, there have been eight national Hubs across Africa (Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Sudan), Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Jordan, Yemen and Syria, as well as additional resources provided in response to the Türkiye-Syria earthquake) and South Asia (Pakistan and Bangladesh), which provided direct support to CSOs through contextualised resources, training, mentorship and an 'Ask an Expert' service. An Eastern European Hub was funded by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) from April 2022 to October 2023, in response to the war in Ukraine.

Alinea International was contracted between October 2024 and July 2025 to evaluate the RSH and determine the extent to which it has achieved its expected results with regard to its outcomes, effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and coherence, including a Value for Money (VfM) assessment. The purpose of the evaluation is to capture and disseminate key lessons learned that will inform future delivery and programming aimed at strengthening the capability of CSOs to keep people safe from all harm.

About Alinea

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAPSEAH	Common Approaches to Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment
CHSA	Core Humanitarian Standards Alliance
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DIGNA	The Canadian Centre of Expertise on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
DEC	Disaster Emergency Committee
DFID	Department for International Development (now merged into FCDO)
EQ	Evaluation Question
ET	Evaluation Team
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected States
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IMDP	International Multi-Disciplinary Practice Framework
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisations
IGTS	Investigation Qualification Training Scheme
KCS	Keeping Children Safe
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NEB	National Expert Board
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OPDs	Organisations of Persons with Disabilities
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PSEAH	Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment
QA	Quality Assurance
RF	Results Framework
RSH	Resource and Support Hub
SDD	Social Development Direct
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment
SGU	Safeguarding Unit
SLN	Safeguarding Leads Network
STTA	Short-Term Technical Assistance
TdH	Terre des Hommes
ToC	Theory of Change

ToR	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdom
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOVRA	United Nations Office of the Victims Rights Advocate
WHRAP	Women's Rights and Health Project
VfM	Value for Money

1 Executive Summary

Evaluation Introduction, Scope, and Objectives:

The Evaluation explores outcomes, effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and coherence. The following Evaluation Questions, organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) criteria, form the basis of this Evaluation and the structure of the findings:

- Effectiveness- EQ1: To what extent has the RSH programme achieved its intended outcomes and improved safeguarding practices in the aid sector?
- Relevance- EQ2: To what extent do RSH users have access to SEAH-related, contextualised resources, guidance, and services (including blended learning)?
- Efficiency- EQ3: To what extent has the RSH programme effectively and efficiently used its resources to deliver intended outputs and outcomes?
- Impact- EQ4: To what extent is there evidence of significant long-term changes or contributions of the RSH programme toward eliminating SEAH in the aid sector?
- Sustainability- EQ5: To what extent are the outcomes and benefits of the RSH programme likely to be sustained by CSOs, regional Hubs, and other stakeholders after the programme concludes?
- Coherence- EQ6: To what extent is the RSH programme aligned with other safeguarding initiatives?
- Cross-Cutting: How effectively has the RSH programme integrated gender, inclusion, and equity considerations into its design and implementation?

Context of the RSH: The RSH was established to provide accessible safeguarding tools, guidance, training, and mentoring to less-resourced CSOs through a global platform and national Hubs to tackle SEAH in the aid sector. Regional and national Hubs were established in Africa, MENA, South Asia, and Eastern Europe, tailored to local needs through contextualised resources and in-country expertise. These Hubs supported CSOs through mentoring, communities of practice, and multilingual resources, contributing to the strengthening of safeguarding practices across diverse operational settings.

Evaluation Revisions and Limitations: The Evaluation thematic approach, methodology, and Evaluation Questions have remained the same as outlined in the inception period. The major revision to this Evaluation is the removal of the South Sudan RSH National Hub from the primary data collection, due to the Evaluation Team (ET) receiving insufficient stakeholder lists and a lack of contact details. In addition, the sample sizes of key informant interviews (KIIs) in Eastern Europe and Ethiopia, who were able to participate as respondents, were significantly smaller than anticipated due to limitations in obtaining complete stakeholder lists.

Evaluation Methodology: The Evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The primary data consisted of 79 KIIs, 9 focus group discussions (FGDs), and a survey of 52 Consultants. Secondary sources included RSH User Surveys (2022, 2024), cost data, programme documents, and relevant literature. Three in-depth Country Case Studies were developed as part of this

Evaluation to explore key aspects of the RSH programme not fully captured in the broader analysis. Each Case Study draws on KIIs, FGDs, and RSH documentation, with targeted follow-up to fill data gaps.

Key Findings: The key findings for this Evaluation are broken down by Evaluation Question. Overall, the Evaluation found the RSH programme has made significant progress at the outcome level, largely achieving its expected results by strengthening safeguarding practices among less-resourced CSOs through improved dialogue, enhanced capacity, and access to contextualised evidence.

- Main Finding EQ1: The RSH made significant progress towards each of the three primary outcomes of improved dialogue, capacity, and evidence; however, less-resourced CSOs still face structural barriers to connecting with safeguarding networks, sustaining internal changes, and accessing evidence.
- Main Finding EQ2: The RSH National and Regional Hubs significantly contributed to less-resourced CSOs in-country having access to SEAH-related, contextualised resources, guidance and services; however, future programmes can explore opportunities to make resources more user-friendly and adapt the delivery modality to allow for greater in-person interactions.
- Main Finding EQ3: The RSH programme has demonstrated good value for money through its efficient use of resources, adaptability to challenges, and commitment to equity.
- Main Finding EQ4: The RSH programme contributed significantly to the institutionalisation of safeguarding practices and promoted peer learning within CSOs, but the depth and sustainability of these outcomes varied across contexts, remaining vulnerable to resource limitations, staff turnover, and uneven system embedding.
- Main Finding EQ5: While the RSH programme strengthened CSO safeguarding capacity and generated strong ambitions for local ownership, its long-term sustainability was undermined by structural barriers, weak transition planning, and inconsistent communication around programme exit.
- Main Finding EQ6: The RSH programme strengthened safeguarding capacity within CSOs but achieved limited alignment with national systems, donor frameworks, or cross-agency SEAH coordination mechanisms. Its contribution was strongest at the technical level, advancing global standards and peer learning, but it remained largely peripheral to broader sector governance structures.
- Cross-Cutting: The RSH programme demonstrated highly effective and intentional integration of gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) considerations into both its design and implementation, achieving meaningful reach to marginalised populations while adapting to diverse contextual challenges across regions.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The RSH programme successfully demonstrated that targeted, locally adapted safeguarding capacity-building can strengthen organisational practices among less-resourced CSOs. Its focus on marginalised groups and embedded GEDSI consideration marked significant progress in inclusive programming. High value for money was achieved through efficient delivery, broad reach, and effective mentorship-based models, particularly where senior leadership drove organisation-wide cultural change.

However, systemic and structural barriers continue to constrain sustained impact. Challenges included limited integration with government and sector-wide systems, infrastructure disparities that hindered

digital access, and poorly communicated exit plans, which affected trust. Translation barriers and technical language limited the uptake of key RSH resources by CSOs, and informal and formal peer networks were not sufficiently embedded for long-term sustainability. Short timeframes further restricted the level of impact the RSH hubs could have and ultimately sustain.

Future safeguarding initiatives must invest in leadership ownership, inclusive and localised delivery, relationship-based models, and sustainability planning from the outset. Embedding these lessons requires a shift toward longer programme cycles and strengthened coordination across the sector.

Based on the Key Findings and Conclusions, this Evaluation recommends the following:

1. **Strengthening Organisational Culture and Leadership:** Establish comprehensive leadership engagement and cultural transformation approaches that embed safeguarding as organisational ownership rather than compliance-based individual responsibility.
2. **Enhancing Capacity-building Approaches**: Prioritise intensive mentorship-based capacity-building over digital-only approaches while implementing systematic strategies to mitigate staff turnover vulnerabilities.
3. **Improving Contextualisation and Accessibility**: Develop participatory translation and adaptation processes that move beyond linguistic conversion to encompass cultural and conceptual understanding through systematic plain language approaches.
4. **Addressing Network Access and Structural Barriers**: Fund inclusive governance reforms in safeguarding coordination mechanisms while systematically supporting CSO engagement in formal networks to overcome structural exclusion patterns.
5. **Optimising Digital Learning and Infrastructure**: Design infrastructure-responsive blended learning approaches that address regional connectivity inequities while providing comprehensive digital platform support and expanded in-person engagement.
6. **Building Sustainability from Inception**: Embed three-dimensional sustainability approaches addressing organisational capability building, PSEAH engagement continuity, and local handover processes from programme inception, while acknowledging contextual factors beyond programme control.
7. **Strengthening GEDSI Integration**: Develop adaptive GEDSI strategies for varied political contexts while investing in comprehensive accessibility infrastructure that requires sustained attention to cultural sensitivity beyond initial programme phases.
8. **Enhancing Programme Coordination**: Mandate explicit coordination mechanisms with existing government and sector-wide safeguarding structures while acknowledging the time requirements, resource constraints, and contextual factors that limit engagement beyond programme control.
9. **Supporting CSO Compliance and Accreditation**: Develop accreditation support mechanisms that help smaller CSOs demonstrate safeguarding capacity through accessible pathways without creating exclusionary processes.
10. **Strengthening Networks and Partnerships:** Expand RSH networks through strategic partnerships with research institutions, United Nations (UN) bodies, and international networks to increase CSO visibility and amplify smaller organisation perspectives in global safeguarding discourse.

11. Investing in Evidence and Learning Systems: Develop real-time learning and adaptive management systems that capture user experiences, contextual shifts, and marginalised actor feedback to enable responsive programme evolution.
12. Improving Exit Strategy and Transition Communication: Develop transparent communication strategies about programme duration while implementing comprehensive transition planning as a programme design requirement from inception, rather than as end-of-programme activities.

Lessons learned: The Lessons Learned are based on the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This Evaluation suggests the following as the key lessons learned:

- Cultural Transformation Requires Leadership Commitment Beyond Compliance: Leadership must drive change, not just enforce rules.
- Deep Contextualisation Outperforms Surface-Level Adaptation: Tailoring materials to local cultures works better than simple translation.
- Relationship-Based Capacity-building Generates Superior Outcomes: Face-to-face mentorship builds stronger, lasting skills than digital-only training.
- Intentional Inclusion Design Reaches Marginalised Groups Effectively: Proactive inclusive design ensures marginalised groups are truly reached.
- Peer Learning Networks Require Sustained Facilitation for Durability: Networks last longer with consistent support and structure.
- Infrastructure Disparities Require Adaptive Delivery Modalities: Blended delivery is needed to overcome digital access gaps.
- Structural Barriers Limit Individual Capacity-building Impact: Without addressing systemic issues, capacity-building alone falls short.
- Early Exit Planning Prevents Programme Disruption and Trust Erosion: Clear exit plans from the start preserve trust and programme impact.
- Knowledge Management Systems Mitigate Staff Turnover Impact: Systems, not just people, must hold institutional knowledge.
- Sector Coordination Requires Proactive Integration Design: Aligning with existing systems boosts sustainability and impact.
- Political Economy Constraints Shape Implementation Effectiveness: Programmes must adapt to political and cultural realities.
- Longer Programme Cycles Enable Deeper Transformation: Sustainable change needs more time than typical programme cycles allow.

2 Introduction

2.1 RSH Programme Overview

The RSH Programme is a UK FCDO-funded programme that aims to support organisations in the international development sector in strengthening their safeguarding measures against SEAH committed by their staff and associated personnel. The initiative was one of several initiatives funded by FCDO, then the Department for International Department (DFID), in 2019 as a result of the various SEAH "scandals" that were appearing in the press brought to the fore by whistleblowers who complained that they had suffered severe reprisals as a result of them raising sexual misconduct complaints against senior members of staff of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs)[1]. The total budget for RSH from FCDO was £9,999,637 as of 31 March 2025.

Evidence at the time indicated that the safeguarding support landscape was fragmented, and there was no centralised body, or one-stop shop, where less-resourced CSOs in developing countries could access resources and support to strengthen their safeguarding and SEAH prevention, reporting, and response practices. The RSH was designed to provide such a platform, consisting of a global online Hub that offers a repository of online tools, guidance, and resources on safeguarding against SEAH, including a consultant directory, webinars, and e-learning materials available in multiple languages.

Alongside this, there have been eight national Hubs established in Africa (Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Sudan), MENA (Jordan, Yemen, and Syria) and South Asia (Pakistan and Bangladesh) that have provided direct support to CSOs through contextualised resources, training, mentorship programmes, and an 'Ask an Expert' service. An Eastern European Hub was also established in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with funding provided by the DEC. This provided direct support to local CSOs in the aid sector through three national Hubs in Moldova, Poland, and Romania.

2.2 RSH Programme Objectives

The RSH Programme was designed around three outcomes that are outlined in the RSH Theory of Change (ToC) (**Error! Reference source not found.**):

1. **Dialogue:** Improving dialogue on safeguarding against SEAH amongst organisations in the aid sector to facilitate shared learning and raise awareness;
2. **Capacity**: Building the safeguarding capacity of less-resourced CSOs, including mainstreaming safeguarding within organisations and shifting organisational culture; and
3. **Evidence**: Generating evidence on what works in safeguarding against SEAH in the aid sector and making it accessible and contextualised to less-resourced CSOs, contributing to the global evidence base, where there are currently evidence gaps.

These outcome areas worked to reinforce, build, and accelerate progress towards the elimination of SEAH in the aid sector and the **restoration of trust in the international aid sector.** As described in the ToC, and in

[1] Naik, A. (2022, June). Tackling sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers: What has changed 20 years on? Humanitarian Practice Network Magazine (Issue 81) [Web article]. ODI.

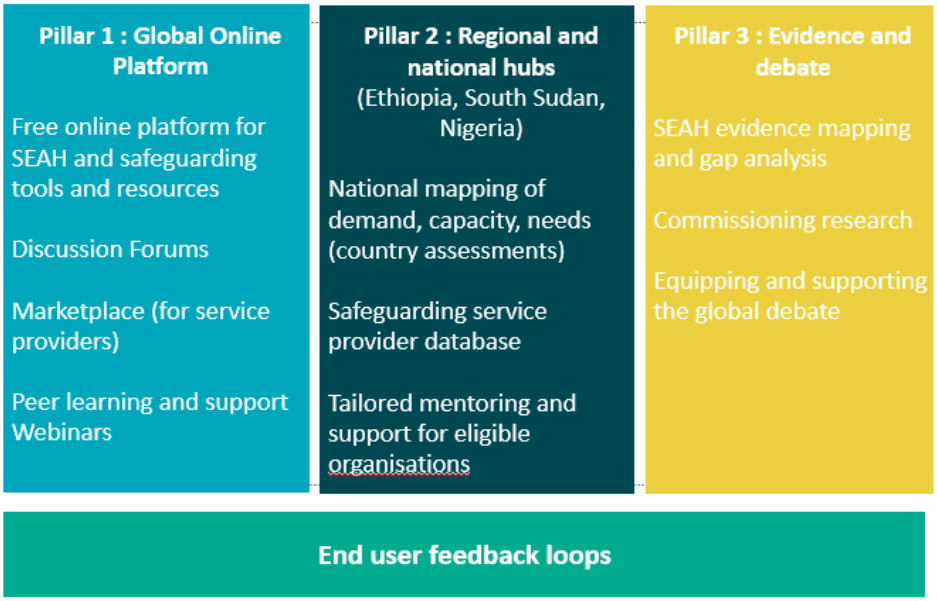
Section 2.1, RSH aimed to address the systemic problems of SEAH and safeguarding challenges in the aid sector, notably:

- A lack of inclusive discussion on SEAH with the sector;
- A lack of access to contextualised resources, evidence, and expertise;
- A disconnect between requirements for international standards and national legislation and policy on SEAH;
- A limited and fragmented evidence base with a lack of contextualised evidence on what works to prevent SEAH.

The RSH places a deliberate focus on less-resourced CSOs (those with fewer than 50 permanent staff), recognising their vital role as trusted, frontline actors within communities. These CSOs are often the most deeply embedded in local contexts and serve as key downstream partners in programme delivery. Yet, despite their proximity to the issues and people they serve, they are frequently overlooked when it comes to training, funding, and global networking opportunities. Many operate in isolation, with limited access to shared learning or the resources needed to strengthen their safeguarding practices.

To address these problems and achieve the outcomes and impacts outlined in the ToC, the RSH established three pillars under which activities were organised and structured: Pillar 1 – Global Online Platform; Pillar 2 – Regional and National Hubs; Pillar 3 – Evidence and Debate.[2]

Figure 1. RSH Pillar Breakdown



Cross-functionally, the RSH programme supported poverty reduction and inequality reduction, in line with the International Development Act (2014), by building the capability of organisations delivering poverty reduction programmes to prevent SEAH. Most victims-survivors of SEAH are women and girls, as well as people with protected characteristics. The RSH programme contributed to strengthening sector

2FCDO (2020) Resource and Support Hub: Annual Review. Internal Document.

accountability by building practical knowledge and awareness of and ultimately safeguarding against SEAH. In doing so, it has sought to help reduce harm to beneficiaries, particularly those most vulnerable, and restore trust in the organisations that deliver international aid and humanitarian assistance. It supported UK efforts to galvanise action to tackle critical safeguarding issues and ensure inclusive considerations are at the forefront of the sector's actions. The RSH programme has focused efforts to ensuring inclusive access to resources, and prioritised building capability on disability-inclusive safeguarding.

3 Purpose, Scope, and Objectives

3.1.1 Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of this endline Evaluation is to evaluate the performance of the RSH programme to date at the outcome level, to determine how far it has achieved the expected results, analyse the Value for Money (VfM) of the programme, and identify and capture key lessons and recommendations. It tests whether the RSH programme's ToC (Annex A) was a valid and effective approach for delivering outcomes that accelerate progress towards the elimination of SEAH and restoration of trust in the aid sector. The output will be used to provide key learnings to inform future FCDO delivery and programming concerning building organisational capability on safeguarding against SEAH. The RSH programme also developed a log frame (Annex B), which serves to clarify the cause-and-effect relationships among the various project components, ensuring that all efforts are aligned towards achieving specific objectives. It builds upon the ToC and translates the identified causal relationships proposed along the pathways into a structured, often visual representation, which focuses on specific, measurable components of the projects, outlining the direct relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, with a primary objective being to provide detailed criteria for monitoring and evaluation (M&E). When developed in conjunction with a ToC., the Results Framework (RF) serves as a robust tool that bridges the gap between conceptual planning and practical execution, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving the desired impact.

More specifically, this Evaluation provides the opportunity to inform the design and implementation of the three new programmes that the FCDO Safeguarding Unit (SGU) is currently developing. The primary purpose is to continue focusing on safeguarding against SEAH in the aid sector, with a proposed new programme dedicated to building organisational capability. This Evaluation will contribute to building the evidence base on what works in relation to capability-building approaches for safeguarding against SEAH in CSOs and other related entities, and FCDO will make the findings publicly available to support this.

This Evaluation is situated within the context of the aid sector more broadly, which recognises safeguarding, GEDSI, and human rights as central to effective development. At the international level, this Evaluation aligns with commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Nationally, it supports the UK's International Development Strategy, the 2014 International Development Act, and the FCDO's Safeguarding Strategy, which emphasise the importance of inclusive, rights-based approaches to development and humanitarian assistance.

This Evaluation incorporates a GEDSI lens through two primary dimensions. First, it examines gender equality by ensuring women's voices are meaningfully captured in the Evaluation methodology and by analysing the programme's approach to gender-responsive implementation. Second, it addresses social inclusion by focusing on the programme's reach to less-resourced CSOs and examining how these organisations engage with and serve marginalised groups within their communities. This includes the extent to which RSH effectively mapped and identified context-specific key vulnerable groups with whom to support CSOs in engaging and effectively engaging as the most vulnerable to SEAH. While the Evaluation explores these GEDSI dimensions, it is important to note that this is not an impact assessment designed to

measure the extent to which the RSH contributed to reductions in SEAH or to evaluate the specific impact of RSH interventions on particular communities. Instead, the GEDSI analysis serves to understand the programme's inclusivity and accessibility across different groups and organisational capacities.

3.2 Scope of the Evaluation

The scope of the Evaluation spans the duration of the RSH programme from its inception in 2019 until the programme's end date in April 2025. The RSH programme consists of two phases: Phase 1, during which the Central and Regional Hubs were formed and developed; and Phase 2, in which the sustainability of the regional Hubs was prioritised along with increasing outreach to CSOs and users.

- Geographic Scope: The Evaluation considers the programme's implementation across multiple countries and regions, assessing how context-specific factors influenced outcomes and sustainability of the Hubs. This includes South Asia, Eastern Europe, MENA, East Africa, and West Africa.
- Thematic Scope: The Evaluation assesses the programme's contributions to safeguarding against SEAH, with a strong focus on capability building of less-resourced CSOs at the local and regional levels.
- Stakeholder Engagement: The Evaluation includes perspectives from a diverse range of stakeholders, including local CSOs, implementing partners, and FCDO.
- Institutional and Systems Strengthening: The Evaluation explores how the RSH programme contributed to strengthening organisational and sector-wide safeguarding systems, policies, and practices, including capacity-building, accountability mechanisms, and increased engagement with wider networks.
- Strategic Alignment: The Evaluation considers how the programme aligned with and contributed to relevant local, national, and international safeguarding and development policies and initiatives.

3.3 Evaluation Objectives

The Evaluation objectives are:

1. To test whether the RSH programme ToC (Annex A) is a valid and effective approach for delivering outcomes of accelerating progress towards the elimination of SEAH and restoration of trust in the aid sector.
2. Assess the performance of the RSH programme at the outcome level (as set out in the programme log frame) as well as VfM.
3. Within the limitations of the Evaluation approach, provide any emerging considerations for the likelihood of achieving programme impact-level results.
4. Identify major lessons and strategic objective recommendations for future investments and initiatives to build organisational capability on safeguarding against SEAH.

The Evaluation Questions (see Section 5) were based on the suggested objectives in the Terms of Reference (ToR). The questions have been further refined to align more closely with the RSH ToC and logframe, which this Evaluation aims to assess,

4 Context

4.1 Global Level

Prior to the inception of the RSH, as outlined in the original Business Case, evidence suggested a lack of and fragmentation of safeguarding support in the aid sector. This was particularly acute in low- and middle-income countries, where lesser-resourced CSOs often lacked access to tools, resources, and capacity to strengthen their safeguarding policies, procedures, and practice. As a result, the RSH was established to address this critical gap and 'to strengthen organisational capacity and capability across the international aid sector' with a particular focus on less-resourced CSOs.[3]

At the global level, RSH has been delivered by Options and Social Development Direct (SDDirect), both based in the UK, and has been supported by several implementing partners, including the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) (Geneva), Terre des Hommes (TdH) (Innsbruck), Clear Global (Geneva), and Sightsavers (UK). The RSH has a clear mandate to build the capability of less-resourced CSOs to enable them to support safeguarding measures to keep people safe. The RSH comprises a global online resource Hub and eight regional Hubs that collectively provide a "one-stop shop" of tools, guidance, and resources for safeguarding against SEAH for CSOs. Additionally, RSH provides a wealth of written materials that are easily accessible and free to download, including tip sheets, guidance, and tools, as well as online and offline training and mentoring in over 10 languages, applicable in various settings within the development and humanitarian sectors.

4.1.1 Contextualising the RSH Evaluation in the capability building domain

The RSH supports CSOs in the humanitarian and development sectors in strengthening their safeguarding policies and practices to protect against SEAH. This positions the RSH as a leading actor among similar initiatives that aim to enhance the capacity and capability of CSOs and other organisations, particularly among those operating in resource-constrained environments and serving marginalised groups. The RSH's work is situated within the broader international development context that recognises safeguarding, GEDSI, and human rights as foundational to effective and ethical aid delivery. Within the many initiatives that seek to build the capacity of organisations working in the aid/development sector, there are some that focus on protection from SEAH and to drive up safeguarding standards globally. While this Evaluation focuses on the effectiveness of the RSH, rather than the successes, or otherwise, of other initiatives, it is important to identify where the RSH sits within the broader context of protecting against /prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PSEAH) in the aid/ development sector, including its added value and any complementarities.

There are two tables in the Evaluation to explain this analysis. Immediately below, Table 1 provides a brief set of some examples of how some other initiatives seek to meet these objectives and aims to give an outline indication of the domain in which the RSH operates, the possibilities for potential collaboration, and

[3] Government of the United Kingdom (2018, October 18). *Commitments made by donors to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the international aid sector* [PDF]. GOV.UK.

the unique contributions of RSH. These are detailed below in the fuller description of the various initiatives in Annex C.

The comparative analysis serves to provide a snapshot of where the RSH sits in the constellation of SEAH-specific initiatives, rather than to give a comprehensive analysis of all these initiatives. For example, (and in order to maintain the focus on the evaluation questions) briefing papers and training materials developed by – *inter alia* – the International Financial Institutions or those available through INGO's websites are not included in this analysis.

Table 1. SEAH Safeguarding Initiatives

Category	Initiative/Organisation	Primary Focus	Target Audience	Delivery Method
Guidance & Best Practice	Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)	Standard setting; guidance and promulgation of best practice.	Sector-wide standard-setting, albeit primarily aimed at humanitarian response.	Dissemination of standards; Policy guidance; tools
	Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (CAPSEAH)	Guidance based on best practice. Standardisation across the sector. Advocacy tool for governments and organisations.	Sector wide and peace sector, Organisations, governments and individuals.	Model of 'adopting' CAPSEAH. Non-binding.
	CHS Alliance	Guidance, research access, training, building accountability	Member organisations and sector-wide resources	Resources and training for members and others.
	Keeping Children Safe	Child protection guidance and training	Member organisations and sector-wide	Training programmes, resources
	UN Office of the Victims Rights Advocate (UN OVRA)	Development of policy and standards. Open access guidance and resources.	Primarily UN entities; also sector-wide organisations	Open access resources; influence through UN and other fora.
Specialised Training	Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) / Humentum Investigator	SEAH investigation professionalisation and standardisation.	Individual investigators within	Multi-tier online programme, webinars;

	Qualification Training Scheme	Resources (Handbook)	organisations or independently.	accreditation by examination.
	DIGNA	Capacity-building for Canadian organisations in the development sector context	Canadian development organisations	Resources and guidance
	INTRAC	General organisational development including safeguarding	Organisations Partnership with BOND.	Training programme.
	Open University/FutureLearn	Introductory training on safeguarding	Individuals	Online courses

In recent years, organisations in the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors have attempted to respond to the realisation of the risks of SEAH by developing a plethora of different safeguarding initiatives. These are led either by donor governments, single international organisations (such as the UN), or groups or networks of organisations (such as the IASC or the CHS Alliance). It is important, therefore, to identify the distinguishing factors between these initiatives and the RSH, to identify areas of distinction and/or duplication. A comparative analysis of the main, safeguarding initiatives demonstrates that, while other initiatives may share some objectives and characteristics with the RSH, the latter remains unique in terms of its ambition and *modus operandi* and the accessibility of its resources.

The RSH does not (and does not purport to) meet every requirement for improving safeguarding standards across the development/aid sector. The UNOVRA operates at the international level, with access to the main UN governance bodies, and is therefore better placed to drive up international standards. The UN's victim's rights centred approach, for instance, finalised after lengthy consultations and rigorous drafting, has been instrumental with regard to the 'victim-survivor centred approach', in turn adopted and promulgated by the CAPSEAH[4].

In another notable example of alignment on PSEAH across the aid and development sector, the CHS Alliance has comprehensively integrated addressing SEAH as a key part of the standard on quality and accountability to affected populations. It updated the index and made it available in multiple languages, developed a set of open-source resources, including a handbook, with free e-learning, and made adaptations so that the standards, guidance, and resources are applicable across the sector, in many languages.

[4] Currently hosted on the RSH website

Other initiatives also aim to drive up standards in specific areas, such as the initiative by the CHS Alliance and Humentum to improve and standardise organisations' approach to safeguarding investigations[5] and the CHS Alliance Harmonised Reporting Scheme.[6]

Anti-colonialisation: While several organisations' initiatives aim to adopt an anti-colonialisation approach to safeguarding, in keeping with the current drive for 'decolonialising' aid, the RSH remains the only initiative that has an explicit 'localisation' focus, in that it is primarily aimed at building the safeguarding capacity of CSOs in countries that are the target of development assistance, so that they can rely on themselves and others across networks of like-minded organisations and can, in turn, build the capacity of other national and local organisations. Linked to this, one of the distinguishing features of the RSH provision is that services and resources are available free of charge to all users and beneficiaries, regardless of whether they are formally associated with the RSH.

Target audience: The comparative analysis demonstrates that the RSH, while sharing some characteristics and objectives with some other initiatives, stands apart in that it intentionally targets under-resourced organisations, has a deliberate 'localisation' approach, and strives to build mutually supportive networks across organisations working closely with communities to improve standards on protecting against SEAH. It is clear from the comparative analysis that there is a need for policy development, tools, resources, and training across the sector, whether tailored for specific organisations within the sector or specific areas of safeguarding, and that the RSH sits well within this constellation.

The following is a brief description of the main comparator initiatives. They fall into the three main categories described below (with the RSH sitting within Category A):

Category A - Those which seek both to build organisational, safeguarding capacity and offer resources to other organisations

Category B - Those which seek to either provide support to organisations' safeguarding capacity or provide resources

Category C - Those which seek to improve or set safeguarding standards across the aid/development sector, although not providing organisational support or resources.

There is also a smaller group of initiatives by profit-making organisations that provide paid-for resources and training to individuals and organisations.[7]

4.1.1.1 Category A: (Capacity-building and resources)

The Canadian Centre of Expertise on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (DIGNA) is an initiative by the Canadian government that seeks to support, build the capacity of, and offer resources to Canadian and international organisations. Some of the resources provided have been developed by the DIGNA

[5] The Investigator Qualification Training Scheme (IQTS) is modular training initiative with accreditation for people conducting investigations into SEAH.

6 CHS Alliance. (n.d.). *Harmonised SEAH Data Collection and Reporting Scheme*. CHS Alliance. Retrieved July 29, 2025, from https://www.chsalliance.org/protection-from-sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-sexual-harassment/harmonised-seah/

[7] Global Safeguarding is an example of a profit-making initiative offering paid-for resources.

initiative, while others are reproduced from other organisations such as The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the IASC. Although tailored for Canadian organisations, most of the resources are likely to be useful to organisations in most contexts.

The Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance (CHSA) is a membership organisation for humanitarian organisations that provides resources (again, some reproduced, and others specifically designed). The CHS Alliance's emphasis is on humanitarian organisations and contexts, although much is transferable to the development sector. The CHSA, with Humentum and support from the UK government, has spearheaded the Investigation Qualification Training Scheme (IQTS) in an effort to set standards for investigations into SEAH. The training and accompanying handbook are applicable across different contexts. The CHSA charges a membership fee, but this is reduced for organisations that are small, unfunded, or from the Global South.

Keeping Children Safe (KCS) is also a membership initiative, aimed at improving organisational capacity for all aspects of child safeguarding. It provides a range of technical, training courses which are accessible by all and at a reduced rate for its members. It also provides many resources on an open-source basis and can provide tailored support to organisations. Membership fees can be waived for small or unfunded organisations or those working in conflict or other crisis contexts.

The CHS Alliance Harmonised Reporting Scheme is set up to meet the need for consistent identification of trends and patterns in SEAH. It offers some support to member organisations through webinars and a limited, advisory function.

4.1.1.2 Category B: (Either capacity-building or resources)

The IASC is a high-level, global network of humanitarian organisations, either in the UN or closely associated with UN entities. The IASC sets operational standards, including for the protection against SEAH, which are expected to shape humanitarian response globally. The IASC foundational documents on SEAH are applicable globally and within the development and peacekeeping sectors, as well as humanitarian operations. The IASC does not provide training or capacity-building to individual organisations, although its resources are available on an open-source basis and some are particularly designed to be used by CSOs working in humanitarian settings.

The Bond network is a membership organisation for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charities working in humanitarian settings. Membership fee is on a sliding scale depending on the member's size, location, and income. Bond has outsourced its training to INTRAC, including a small number of training sessions on SEAH, and it has a set of open-source resources for organisations to improve their safeguarding standards and procedures.

The Safeguarding Leads Network (SLN) is a free-to-join membership initiative for private sector (for-profit) organisations working on behalf of the UK government to implement Official Development Assistance (ODA) spend. The SLN is open to organisations globally, of all sizes and capacities, and provides peer-to-peer support, targeted webinars, and other events, and directs members to resources.

The UN Secretary General set up the UN-OVRA to address the continuing issue of SEA committed by UN personnel. Working with all UN entities, the Victim's Rights Advocate and her team work at the global level and in some countries to promote accountability for SEA and appropriate support to victims. While training and other resources are directed towards UN entities, they are available to all and can be adapted for different contexts.

INTRAC provides support to CSOs by way of training and consultancies, on a paid-for basis. Its training is both online and in person and covers a range of safeguarding issues.

Disaster Ready provides free, online training and other resources on a range of safeguarding issues – from the introductory level to more technical issues such as talking to child victims of traumatic events. Most of the training is 'bite-sized' and some is reproduced from other organisations' resources.

4.1.1.3 Category C: (Standard-setting without direct capacity-building or resources)

At the moment, just one initiative sits within this category, perhaps as an indication of the dynamic nature of efforts to address SEAH in the sector. The CAPSEAH is a policy and practice initiative. CAPSEAH is a global initiative aimed at creating a shared understanding and approach for organisations in the humanitarian, development, and peacekeeping sectors towards the protection (prevention and response) against SEAH, establishing recommended minimum actions, and providing detailed guidance to organisations, as well as governments and individuals, capturing best practices and reaffirming foundational standards. It addresses the need to organise and make more coherent issues such as the use of language in PSEAH; to have a common approach for governments, organisations, and individuals across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding, in any permutation of sudden-onset crises, protracted crises, and longer-term development contexts. CAPSEAH stands alone in this category as the sole current initiative of its kind aimed at SEAH; however, it is relevant to keep this category 'open' for future initiatives as the RSH and other efforts regarding PSEAH further evolve.

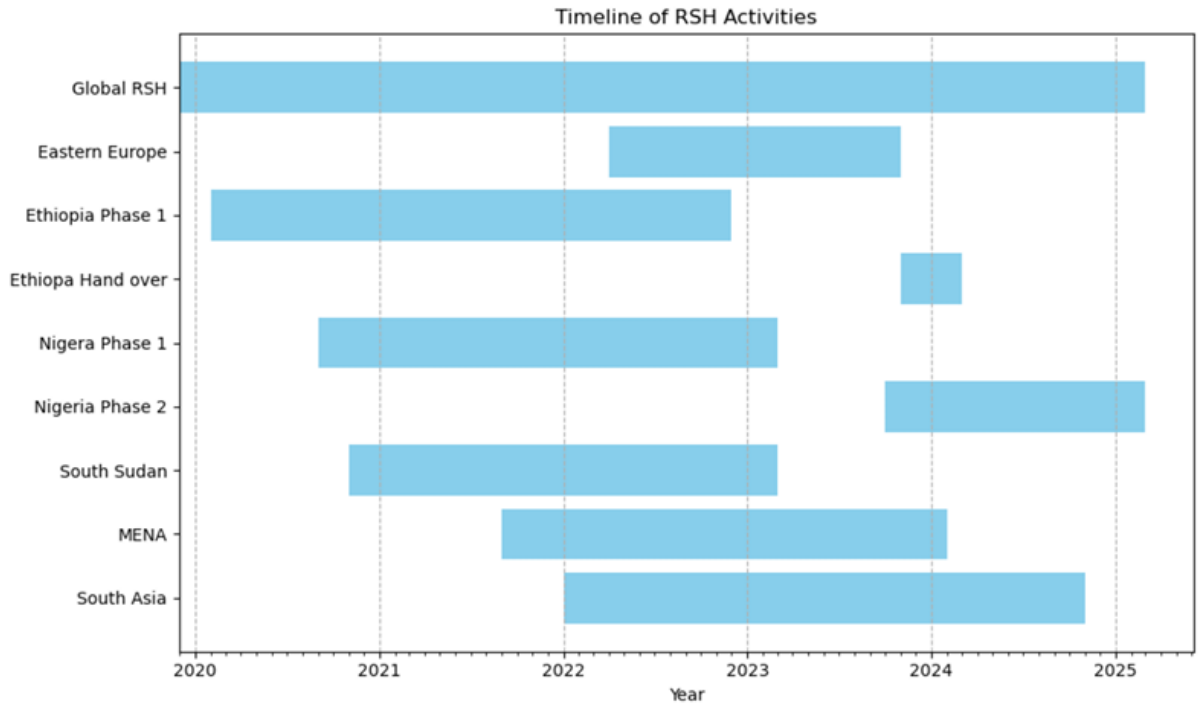
CAPSEAH is not a membership initiative, and although organisations are invited to 'endorse' CAPSEAH, it is not binding. The documents are intended to be used on a proportionate, contextual basis by smaller organisations as well as large, international or multi-lateral organisations, as well as governments. CAPSEAH has borrowed some key features and built on lessons from initiatives addressing sexual violence in conflict or gender-based violence (GBV) in humanitarian or development settings.

4.2 National Hubs

While the online global Hub provides contextually relevant resources and guidance, including a consultant's directory, webinars, and e-learning that are available in multiple languages, the national Hub's services were tailored, contextualised, translated, and blended to region/country-specific contexts. As indicated in Image 1 below, there were eight national hubs, three in Africa (Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Sudan), three in MENA (Jordan, Yemen and Syria) and two in South Asia (Pakistan and Bangladesh) that have provided direct support to CSOs, including contextualised and translated resources and guidance, regional research, mentorship programmes, a free 'Ask an Expert' service, and Communities of Practice. An Eastern European Hub was also established in response to the invasion of Ukraine, which was in operation from April 2022 to October 2023.

The establishment of the regional Hubs was intentionally staggered to promote lessons learned between Hubs as they were established. The RSH's national strategic priorities were based on evidence from a Country Assessment, which was validated by a National Expert Board (NEBs) and ongoing user feedback.

Image 1. Timeline of RSH Activities



4.2.1 MENA Regional Hub

The RSH Hub in the MENA region was established in response to ongoing safeguarding concerns in the region. MENA has faced extensive and complex challenges over the past decade, with conflicts, economic crises, and political instability displacing millions and putting substantial pressure on local communities and public services. With a population of approximately 500 million in 2024, nearly 18.1% live in poverty, with significantly higher figures in conflict-affected areas such as Yemen and Syria.[8] Widespread displacement paired with socio-economic vulnerability has increased the risks of SEAH across the region.[9] Across the region, traditional gender norms rooted in patriarchy further exacerbate these vulnerabilities, particularly for women and children, who are disproportionately affected.[10] Moreover, SEAH incidents are frequently underreported due to societal stigmas surrounding sexual abuse, which can lead to victim-blaming, shame, and social exclusion when cases are disclosed.[11] Syria, Yemen, and Jordan represent crucial points within this context, where SEAH risks are particularly severe due to intersecting issues of poverty, limited educational opportunities, cultural pressures, and natural disasters.

[8] International Rescue Committee. (2014, September). *Are we listening? Acting on our commitments to women and girls affected by the Syrian conflict* [PDF].
[9] International Rescue Committee, 2014, *Are we listening?*
[10] Ibid
[11] United Nations Population Fund. (2024, November). *Voices from Syria* 2024 [PDF]. UNFPA Arab States Regional Office.

The RSH regional hub was established as a response to growing SEAH challenges, driven by the need to provide safeguarding measures for affected populations, and this was boosted by the recommendation of the RSH Annual Review in 2021 to expand its geographic reach to the MENA region.[12] Following this, the RSH National Hubs in MENA were established, and the RSH team conducted SEAH country assessments and reports in Jordan, Yemen, and Syria, and identified critical gaps, such as stigma, under-reporting, and inadequate survivor-centred mechanisms. These findings informed the Hub's primary focus, which included training local organisations on safeguarding, establishing reporting pathways, and facilitating multi-agency collaboration to strengthen safeguarding efforts across the region.[13] Additionally, the RSH MENA Hub facilitated professional dialogues through webinars and roundtables, creating platforms for collaboration among CSOs, governments, and international stakeholders, which emphasised shared learning and regional good practice.

4.2.2 South Asia Regional Hub

South Asia is the fastest-growing region in the world, with 24% of the world's population (1.8 billion), including 40% of the world's poor. The region faces challenges of low education levels and high levels of child trafficking, child labour (including domestic child labour), early marriage, unsafe migration, and slavery and servitude, coupled with humanitarian crises caused by conflicts and climate change, exposing its inhabitants, particularly women and children, to SEAH.[14,15] According to a UNICEF report, 1 in 4 young women in South Asia were married before their 18th birthday, 70% to 90% experienced violent discipline at home and at school, and 30 to 50% reported being bullied.[16] This context poses a number of challenges when working on safeguarding capacity and capability building in South Asia. In addition, when working within patriarchal and hierarchical organisational structures in the region, there is an absence of effective policies and procedures, inadequate funding, and a lack of allocation of resources to SEAH specialists.

The South Asia RSH Hub was established in 2022 to address existing safeguarding challenges in the region, with a particular focus on Pakistan and Bangladesh. The RSH Hub in South Asia operates in a complex dynamic with CSOs as well as with other initiatives working in the region. In South Asia, RSH established Hubs in Pakistan and Bangladesh with a Regional Representative, National Representatives, Communications and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) expertise. The Hub activities included webinars, podcasts, and training on key safeguarding topics; posting contextual and translated material on the South Asia website; six-month mentorship schemes for CSOs; tri-lingual quarterly newsletters; an 'Ask an Expert' service for any SEAH safeguarding challenges; and a Safeguarding Consultants Directory. The availability of safeguarding resources in local languages and published research on safeguarding and PSEAH is limited. This approach was also validated in terms of considering the overall digital access and digital inclusion profile.

4.2.3 Ethiopia and South Sudan Hubs

[12] FCDO (2021) Resource and Support Hub: Annual Review. Internal Document.
[13] Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (n.d.). The state of safeguarding in MENA.
[14] *The Daily Star. (n.d.). South Asia in a changing world*.
[15] ECPAT International. (n.d.). *Regional overview: South Asia.*
[16] UNICEF. (n.d.). Child protection in South Asia.

In East Africa, protracted conflicts and the impacts of climate change, such as drought and flooding, are risks that contribute to the displacement and dependency on aid for vulnerable communities and increase the risk of SEAH. According to the UN OCHA, over 10 million people in Ethiopia required humanitarian assistance in 2024, with women and girls facing elevated risks of GBV and SEAH in displacement settings.[17] The UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan has repeatedly documented the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, and the IASC has identified South Sudan as one of the highest-risk countries for SEAH in humanitarian operations.[18] Along with these contextual factors, social norms that promote male superiority and patriarchal thinking are reinforced by the ineffective functioning of both formal and informal justice systems in the region.

The RSH Hubs in East Africa were established to address the fragmented approach to SEAH. Unlike other regions, there is no "East African Hub", but rather national Hubs in Ethiopia, which was set up in late 2019, and in South Sudan, established in September 2020.[19] In Ethiopia, RSH identified capability-building activities that enhanced and complemented organisational activities with communication, coordination, and collaboration. RSH supported the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) network and identified ways to build a community of practice that reached a much wider range of CSOs, serving as a convener to achieve a common understanding on SEAH, including clarity around definitions, elements, and common tools in local languages. The programme worked to improve the overall capability of mentors and mentees through CSOs, measured by a detailed Organisation Capacity Assessment process with 16 indicators. The achievements of the RSH Hubs in Ethiopia and South Sudan included 80% of participating organisations improving in their safeguarding policies and procedures and training in adherence to national legislation and international safeguarding standards.

4.2.4 Nigeria National Hub

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the sixth most populous globally, with a current population of 234,414,869.[20] The country faces significant challenges regarding SEAH, despite its rich cultural and natural resources. The rise of SEAH incidents in Nigeria can be attributed to weak legal frameworks, inadequate enforcement, societal stigma, and insufficient data. SEAH prevalence in Nigeria is highlighted by reports from organisations like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which noted in 2019 that 30% of Nigerian women aged 15-49 have experienced some form of sexual abuse.[21] Human trafficking is also a critical issue, with Nigeria serving as both a source and destination for trafficked victims.[22] The Boko Haram insurgency has exacerbated these problems since its beginning in 2009, resulting in widespread human rights abuses, including sexual violence, abduction, and forced

[17]UN OCHA (2024) Ethiopia - Situation Report.

[18] UN News (2022) *South Sudan: 'hellish existence' for women and girls, new UN report reveals*.

[19] This Evaluation does not include the South Sudan Hub. Due to the length of time since the Hun closed and the lack of up to date available information of participants, FCDO agreed to remove the South Sudan Hub.

[20] Nigeria population (Live). (n.d.). Worldometers.

[21] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2023, November 25). *Promoting accountability for sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria – International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women* [Web article]. UNODC Country Office Nigeria.

[22] International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Nigeria. (2024). *Vulnerabilities of trafficking victims: Q1 2024 report*. IOM.

conversions.[23] However, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, enacted in 2015, represents a significant legislative effort, but its implementation is inconsistent across states.[24]

The Nigeria National Hub complements the work in the RSH Hubs in Ethiopia and South Sudan. The Nigeria Hub was established in September 2020 to address significant gaps in safeguarding practices among local CSOs. The Hub aims to enhance the capability of local organisations to implement effective SEAH safeguarding measures, ensuring safer programming and operations. Key activities in Nigeria include a comprehensive Country Assessment, the launch of an online Hub providing tailored tools and resources, and direct support through safeguarding mentorship programmes. The Hub has also engaged a wide range of stakeholders, like CSO leaders, key networks such as the Nigeria Network NGO, government partners, and private sector partners, through events and media channels. The Hub also commissioned research on safeguarding practices among Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and launched several support services and initiatives.

4.2.5 Eastern Europe Regional Hub

The ongoing war in Ukraine has triggered one of the largest displacement crises in Europe since World War II. This has significantly intensified the safeguarding needs across Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. There have been 8.19 million reported crossings from Ukraine to Poland alone, since February 2022, with millions more displaced in other neighbouring countries as well as internally in Ukraine.[25] Vulnerable groups, including women, children, the elderly, Roma communities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals, and people with disabilities, are at heightened risk of violence, trafficking, and exploitation, particularly during transit and settlement. These risks are particularly acute during transit, border crossings, and in temporary shelters, where protection systems may be overwhelmed or under-resourced. The complexities of displacement underscore the urgent requirement for trauma-informed, survivor-centred coordinated safeguarding approaches.

The Eastern European RSH Hub was established in direct response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Eastern European Hub operated under the RSH framework and implemented the same activities as the other RSH Hubs, but was funded by the DEC, not by FCDO. The Eastern European Hub operated from April 2022 to October 2023, with three national Hubs in Moldova, Poland, and Romania. SEAH risk assessments were conducted in multiple countries, identifying key risk factors such as unregulated volunteer activity, lack of privacy in shelters, and gaps in online safety for refugees, which informed the design of the Hub activities. The RSH Eastern European Hub provided SEAH training for NGO staff with an emphasis on inclusivity, trauma-informed care, and non-discrimination. The Eastern Europe Hub tackled issues of inadequate SEAH awareness, limited trauma-sensitive support, and coordination gaps across aid networks. There was also support for improving documentation access, including simplified processes for Roma refugees to obtain identification and access essential services. The work of the RSH Hub in Eastern Europe contributed to the wider ecosystem of safeguarding interventions that are taking place as a response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

[23] International Crisis Group. (2016, September 28). *Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram insurgency* [Web report].
[24] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (n.d.). *UNODC handover resource tools to Ministry of Justice SGBV Prosecution Hub to fight and prosecute rape and other sexual violence-related offences* [Web article]. UNODC Nigeria.
[25] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2023, June 14). *Global report 2022* [PDF]. UNHCR.

5 Evaluation Design, Methods, and Analysis

This section outlines the final Evaluation methods and analytical approach adopted for the study. The approach was developed during the inception phase and remained largely consistent throughout the Evaluation. However, some revisions were necessary to account for factors such as the availability of stakeholder data and regional variations in response rates. A comprehensive overview of the Evaluation design, methodologies, and analytical procedures is available in Annex D.

5.1 Evaluation Approach

During the Inception Period, the ET developed an Evaluation Framework, which is outlined in Annex E. The Evaluation Framework aligns the Evaluation Questions, Sub-questions, and OECD-DAC criteria, as shown in Annex F. This Evaluation Framework was used in the design of the data collection tools and to structure the analytical frameworks for both qualitative and quantitative data. The Evaluation Framework has been updated to include the indicators for each stakeholder category, per EQ, as well as the data collection and analysis methods for each sub-question. It also forms the structure of the Evaluation findings found in Section 7 below. The EQ's have stayed the same since the Inception Report was approved; they include:

- Effectiveness (EQ1): To what extent has the RSH programme achieved its intended outcomes and improved safeguarding practices in the aid sector?
- Relevance (EQ2): To what extent do RSH users have access to SEAH-related, contextualised resources, guidance, and services (including blended learning)?
- Efficiency (EQ3): To what extent has the RSH programme effectively and efficiently used its resources to deliver intended outputs and outcomes?
- Impact (EQ4): To what extent is there evidence of significant long-term changes or contributions of the RSH programme toward eliminating SEAH in the aid sector?
- Sustainability (EQ5): To what extent are the outcomes and benefits of the RSH programme likely to be sustained by CSOs, regional Hubs, and other stakeholders after the programme concludes?
- Coherence (EQ6): To what extent are the RSH programme activities consistent with the objectives and ToC and between RSH Global and hubs (vertically and horizontally)?

The Evaluation Framework (Annex E) highlights a secondary EQ specifically focused on cross-cutting issues and GEDSI, which is separate from the main EQs structured around the OECD-DAC Criteria. The main cross-cutting EQ is: *How effectively has the RSH programme integrated gender, inclusion, and equity considerations into its design and implementation?* This question is answered in Section. 7 of this report.

This Evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach, drawing on qualitative, quantitative, and secondary data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding to evaluate the RSH programme. The primary emphasis was placed on qualitative data, supplemented by quantitative insights from the programme's Annual User Survey and VfM cost analysis.

The qualitative data involved an extensive set of KIIs and FGDs conducted across regions. This data formed the core evidence base for assessing the programme's relevance, effectiveness, and contribution to outcomes. Document analysis of key programme materials, such as the RSH Country Assessments, Legacy Reports, and Annual Reports, was also used to triangulate findings and support interpretation.

An online survey was conducted with Consultants on the RSH Database, which consisted of both quantitative and qualitative responses, and this was followed by several KIIs with the consultants to further contribute to the primary data collection.

Three in-depth case studies (Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS) regions) were also developed to provide illustrative insights into local ownership, adaptation, and uptake of skills and knowledge. These studies supported both the contribution and comparative analysis dimensions of the Evaluation.

The Inception Report proposed to conduct a contribution and comparative analysis for this Evaluation. The purpose of this was to understand how and why the RSH programme achieved its outcomes across diverse regional contexts. By exploring the causal pathways between programme interventions and observed outcomes, while accounting for internal factors like design and leadership, and external influences such as socio-cultural dynamics, funding, and environmental factors, the Evaluation aimed to validate the RSH ToC, uncover what worked, what didn't, and why. This approach was intended to enable a comparison of Hub performance across geographies, isolating region-specific enablers and barriers, and identifying shared drivers of success, thereby strengthening evidence-based recommendations for future safeguarding efforts.

This approach was largely implemented as intended. However, as outlined in the full methodology (Annex D) and the limitations section, data collection challenges in specific regions, particularly Ethiopia and Eastern Europe, limited the ability to conduct a full comparative analysis, due to underrepresentation in the data collection sample. As a result, while the Evaluation addresses each of the EQs across all Hub regions, it does so by highlighting key similarities and differences and exploring potential drivers behind them, rather than undertaking a comprehensive comparative assessment.

Table 2. Evaluation Approach Overview

Evaluation Approach	
Data Collection	**Data Analysis**
Primary data **79** KIIs **9** FDGs **52** responses in Consultant Survey **Secondary data** RSH 2022 and 2024 Annual User Survey Global and National Hub Cost Data RSH published and internal documents Literature review of sector-relevant publications	**Qualitative data analysis** - Coding on Dedoose **Comparative Analysis of different safeguarding initiatives** – Desk-based literature review **Annual User Survey** – Mapping against EQs and triangulating with primary qualitative data **Programme Cost Analysis and VfM** – delivery costs and key cost drivers across the programme

An Analysis of Factors Contributing to Achievement of RSH Objectives

The internal and external factors that contributed to enhancing or constraining the achievement of RSH outcomes at the global or regional/ national level.

Comparative Analysis

Shared drivers of success and barriers across regions, as well as positioning the RSH in the wider landscape of initiatives working on safeguarding and capability building in the aid sector.

Data Triangulation

Validating data across multiple sources and methods, including the use of primary and secondary data, and the use of a mixed methods approach drawing on KIIs, FGDs, surveys, and VfM data.

GEDSI Analysis

Particular attention has been paid to references involving work with women, people with disabilities, youth, LGBTQ+ groups, and other at-risk populations, allowing for meaningful insights into inclusion and equity even without formal respondent-level disaggregation.

Case Studies

Three in-depth Case Studies to provide an understanding of specific aspects of the RSH programme's outcomes and implementation processes, and supplementary evidence on specific areas not covered in this analysis.

5.2 Evaluation Design

Engagement with FCDO and RSH

The Evaluation approach was developed in close collaboration with FCDO and the RSH Global Hub and formally approved after the Inception Report. This engagement shaped the Evaluation Framework and helped identify key stakeholder groups and data gaps. Limited data access, especially in Ethiopia and Eastern Europe, posed challenges due to hub closures and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), but ongoing support from FCDO and RSH helped the team navigate emerging issues.

Tool Development, Testing, and Training

Tailored data collection tools were created and reviewed by the Safeguarding Expert to ensure they were appropriate and inclusive. Tools were translated into local languages and tested in Nigeria, leading to refinements. Regional Leads helped adapt tools to each context, and the team received training on using them effectively. A mid-point review allowed for further adjustments based on early findings.

5.3 Data collection

The following highlights the key steps followed in the data collection processes across the national, regional, and global levels of this Evaluation. Annex G provides an overview of each of the stakeholder categories identified for this Evaluation and the purpose of their engagement.

Regional Stakeholder Engagement

Regional Leads were responsible for identifying and engaging stakeholders using lists provided by RSH teams. These lists varied by region and were often incomplete due to hub closures, outdated contact details, or data protection rules (especially in Eastern Europe under GDPR). In MENA and South Asia, access to stakeholders was better, and local research assistants supported interviews in local languages. Stakeholders engaged included CSOs (mentored and non-mentored), NEB members, mentors, investigators, and RSH staff, with some regional variation based on activity type and respondent availability.

Global Stakeholder Engagement

KIIs were held with global stakeholders, including the RSH Global Hub partners, DEC, FCDO, and in-country FCDO safeguarding reps. These were selected in collaboration with RSH and FCDO. FGDs were initially proposed but deemed unnecessary as targeted KIIs covered the required insights. Additional focused interviews were conducted by the VfM Expert. The RSH team remained engaged throughout and supported the identification of in-country respondents. Emerging findings were presented to both FCDO and the RSH team to inform future phases of the programme.

Participant Selection Approach

A systematic, Excel-based random sampling method was used to disaggregate stakeholders by country, gender, and type, then randomly select respondents to ensure balanced representation. Gender and geographic diversity were considered for individual interviews, while less-resourced CSOs were prioritised for FGDs to capture typically underrepresented perspectives.

Consultant Survey Process

An online survey was sent to 133 RSH Directory-listed consultants, with 52 responses received. After screening out ineligible respondents (e.g., no RSH engagement, incomplete responses), four consultants ultimately participated in follow-up KIIs. Though fewer interviews were conducted than planned, the process helped explore the perspectives of independent consultants linked to the programme.

5.4 Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

A detailed coding framework was developed to analyse KII and FGD data consistently across regions. Analysts used software to code the data, tested the framework first with a pilot, and held regular meetings to ensure quality. Findings were first analysed by region, then compared across regions and triangulated with other data sources. The full coding framework can be found in Annex H.

RSH Annual User Survey

The RSH conducted surveys from 2022 and 2024, which provided feedback on RSH services, mainly from NGO and CSO users. The data was analysed using Power BI dashboards and matched with themes from interviews. Some data limitations mean findings should be interpreted carefully, but they add valuable insights when combined with other evidence.

Programme Cost Analysis and VfM

A cost and VfM analysis was completed using financial data and interviews. Because not all financial details were available, the focus was on key cost areas and drivers. Qualitative feedback also helped explain how resources were used across the programme.

Data Triangulation

The team cross-checked findings from different sources, like interviews, surveys, and documents, to confirm accuracy and reduce bias. While stronger data came from some regions than others, no major inconsistencies were found, and the approach helped ensure well-rounded conclusions.

5.5 Case Studies

In line with the Evaluation ToR, three Case Studies were developed to provide focused insights into specific aspects of the RSH programme that were not fully captured through the broader evaluation. These Case Studies generate deeper learning on regionally relevant issues and offer standalone evidence on key areas of interest for FCDO and other interested stakeholders.

The ET, in consultation with Regional Leads, identified emerging themes during primary data collection that merited further exploration. The Evaluation ToR specified that the case studies include examples from Ethiopia, South Asia, Eastern Europe, and MENA. Through collaboration with Regional Leads, the following Case Study topics were identified:

- South Asia (Pakistan): The uptake of safeguarding skills and knowledge by CSOs, with a particular focus on the mentorship model.
- Ethiopia: The transition to local ownership, highlighting the experience of national partner Hiwot and the sustainability of locally led approaches.
- Eastern Europe and MENA: The adaptability of the RSH model in FCAS countries.

The ET drafted ToRs for each Case Study, which were reviewed and quality assured by the QA Lead and Safeguarding Lead. These drafts were then further examined by the FCDO RSH Team and key members of the FCDO SGU. Following FCDO approval of the final ToRs, any necessary supplementary data collection was conducted. Each Case Study draws on: primary data from KIIs and FGDs conducted for the main evaluation; RSH programme documentation; and targeted follow-up interviews where data gaps were identified.

The complete Case Studies are presented in Annex I, and their corresponding ToRs can be found in Annex J. The Case Studies have been produced to act as standalone supplementary documents to the Evaluation.

5.6 GEDSI

While the Evaluation did not apply a formal disaggregation model (e.g., by age, gender, socioeconomic status, or disability status) during data analysis, efforts were made to capture the diversity of respondent perspectives. Rather than coding based on demographic categories, the analysis focused on understanding how respondents, such as CSO staff, consultants, or hub implementers, engaged with or supported marginalised or underrepresented groups. This approach enabled the ET to consider the relevance and reach of the RSH programme through a GEDSI lens without overextending the granularity of available data. Throughout the qualitative coding process, particular attention was paid to references involving work with

women, people with disabilities, youth, LGBTQ+ groups, and other at-risk populations, allowing for meaningful insights into inclusion and equity even without formal respondent-level disaggregation. Section 7.7 of this report provides the GEDSI analysis of the RSH programme.

5.7 Limitations and Quality Assurance (QA)

Data Collection Limitations – Contacting Respondents

The Evaluation faced challenges reaching respondents in Ethiopia, Eastern Europe, and South Sudan. In Ethiopia, many contacts were outdated due to the passage of time since RSH activities ended. In Eastern Europe, GDPR restrictions meant participant data had been deleted, severely limiting outreach. Primary data collection was not conducted in South Sudan due to the lack of a viable stakeholder list. As such, the South Sudan hub is predominantly excluded from this Evaluation; however, references to it are made when discussing the Annual User Survey. Gender-balanced FGDs were difficult in some areas: Nigeria lacked male mentee participation, while South Asia had a smaller sample of female mentees. In MENA, male and female FGDs were possible in Jordan, but only male FGDs occurred in Syria and Yemen; KIIs were conducted with women to help address this gap. These constraints limit the generalisability and comparability of findings, especially in Ethiopia and Eastern Europe.

Annual User Survey – Limitations

The Annual User survey results are based on a very small fraction (0.04%) of the total platform user base, limiting representativeness and raising the margin of error. Self-selection introduced selection bias, and the potential overlap in respondents between survey years (2022–2024) further undermines comparability over time. Design issues include allowing multiple countries and hub affiliations, as well as complicated demographic analysis. Survey questions focused on platform features rather than impact, and often implied a causal link between RSH resources and user knowledge gains without substantiating that relationship. Future surveys would benefit from a design that focuses on learning and impact directly related to RSH's services and activities, such as mentorships and trainings, rather than a focus on web services, as well as a clear delineation of demographic details, i.e., hub affiliations. It could also be advantageous to implement the survey on a quarterly or bi-annual basis or triangulate the survey with other surveys pre- and post-mentorship or training activities.

Evaluation Quality Assurance

QA was integrated throughout the Evaluation. All data tools were reviewed by the Team Leader (TL), Deputy Team Leader (DTL), and Safeguarding Expert for clarity and contextual fit. The Regional Leads received training on ethical data collection. Transcripts were verified for completeness before inclusion in the analysis. Intercoder reliability was strengthened through piloting, calibration meetings, and oversight by the DTL. The QA Lead and Safeguarding Leads reviewed draft outputs, and triangulation across data sources helped confirm findings and reduce bias. An overview of the strength of our evidence for the evaluation findings, which led to the evaluation conclusions and recommendations, has been outlined in Annex K.

6 Ethics and Safeguarding

6.1 Ethics

The ET approach to ethics and safeguarding was based on the DFID/FCDO Quality Standards, which provide a framework for Evaluation ethics. The foundational principles of this ethical approach were as follows:

- Ensuring M&E activities maximise impact while minimising harm.
- Respecting people's dignity and rights.
- Addressing concerns related to gender, age, ethnicity, disability, geographic location, ability, and socioeconomic status as they arose.
- Acting with honesty, competence, and accountability.
- Delivering work with integrity and merit.

In addition, the ET is committed to adhering to further detailed principles from the United Nations Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation, including independence, impartiality, and responsiveness.

The Evaluation Manager distributed the FCDO Ethical Guidance for Research, Evaluation, and Monitoring Activities during the inception period and stored relevant documents in the shared repository, enabling team members to revisit them as needed. Throughout the project, the ET was dedicated to ethical standards, including confidentiality and informed consent. Moreover, the ET was able to work freely, and the ET conducted the interviews almost all remotely, to ensure the safety of the consultants and had no external interference from any external stakeholders. Finally, the ET had no conflicts of interest. As mentioned previously, the ET deliberately held a separate presentation with the RSH and the FCDO to avoid any potential for the introduction of bias.

6.2 Safeguarding

Alinea's comprehensive policy and guidelines library includes policies on social responsibility, data protection, whistleblowing, modern slavery, and free, prior, and informed consent. All personnel on the ET were bound by these policies, which were explicitly outlined in their contracts with Alinea International.

Throughout the Evaluation, the ET adhered to Alinea's Safeguarding Policy, which is aligned with FCDO safeguarding standards. This policy was shared directly with all team members and any respondents involved in the study. A link to corporate training on safeguarding was shared with the ET team during the inception period, and all team members and partners contracted under the RSH Evaluation project were made aware of the designated Safeguarding Officer, Katya Kerrison, along with her contact details.

Safeguarding approaches were integrated throughout the project. To ensure our data collection adhered to safeguarding best practices and to ensure all the ET members were fully equipped to conduct the data collection, we conducted a small group training session on safeguarding in data collection. The session was led by the Safeguarding Expert and focused on how to approach sensitive topics, ensure all voices are heard, use of language, and support the respondents and data collectors in case the KIIs and FGDs focused on distressing issues. The Regional Leads and Research Assistants could ask any questions they had, and

the Safeguarding Expert made herself available to all the Regional Leads and Research Assistants should they need to contact her during the data collection phase with more questions.

All respondents, whether taking part in KIIs or FGDs, were required to sign a Consent Form before any data collection. Developed with input from the Safeguarding Expert, the form was shared via a link and included details about respondents' rights, such as the right to withdraw at any time, request that their responses not be used, and assurances of data privacy and anonymisation. Consent was confirmed through an online response database, accessible to the Regional Leads and Evaluation Manager. Additionally, a Participant Information Form, also reviewed for safeguarding standards, was sent to collect demographic data like age, gender, and region. Submission of both forms was monitored and verified by the Regional Leads and the Evaluation Manager.

6.3 Data Collection and Storage

In alignment with the Principles for Digital Development outlined in the FCDO Digital Development Strategy 2024–2030, our approach prioritised ethical, inclusive, and context-driven design and deployment of digital tools. We applied responsible data practices throughout, ensuring data integrity, privacy, and confidentiality were upheld at every stage. Consent was obtained transparently, and data collection was limited to what was necessary and relevant. Ethical considerations were embedded in the design process, with particular attention given to safeguarding risks, digital inclusion, and the equitable use of technology to support local ownership and trust.

Data collection involved gathering information from various stakeholders and external sources, including documents, interviews, surveys, and project performance outcomes. To maintain an ethical approach and ensure the ET was implementing a "do no harm" approach, the data collection tools included privacy measures, which were communicated to respondents before obtaining their consent to participate in interviews, and all respondents were made aware that they could withdraw at any time. The Evaluation did not collect primary data from vulnerable community members, nor did the report require formal approval from an Ethical or Institutional Review Board. As such, safeguarding risks were minimal. Moreover, the ET carefully assessed potential risks and implemented safeguarding measures to protect respondents from physical, emotional, or psychological harm.

Most interviews were conducted remotely through private online discussions, ensuring limited exposure and risk to respondents, as well as no physical security threat to the ET or respondents. All data collected was securely stored in an encrypted file system, with access restricted through password protection. Respondent details were anonymised before storage, and only the Central Research Hub, had access to the original files. Each respondent was assigned a unique identifier in the dataset before analysis to ensure their privacy throughout the reporting phase. Finally, in the reporting, the ET intentionally provided specific information on the participant but omitted any information that may identify the participant's information. To preserve anonymity throughout this evaluation, the referencing format for KII and FGD respondents is: KII/FGD_REGION_RESPONDENT TYPE.

7 Evaluation Findings

7.1 EQ1: To what extent has the RSH programme achieved its intended outcomes and improved safeguarding practices in the aid sector?

Table 3. Overview of the key findings for EQ1

OECD DAC Criteria - Effectiveness	
EQ1: To what extent has the RSH programme achieved its intended outcomes and improved safeguarding practices in the aid sector?	
Main Finding	The RSH made significant progress towards each of the three primary outcomes of improved dialogue, capacity, and evidence; however, less-resourced CSOs still face structural barriers to connecting with safeguarding networks, sustaining internal changes, and accessing evidence.
Key Finding 1.1	Across most regions, the RSH was successful in fostering dialogue around the issue of SEAH and contributing to changes in organisational culture to mainstream protection against SEAH.
Key Finding 1.2	Many CSOs now demonstrate improved organisational capacity to safeguard against SEAH and have noticeably contributed to greater awareness of SEAH in their operating environment.
Key Finding 1.3	The RSH Global Hub has made significant progress towards producing evidence and learning related to SEAH in the aid sector; however, there is further scope to improve the national or regional contextualisation of this evidence base.
Unintended/ unexpected finding	While research and evidence pieces driven by in-country demand and specific needs produced valuable, context-specific publications, their accessibility to intended users remains unclear due to how they are presented and distributed.

The RSH ToC identifies three key outcomes, these are:

- Improving **dialogue** on safeguarding against SEAH amongst organisations in the aid sector to facilitate shared learning and raise awareness;
- Building the safeguarding **capacity** of less-resourced CSOs, including mainstreaming safeguarding within organisations and shifting organisational culture; and
- Generating **evidence** on what works in safeguarding against SEAH in the aid sector and making it accessible and contextualised to less-resourced CSOs, contributing to the global evidence base, where there are currently particular evidence gaps.

This Evaluation examined progress across these outcomes. Overall, the Evaluation found that the RSH made substantial progress towards achieving these intended outcomes, particularly among CSOs that participated in the mentorship programme or accessed the Ask an Expert service, where support was more tailored and hands-on. However, barriers remain, including challenging and dynamic operating

environments, ongoing limitations in the contextualisation of tools and resources, and slow or uneven progress in embedding safeguarding practices across organisations.

7.1.1 Key Finding 1: Across most regions, the RSH was successful in fostering dialogue around the issue of SEAH and contributing to changes in organisational culture to mainstream protection against SEAH.

Shifts in organisational culture around understanding SEAH

For strengthened dialogue around safeguarding against SEAH, both within and between organisations, to occur meaningfully, organisations need an internal culture where staff can openly discuss safeguarding challenges and identify solutions collaboratively. Shifts in organisational culture are not only linked to improved capacity but are also a foundational component of the dialogue outcome.

Across most regions, respondents reported noticeable changes in how safeguarding and SEAH were understood and integrated into organisational culture and processes. In the MENA region, for example, respondents noted that safeguarding responsibilities were no longer siloed within specific departments or individuals but were becoming shared across the entire organisation. One FGD participant in Jordan said the RSH, "*has significantly contributed to fostering a 'safeguarding culture' within the organisation and among the staff…*"[26]. Similarly, a participant in Syria said, "*…involving the senior management was a great opportunity to change the culture of the organisation toward zero tolerance for SEAH issues*"[27]. Similar developments were reported in Nigeria, where organisations described **a shift from safeguarding being the responsibility of a few individuals to a more embedded, organisation-wide approach**. One female FGD participant noted, "*…it improved our ability to manage staff, volunteers, and external visitors while fostering better internal relationships… we realised the extent of our organisational gaps, and we actively worked to address them…*"[28].

These internal organisational cultural changes signal an increased capacity and motivation to mainstream safeguarding, and a **stronger internal willingness to engage in dialogue about safeguarding practices and challenges**. This openness enables organisations to engage more effectively with communities and peers, further supporting the broader outcome of improved dialogue across the aid sector.

Less-resourced CSOs are somewhat better connected, but face barriers to joining wider safeguarding networks.

The Evaluation found that while there was some success in fostering CSO-to-CSO connections and communities of practice, access to broader, more formal safeguarding networks remains limited for many. In some contexts, particularly where the mentorship programme was implemented**, CSOs were able to build valuable peer connections**. For instance, in Ethiopia, respondents highlighted how the mentorship created a platform for diverse organisations to interact, *"…during the mentorship programme, respondents from local and international organisations, as well as the private sector, engaged in discussions and shared experiences…"*[29]. Similarly, in Bangladesh, **RSH-supported activities helped facilitate stronger intra-CSO communication through informal networking**: *"…we created eight divisional WhatsApp groups of*

[26] FGD_MENA_Mentee
[27] KII_MENA_Investigator
[28] FGD_NIG_Mentee
[29] KII_EAFR_Investigator

participants who attended our divisional level safeguarding training…we disseminated new products and information and got feedback from them"[30].

However, **many CSOs across regions reported a disconnect between these smaller networks and formal global or regional safeguarding bodies**. While some respondents appreciated the peer support and learning, others expressed a desire for more direct and structured engagement with international networks. A CSO representative from Syria noted, *"…we have the chance to exchange our experience and to support each other. But with international organisations, we didn't get that chance. All the meetings and workshops were national-based…"*[31]. In Nigeria, a participant in an FDG echoed this limitation, calling for **more support in bridging these gaps**, *"…while we have not yet formally joined the PSEA network, I continue to push for it. It would be beneficial if [the] RSH could facilitate this integration… This would enhance collaboration and allow us to adopt best practices…"*[32] . This is somewhat contradictory to the RSH 2024 Annual Review, in which it was reported that the RSH had achieved 50 strategic partnerships against the target of 45[33]. Thus, it may be the case that these remain somewhat high-level and out of the reach of smaller CSOs.

Respondents pointed to structural challenges, such as a lack of funding, limited visibility, or exclusionary governance structures of existing networks. One respondent in Nigeria explained, *"Only organisations that are actively implementing projects are included in these technical working groups. We are continuously challenged to secure more funding to sustain our engagement…"*[34]. Others reflected on practical constraints, **such as a lack of information and support** to join these groups, *"…one major challenge is knowing where to find these networks and whether they are still active. Even when they exist, it's not always clear how to get linked to them…"* [35]. In Pakistan, a CSO representative commented, "*…there is a feeling that structuring the network with UN agencies as chair and co-chair excludes national NGOs. The current structure doesn't leave room for local or even INGOs to lead…"*[36]. This perception was reinforced by an RSH global representative who acknowledged*, "…quite frankly, CSOs just don't really have a voice at the table. They've not got the resources to input; they've not got the infrastructure…"* [37].

Overall, while the RSH has helped strengthen some forms of networking, especially among CSOs at the same level, **many still remain outside of the formal safeguarding coordination mechanisms that shape policy and practice**. These challenges, as elaborated in other sections of this report (see Sections 7.1.2 and 7.1.3), often stem from broader issues related to accreditation, access to funding, visibility, and institutional gatekeeping.

7.1.2 Key Finding 2: Many CSOs now demonstrate improved organisational capacity to safeguard against SEAH and have noticeably contributed to greater awareness of SEAH in the environment in which they are operating.

CSOs have better knowledge of their operating context and know how to address SEAH

[30] KII_SASIA_RSH
[31] KII_MENA_Investigator
[32] FGD_NIG_Mentee
[33] FCDO (2023) Resource and Support Hub: Annual Review. Internal Document.
[34] KII_NIG_CSO
[35] KII_NIG_Investigator
[36] KII_SASIA_CSO
[37] KII_GLO_RSH

CSOs reported a better understanding of SEAH, implementing appropriate internal and external mechanisms, and tailoring safeguarding practices to their specific operational contexts. This reflects a shift from basic awareness to more practical, applied knowledge. While high staff turnover was noted as a consistent challenge across all regions, many CSOs demonstrated a strong commitment to institutional knowledge retention.

In the MENA region, for example, CSOs described **proactive efforts to broaden awareness and embed safeguarding across their networks and partnerships**, "*…we have shared extensive knowledge using various means such as workshops and ongoing training… as well as the training we conduct with the international team and the international network…*"[38]. Similar shifts are reflected in the 2024 Annual User Survey, where almost 85% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that ***"Engaging with [the] RSH has improved my understanding of how to apply international safeguarding standards in my context"*** and a similar proportion in 2022 and 2024 felt that the RSH had improved their ***"ability to implement safe programmes and support a safe organisation"***[39] The positive responses are demonstrated in Annex L, Figures 1 and 2.

CSOs who participated in the mentorship programme were especially likely to attribute the development of formal safeguarding, SEAH, and protection policies to their engagement with the RSH. These were not viewed as compliance documents but as embedded components of organisational practice. As one CSO representative in Nigeria explained, "*…we have integrated safeguarding principles into our communication guidelines….This ensures that they understand appropriate communication and behaviour, both within and outside the organisation…*"[40].

CSOs highlighted the introduction of reporting mechanisms as one of the most tangible and important changes, improving both community engagement and staff confidence. A CSO representative from Bangladesh reflected, "*…regardless of how sensitive an issue may be, we must approach it with the utmost confidentiality and professionalism…*"[41]. In Moldova, one respondent observed, "*I felt it was more important for the staff to be well-prepared—to be able to identify potential abuse, in any form. Even among the staff, although no one openly said so, I noticed a sense of increased security and reassurance…*"[42].

Many CSOs now demonstrate stronger institutional safeguarding systems, enhanced staff awareness, and more structured approaches to prevention and response, marking a significant step forward in their ability to address SEAH effectively and sustainably within their organisations and communities.

CSO capacity has increased, but they are still constrained by local operating contexts

Many organisations continue to face significant barriers due to challenging local operating contexts. In Eastern Europe, for instance, despite the existence of formal mechanisms, uptake remains limited. One respondent in Moldova noted, "*…for example, according to national legislation, we have had a formal 'case referral sheet' in place since 2014—meaning this instrument has been institutionalised for about ten years now... But still, there is very limited use of these referral forms…*"[43].

In some contexts, particularly in Nigeria, CSOs continue to face resistance from communities unfamiliar with safeguarding concepts. One CSO representative described this challenge, underscoring the cultural

[38] FGD_MENA_Mentee
[39] RSH (2024) Annual User Survey. Internal use only.
[40] KII_NIG_CSO
[41] FGD_SASIA_Mentee
[42] KII_EEURO_Mentee
[43] KII_EEURO_Mentor

and perceptual barriers that can hinder local uptake, "*…when I introduce safeguarding concepts to community members, they often dismiss them, saying, 'Oh, this is just an Abuja thing.' But I believe that, over time, they will come to understand its importance…*"[44]. **Similarly in Pakistan, it was noted by one CSO representative who had participated in an RSH workshop that even the concept of safeguarding was "new".** They noted "*…this was sort of a limitation that the concept felt like an imported concept to many people. And it could have gone better had it been sort of contextualised to the culture of Pakistan…*"[45].

These reflections suggest that while CSO capacity has improved as a direct result of RSH engagement, translating knowledge into practice remains uneven, particularly in environments where safeguarding is still viewed as external or unfamiliar. Sustained support and greater contextual sensitivity may be needed to bridge this gap.

7.1.3 Key Finding 3: The RSH Global Hub has made significant progress towards producing evidence and learning related to SEAH in the aid sector; however, there is further scope to improve the national or regional contextualisation of this evidence base.

Production of contextualised resources at the national or regional level

The RSH made important contributions to the global evidence base, with evidence outputs often developed in collaboration with National and Regional Hubs and disseminated via the Global Hub online platform (Section 7.2.3). The production of evidence at the national and regional levels included resources designed specifically to support less-resourced CSOs. These were intended to reflect local safeguarding realities and promote the use of context-relevant evidence in organisational practices. However, the extent to which this was achieved varied by region.

Among CSOs engaged in the mentorship programme, respondents reported that the evidence-based tools were difficult to use or insufficiently localised. For example, in MENA and South Asia, several users noted language barriers and overly technical content, *"…even when the documents are in Arabic, the language is too policy-heavy. Field staff [find it difficult to] engage unless we reword it…"*[46]. A mentor in Bangladesh noted, *"I would highlight here the need for more documents in Bangla and in reader-friendly Bangla... The translation becomes very mechanical…"*[47]. Meanwhile, a respondent in Ethiopia noted the challenges in keeping the information up to date when the RSH hub closed. They noted *"…terminology and policies must be adjusted to align with emerging needs and challenges within different communities. Ensuring continuous updates requires collaboration among different stakeholders…"*[48].

Due to limited resources, translation and adaptation efforts were focused primarily on a small number of languages and regions. While the RSH made a concerted effort to translate materials into key local languages where the RSH Hubs were located, the demand for broader linguistic accessibility was an issue for those accessing the RSH materials from wider geographical areas. For example, while materials were widely available in Arabic, French, Bengali, and Swahili, users working in Latin America, such as the Consultants who use the RSH Database, reported that the lack of Spanish-language resources restricted access and use, *"I mostly work with Latin America; they don't necessarily have English skills... Spanish would*

[44] KII_NIG_CSO
[45] KII_SASIA_CSO
[46] KII_MENA_CSO
[47] KII_SASIA_Mentor
[48] KII_EAFR_Investigator

be useful…"[49]. Despite these challenges, the RSH Global Hub serves as a central repository of evidence and learning that is accessed globally. Many stakeholders praised the overall quality and utility of the materials.

The RSH has made important contributions to evidence generation through the Global Hub

One of the RSH's key achievements in meeting its intended outcomes has been the development of evidence on safeguarding, primarily showcased through the Global Hub. This evidence, produced from the programme's early stages, was made available on the RSH website and shared through various dissemination efforts by the implementation team. As one team member noted, *"we did a lot of research, and evidence gathering, and understanding the gaps. So that was done maybe at a global level, looking at actually what is the state of safeguarding at the moment"*[50]. The team also actively engaged in forums, networks, and platforms to share learning and contribute to the wider safeguarding sector.

However, the evidence generation was not based on systematic reviews or cross-country comparisons, and learning tended to remain siloed by region or activity. Several key publications highlight how the RSH has been able to gather and generate important and valuable evidence that supports addressing SEAH in the aid sector, such as the *Evidence review: Safeguarding in Ukraine, Moldova, Poland and Romania in relation to the conflict in Ukraine (2022); RSH research: The state of safeguarding across the MENA region (2023); Africa legacy study (2024).* While providing valuable and context-specific information, these reviews do not offer insights that can be shared across the regions. Moreover, several respondents noted that the RSH Global Hub website is difficult to use and find specific information, making these evidence pieces even more difficult to access.

The production of knowledge products, particularly **the *Global Evidence Review of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment in the Aid Sector (2021)* and its 2025 update**, stands out as a major contribution. These reviews, published on the RSH Global website, map existing gaps in SEAH prevention and response and offer priorities for future research.

A key limitation noted in this Evaluation is the lack of consistent dissemination of these evidence products to the CSOs that the RSH worked with, especially less-resourced ones. While the evidence exists and is publicly accessible, its reach among the very organisations the RSH aims to support remains limited.

7.2 EQ2: To what extent do RSH users have access to SEAH-related, contextualised resources, guidance, and services (including blended learning)?

Table 4. Overview of key findings for EQ2

OECD DAC Criteria - Relevance	
EQ2: To what extent do RSH users have access to SEAH-related, contextualised resources, guidance, and services (including blended learning)?	
Main Finding	The RSH National and Regional Hubs significantly contributed to less-resourced CSOs in-country having access to SEAH-related, contextualised resources, guidance, and services; however, future programmes can explore opportunities to make resources more user-friendly and adapt the delivery modality to allow for greater in-person interactions.

[49] KII_GLO_Consultant
[50] KII_GLO_RSH

Key Finding 2.1	The RSH National and Regional Teams made significant attempts to contextualise tools and resources across all regions.
Key Finding 2.2	Translation of RSH tools and resources was a significant contributing factor to contextualisation; however, this is a key area where respondents noted there can be improvements.
Key Finding 2.3	Digital learning platforms extended the reach of the RSH (globally and nationally). In some regions, however, the effectiveness was also constrained by infrastructure and connectivity issues.
Unintended/ unexpected finding	CSOs engaging directly with the RSH through the mentorship or Ask an Expert had greater access to contextualised resources, while those relying mainly on the Global Hub had access to a more limited range of materials, suggesting that outputs from the Global Hub may not be sufficiently contextualised to effectively reach wider audiences.

RSH users encompass individuals and organisations who engaged with the platform through its online resources and services, as well as those who accessed the regional or national hubs in person while they were operational. The Evaluation found that, overall, the RSH provided contextually appropriate and relevant guidance and support on SEAH across its platforms. However, areas for improvement were identified, including the need for more accurate and specialised language translations, greater opportunities for in-person engagement, particularly through national hubs, and a deeper understanding of local operating contexts in specific settings.

7.2.1 Key Finding 1: The RSH National and Regional Teams made significant attempts to contextualise tools and resources across all regions.

The RSH Country Assessments

The RSH Country Assessments were instrumental in contextualising the priority SEAH challenges, identifying key networks and local actors, and determining the tools and resources needed in each country. Conducted by the RSH Regional and National Teams prior to the initiation of in-country work, these assessments provided a foundation for understanding the needs and priorities of CSOs and NGOs within the aid sector.

Across the board, national, regional, and global RSH staff reported that the Country Assessments were useful in guiding programming. As one National Staff member in Bangladesh explained, the 2022 assessment enabled the team to "*…prioritise our strategy and, based on that strategy, we made our work plan like supporting the CSOs, some online support through the resources, and some direct support, and also supporting creating network and collaboration with existing actors working on SEAH or PSEA*"[51]. Executive Summaries from all assessments remain publicly accessible on the RSH Global Website, continuing to provide insight into the issues the hubs were designed to address. The RSH developed a guide on developing and conducting Country Assessments. This guide also contains lessons learned to help inform future processes, including issues related to staff selection and onboarding, data collection, and quality assurance.[52]

[51] KII_SASIA_RSH
[52] RSH: A guide to developing a Country Assessment (2023): Internal Use Only.

However, **no follow-up Country Assessments were conducted after the closure of the hubs, meaning potential shifts in local operating contexts went unrecorded.** Additionally, while the assessment process was key to understanding local dynamics, such as major actors and cultural, religious, or social considerations, the method was not always appropriate in all contexts. One challenge noted was the duration of the assessments, which often spanned six to nine months. While this time frame was seen as valuable in stable contexts, it posed challenges in rapidly changing or fragile settings. In Eastern Europe, for instance, interviews with the funding and implementing teams highlighted that the RSH's 18-month programme duration was insufficient. One respondent remarked: "*…the programme was quite ambitious in terms of the time duration. So, I think it was over-promising. It was over-promising, again with the idea that this will be continuing a bit similar to the Global RSH*"[53]. As a result, significant resources were allocated to set-up activities, leaving limited capacity for implementation.

Contextualisation of RSH tools and resources for users

Respondents involved in the RSH mentorship programmes across various countries consistently highlighted the added value of contextualisation. They reported that the tools, templates, and examples provided were not only tailored to their national contexts but, in many cases, also adapted to their specific regions and target populations. This approach was particularly helpful for CSOs that were newer to safeguarding concepts, enabling them to understand the materials better and apply them meaningfully in their work.

In Nigeria, one female mentee described how the use of locally relevant examples facilitated understanding and communication, "*We used practical, localised examples, which made it easier to understand and communicate safeguarding principles…we primarily use Hausa, and this approach allowed us to convey key messages effectively*"[54]. A similar observation came from Eastern Europe, where a CSO-representative in Romania shared the impact of participatory methods used in the training, *"I really appreciated the role-playing exercises. I really saw myself in them, and they helped me understand what I needed to grasp"*[55].

These examples underscore the crucial role played by RSH Mentors and Coaches in adapting resources to local realities. This additional layer of contextualisation, delivered through direct, person-to-person engagement, was often what made the tools and training materials relevant and actionable. It is important to note, however, that such tailored support was specific to the mentorship and coaching components of the programme and was not a consistent feature across all RSH offerings, such as standalone online tools, webinars, or workshops.

This finding highlights the unique strength of the mentorship model: the ability to embed safeguarding guidance within the local linguistic, cultural, and operational contexts of participating organisations. It also points to a **potential gap in the wider accessibility of this contextualised support outside the mentorship setting**. The responses from the Consultants on the RSH Directory also corroborate this observation. Three of the four who participated in a KII noted that the RSH tools on the website are a great starting point for their work, but require modification for different operating contexts, especially those in Latin America.

The RSH Annual User Survey data indicates that users beyond the mentorship programmes in each region also found the tools and resources to be broadly relevant and useful. For example, when asked, *"How relevant do you find the RSH products/resources to your work and context?"*, 82% of respondents across all

[53] KII_GLO_RSH
[54] FGD_NIG_Mentee
[55] KII_EEURO_Mentee

regions in the 2022 and 2024 Annual User Survey reported finding the RSH tools and resources to be either *"Extremely relevant"* or *"Very relevant."* Similarly, in response to the question, *"How practical and useful do you find RSH products/resources?"*, over 78% of all respondents indicated they found the tools *"Extremely practical"* or *"Very practical."*[56] This is demonstrated in Annex L - Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Despite the positives, challenges were noted regarding the contextual appropriateness of tools at the point of their initial rollout. **In the MENA region, for example, mentees reported that early tools did not reflect the regional or cultural context**. One FGD participant explained: "*The initial materials or tools we used, we noticed that the tool was applied to Southern Africa, for example….if there is a possibility to develop this topic so that the materials and tools are compatible with the Syrian context, this would contribute significantly…*"[57]. This challenge may be linked to the sequencing of hub development. Since the RSH tools were first developed by or in collaboration with the first hubs in Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Nigeria, they may not have been fully adapted to reflect the contexts of hubs that launched later, such as those in MENA, South Asia, or Eastern Europe.

A consultant from the RSH database reflected on **the difficulty of translating global standards into contextualised guidance.** They stated: "*It's all well and good to have CHS standards to have indicators on X, Y and Z, but meeting those standards and those criteria is also beset with many challenges….the indicators don't speak to alleviate in real world issues with it within each and every country context…*"[58]. These insights reinforce the importance of ensuring that global tools are not only technically sound but also meaningfully adapted to diverse regional realities. While the RSH tools were generally well received, these findings point to a need for more consistent, proactive contextualisation, particularly at the outset of the hub.

7.2.2 Key Finding 2: Translation of RSH tools and resources was a significant contributing factor to contextualisation; however, this is a key area where respondents noted there can be improvements.

Positive reception of translation as a form of contextualisation

A key element underpinning the RSH's approach to contextualisation and localisation was the translation of primary guidance and tools into multiple languages. While the focus was primarily on national languages in countries where hubs were established, including Urdu, Bengali, Arabic, Swahili, Amharic, Romanian, and Polish, the RSH National Teams also made efforts to translate materials into additional local languages where relevant.

Across regions, this commitment to language accessibility was widely seen as a significant strength of the RSH model. Translation into national languages was frequently cited as a crucial enabler of effective use and understanding of safeguarding materials. This was particularly evident in Eastern Europe, where language barriers are less complicated by regional dialects. A female CSO representative who received coaching in Moldova explained, "*…once we realised that the materials would be in Romanian*[59]*, our specialists could immediately use the resources without spending additional time on translations…*"[60].

[56] RSH Annual User Survey (2022) and (2024). Internal use only.
[57] FGD_MENA_Mentee
[58] KII_GLO_Consultant
[59] Romanian is the official language of Moldova, and thus this would support the RSH hubs in Moldova and Romania.
[60] KII_EEURO_Mentee

In South Asia, **translation efforts were not only appreciated but also actively supported and improved through collaboration with local organisations**. A male mentee in Pakistan described how the RSH engaged CSOs in refining translated materials, "[The] *RSH shared translations of SEAH materials in different local languages with us, which we circulated to our member organisations in the provinces, who corrected the second and third drafts…*"[61]. As national hubs became more embedded in their respective contexts, the materials were not only translated but also adapted and developed with local CSOs to meet their specific needs.

Translation of RSH products can be improved

Across all regions, stakeholders consistently emphasised that direct translation of safeguarding materials was not sufficient. While many tools were translated into major national languages, the nuance and meaning of key safeguarding concepts were often lost without deeper contextualisation. This was a recurring issue in Poland, Ethiopia, and across the MENA region. One respondent in Ethiopia noted, *"…translation should go beyond literal language conversion… A direct translation may not always be effective in conveying safeguarding concepts, so contextualization is necessary…"*[62]. In MENA, standardised safeguarding terminology was unfamiliar to many communities. One female CSO Mentee in Syria noted, "*…all the safeguarding terminologies are new to the Arab world and even the Arabic agreed upon translations are not well perceived at the community level and needed further explanation*."[63]. The RSH implementing team recognised the limitations of the translations in their own learning materials, noting that where some words or phrases do not have direct translations, finding the correct descriptors is essential to ensure that meaning is not lost or mitigate the poor translation form having negative consequences[64].

Respondents from CSOs and others, including FCDO staff, highlighted that many RSH tools remained overly technical or "jargon heavy", making them difficult for those new to safeguarding to engage with effectively. One FCDO respondent noted, "*I think the RSH has made a real effort to kind of have a more concrete approach to SEAH, when I look at some of their materials, I still find the whole field very jargon-heavy…*"[65]. Similarly, a MENA-based CSO mentee described the challenge of working with unfamiliar terminology, "*As a novice organisation in safeguarding, it was challenging for me to grasp some of the terminology…*"[66].

Findings from the 2024 RSH Annual User Survey supported these reflections. When asked, *"How accessible and user-friendly do you find these products or resources?"*, responses varied by region. As shown in Annex L – Figure 5, **South Asia showed the most significant degree of dissatisfaction, with nearly 16% of respondents rating the resources as only "somewhat accessible" or "not so accessible."** In contrast, accessibility ratings were much higher in other regions, with 100% of respondents in both Eastern Europe and Ethiopia finding the resources either "very" or "extremely" accessible, followed by MENA (~84%) and Nigeria (over 70%).[67]

A significant barrier to accessibility identified in the Evaluation was the lack of translation into local, not just national, languages. While some CSOs involved in the mentorship programme were able to access

[61] KII_SASIA_Mentee
[62] KII_EAFR_Investigator
[63] KII_MENA_Mentee
[64] Social Development Direct. (2023). *Lessons learnt from the RSH Africa Hubs* [PDF]. Safeguarding Resource & Support Hub – Eastern Europe.
[65] KII_GLO_FCDO
[66] FGD_MENA_Mentee
[67] RSH (2024) Annual User Survey. Internal use only.

translated materials, these were not consistently available through the RSH website for a broader audience. In Ethiopia, this language gap was particularly challenging: *"Ethiopia has over 80 languages, and we could not cater to all. As a result, some organisations continued to rely on English versions as their primary reference"*[68]. A similar concern was echoed in Bangladesh, where limited translation into local languages was seen as a barrier to effective engagement by local CSOs, particularly during ongoing emergencies. A representative from the RSH in Bangladesh noted, "*The quantity of resources is not meeting the demand, as we have big emergencies in process, and we have a lot of local CSOs….I would say that we need to focus more on contextualisation and translation in the local language…*"[69]. While RSH Mentors provided more contextual examples or translations for CSOs involved in the mentorship programme, RSH Global Hub users do not have access to these further refined resources to support them in contextualisation or localisation.

7.2.3 Key Finding 3: Digital learning platforms extended the reach of the RSH (globally and nationally). In some regions, however, the effectiveness was also constrained by infrastructure and connectivity issues.

Accessibility as an attribute of online learning

Blended learning approaches, particularly when paired with mentorship, played a significant role in strengthening the safeguarding systems of participating CSOs. Across regions, combining in-person and online modalities helped ensure broader participation, especially in areas affected by conflict, insecurity, or limited infrastructure.

In the MENA region, online mentorship proved especially valuable for individuals working in remote or unsafe environments. One female CSO mentee in Jordan shared, "*…what made it easier for me to participate was that the training was online; allowing me to attend during my working hours without any significant technical issues…"*[70]. Similarly**, in Ethiopia, the hybrid format enabled continued participation during times of instability.** An investigator described how this flexibility supported learning continuity, "[The] *RSH offers both in-person and online (virtual) training, making it possible to continue participation even in unstable conditions….materials were shared online, allowing participants to study at their own pace…"*[71].

Beyond mentorship, the RSH provided a wide array of digital resources, making safeguarding knowledge accessible to a broader audience. These included webinars, an e-learning module, podcasts, and a repository of downloadable tools and templates. The platform was intentionally designed to serve more than just the mentorship programme, offering on-demand access to materials that supported CSOs beyond direct engagement. A CSO representative in Nigeria reflected on how his organisation engaged with multiple forms of RSH support, "*…we have benefited significantly from the workshops…. I have also participated in multiple webinars, and when I wasn't able to attend the live sessions, I went back to listen to the recordings. More importantly, I have used their safeguarding materials from the RSH website to conduct training sessions within our organisation…"*[72].

[68] KII_EAFR_RSH
[69] KII_SASIA_M_RSH
[70] KII_MENA_Mentee
[71] KII_EAFR_Investigator
[72] KII_NIG_CSO

The diversity and adaptability of the RSH's learning offerings were frequently mentioned by National Team members, who noted that many CSOs continued to reach out for further resources even outside of formal training programmes.

More in-person engagement could lead to better knowledge sharing and engagement

CSOs involved in the mentorship programme, particularly in South Asia, commented that they would have preferred more in-person mentorship. This could have strengthened the overall learning experience by improving interaction between mentees, mentors, and key actors within SEAH protection networks. It was noted that in-person sessions could facilitate deeper knowledge exchange, collaborative problem-solving, and stronger peer-to-peer support.

Internet connectivity emerged as a significant barrier to online engagement in South Asia and Nigeria. These challenges were reported less frequently in other regions, such as Eastern Europe, MENA, and Ethiopia. In Bangladesh, one FGD participant described the difficulties caused by unstable internet access, "*…on several occasions, I missed parts of the training due to these disruptions….as Mentees from different organisations, we couldn't fully benefit from the shared experiences and best practices of other organisations…*"[73].

In Nigeria, a mentor echoed the value of direct engagement, particularly in supporting practical implementation of safeguarding practices at the community level, *"…holding more in-person meetings instead of relying solely on virtual engagements would allow for better monitoring of organisational activities and even direct interactions with community members to assess awareness levels…"*[74].

Despite this interest in more face-to-face learning, several practical barriers limited the feasibility of in-person mentorship. These included the geographical dispersion of CSOs and mentors, high travel costs for participants, the expense of hiring venues, and scheduling constraints faced by many involved. While increasing in-person engagements could potentially enhance the capacity-building outcomes of the RSH, especially for smaller or less-resourced CSOs, any such expansion would require careful consideration of VfM, equity of access, and logistical practicality.

7.3 EQ3: To what extent has the RSH programme effectively and efficiently used its resources to deliver intended outputs and outcomes?

Table 5. Overview of Key Findings for EQ3

OECD DAC Criteria - Efficiency	
EQ3: To what extent has the RSH programme effectively and efficiently used its resources to deliver intended outputs and outcomes?	
Main Finding	The RSH programme has demonstrated good VfM through its efficient use of resources, adaptability to challenges, and commitment to equity.

[73] FGD_SASIA_Mentee
[74] KII_NIG_Mentor

Key Finding 3.1	The programme delivery was economical and efficient. The hubs delivered good results within lean cost structures, apart from the Eastern Europe hub, which had high costs in comparison.
Key Finding 3.2	There was a strong commitment to equity, both from the global central team and in the hubs. The RSH programme combined this commitment with an efficient and opportunistic approach tailored for each hub to deliver equitable results.
Key Finding 3.3	A key lesson is that the two-year hub cycle was often too short—longer timelines are needed for deeper impact. Embedding sustainability and exit strategies from the outset is crucial, as is strengthening reporting systems by integrating VfM into routine MEL frameworks to support more robust future VfM assessments.
Unintended/ unexpected finding	The COVID-19 pandemic, almost immediately at the start of the RSH programme, has led the implementers to bolster the online platform and the online elements of the programme significantly. This has led to a reduction in some costs, such as travel and activities, but more importantly, it has resulted in increased efficiency in reaching more organisations and individuals, and in general, doing more with less.

In order to answer the VfM questions, quantitative cost analysis was carried out, as detailed below, and in the Methodology and Annex M. The RSH programme data and FCDO reports, including financial statements, were reviewed. A number of KIIs specifically focused on VfM were carried out. Further, a small number of VfM-related queries were incorporated in the design of the other KIIs and FGDs to triangulate evidence across the programme and its hubs and components. In summary, it can be concluded that the RSH programme has demonstrated good VfM through its efficient use of resources, adaptability to challenges, and commitment to equity.

7.3.1 Key Finding 1: The programme delivery was economical and efficient. The hubs delivered good results within lean cost structures, apart from the Eastern Europe hub, which had high costs in comparison.

Key stakeholder feedback and the wider set of KIIs conducted for the Evaluation highlighted overwhelmingly positive views on the economical and efficient delivery of the RSH programme. 'Economical' signifies buying the right inputs of the appropriate quality, at the right price. Across the programme components and interventions, a number of illustrative examples of cost efficiency and cost-effectiveness were observed. Except for the Eastern Europe Hub, the regional and national hubs delivered effectively for the beneficiary CSOs and the wider networks of safeguarding practitioners, within relatively lean cost structures. The key themes of economy and efficiency are summarised below. These included a cost driver and key cost categories analysis, budget execution, procurement and unit costs, and hub-level costs.

Key Cost Categories

The cost drivers in the RSH programme were programme fees and programme expenses. The latter category includes activities, travel, and MEL costs. The programme delivery was predominantly based on the use of expertise (research, consultancy, training, mentoring, etc.), which is reflected in the programme

fees. The periodic financial statements have featured a breakdown of roughly 85% (programme fees) to 15% (programme expenses). A number of budget amendments were agreed with FCDO over the years, and due to COVID-19 adaptations where online delivery platforms were utilised more than in-person, a portion of the expenses budget items was moved to the programme fees.

The figures below were compiled based on reports provided by the RSH programme management. Financial reporting was done on a monthly and quarterly basis. The statements that were provided to the Evaluation Team were monthly. It was challenging to build an overall picture from monthly trends, and therefore the team asked RSH management to provide an annualised and cumulative statement. Annex L – Table 1 is from the annual information provided to the Evaluation Team, as of December 2024. **The total budget for RSH from FCDO was £9,999,637,** which was expected to be fully spent by the end of the programme as of 31 March 2025.

The monthly statements also had forecasts and actuals for the relevant quarter, and a breakdown of the fee categories, including the Global hub, MENA hub, Africa Hub, South Asia Hub, and total short-term technical assistance (STTA) costs. **In this breakdown of hubs, Global hub always represented the biggest share of the fees, as these included the online platform as well as the management team.** Out of the programme fees, the proportion of programme leadership and programme management categories together ranged from 19.7% to 29.6%, based on a number of randomly selected monthly statements. The total fees and milestones' share varied between 76% to 90% of the total expenditure. These were found to be within the range of other similar ODA programmes. Further details can be found in Annex M.

Regarding the DEC allocation of RSH funding, a review of the cost drivers in the Eastern Europe Hub budget[75] indicated that 95% were personnel costs, and the remaining 5% were logistics and personnel support costs. 7% was indicated as the share of management costs in total costs.[76] The Türkiye and Syria Hub reported 82.4% of personnel costs, and the remainder as in-country personnel support costs. The management costs were similarly at 7%.

Budget execution

The budget execution for the programme's quarterly periods has been high, consistently above 90% throughout the months and quarters, and then reaching 97-99% annually. This was an indication of good financial management. The quality of RSH's financial management was deemed to be high by both FCDO and their downstream consortium partners. One noted,*"…I think they (Social Development Direct (SDD) and Options) really had very strict and close oversight on what's being spent and how it's being spent…"*[77].

As per the RSH contract with FCDO, 20% of all fees were linked to the successful delivery of pre-agreed key performance indicators (KPIs) each quarter. The interviews confirmed that there was no instance when the fees were withheld. There were a few times when a KPI had to be rescheduled to the following quarter, due to delays beyond the programme's control.

75 At the time of writing, only the Phase 2 budget of the EE Hub was available to the Evaluation Team covering £1.9m, and not the whole £3.5m. allocation.
76 Presumably within the 95% indicated.
77 KII_GLO_RSH

Procurement and Unit Costs

As a result of its delivery model, the majority of procurement activities at the RSH were for technical expertise. Many experts would be engaged long-term, at the local hubs or the Global Hub. In the monthly statements, global and hub teams' costs consistently exceeded STTA costs, indicating a greater reliance on staff over temporary technical advisors. It was also emphasised that many of the global team members working at the RSH were engaged part-time, rather than full-time, delivering cost efficiencies to the funding organisation.

Procurements were typically a combination of open competitive recruitment and leveraging existing networks. A KII with the RSH implementing team stated, "[*We] went through open recruitment processes, if it was the national representative, the MEL officer, the senior advisor, those types of roles in-country. For short-term consultancy, we tended to directly use networks and a direct approach to consultants…"*[78].

The available financial reports indicate the key cost categories in RSH financial reporting have changed from late 2021 to early 2022. Several categories and sub-categories have been reorganised. In the earlier statements, the programme staff and their daily fee rates were reported. **A review of these indicates that they were similar to the commonly applied fee rates in ODA programmes, and many of the rates were distinctly on the lower end of the range.** The levels of fee rates were determined by the International Multi-disciplinary Practice (IMDP) Framework, through which the RSH procurement was carried out. The RSH team pointed out that the rates set in 2018 by IMDP were applied until the end of RSH operations in 2025, which potentially needed reviewing following the increases in the cost of living for RSH countries in which they were located.

The RSH prioritised national-level expertise and worked with significant numbers of national consultants. This meant that not only were the fee rates and travel costs lower, but it also helped build the national rosters of safeguarding consultants in the RSH countries. This represents a good example of cost-effectiveness, contributing to sustainability at a lower cost.

Examples of Cost-efficient Delivery

The RSHs have worked adaptively and demand-led across their hubs. Early in the programme, the COVID pandemic resulted in online engagement for all activities, reducing the costs associated with travel and in-person events. The travel costs were very low, at 2% of overall expenditure, for a programme that went on for over 5 years and operated in multiple countries and regions. A representative from the RSH in South Asia noted, *"… it was one of the most VfM driven projects….we were able to reach hundreds of CSOs and build the capacity of at least 58 CSOs directly with the workshops, 19 CSOs with the detailed mentorship program, 8 CSOs with Ask an Expert, so about 80 to 90 CSOs were reached by direct support, and hundreds with the resources and the webinars. In every webinar we had more than 200 attendees…"*[79].

An illustrative example for using a VfM lens in programme management comes from an RSH hub in Nigeria: "*NEB members could easily serve as independent consultants, but the RSH brought them together to provide*

[78] KII_GLO_RSH
[79] KII_SASIA_RSH

expertise collectively…the RSH engaged them periodically, allowing their input to guide programme activities for months. This approach maximised impact while minimising costs…"[80].

These enhancements imply a learning curve, where the adaptations in the initial years contributed to more efficient methods and greater outreach in the later phases of the programme. Several respondents defined a 'ripple effect' from RSH interventions. According to one Key Informant, results were achieved with minimal investment: "*We moved the needle for less than the price of a mid-size donor grant*"[81].

Hub-level Costs

RSH financial reporting was based on programme fees and expenses programme-wide, and not on the individual hubs. However, the monthly statements included a breakdown of the fees category, based on the following regional hubs: Global, MENA, Africa, and South Asia. RSH management produced the following costs upon our request; however, it was explained that this may not include all the costs and should be taken as approximate costs. This was due to coding on different budget lines and different apportioning in the earlier years of the programme.[82.] The DEC provided the actual total costs for the Eastern Europe and Türkiye-Syria Earthquake Appeal hub.

Annex L– Figure 6 indicates that the Eastern Europe Hub was the most costly hub in the RSH. The RSH team attributed this to the Eastern Europe Hub having to hire a separate team and implement activities on the ground, rather than online, more than the rest of the hubs. The Türkiye-Syria earthquake appeal hub leveraged resources from the MENA Hub and operated for only 6 months, which together explained its low budget.

7.3.2 Key Finding 2: There was a strong commitment to equity, both from the global central team and in the hubs. The RSH programme combined this commitment with an efficient and opportunistic approach tailored for each hub to deliver equitable results.

The RSH programme design document did not feature an obvious bias towards the less-resourced organisations, mentioning this only briefly. The RSH programme management definition of the 'less-resourced CSOs' is: 'organisations with fewer than 50 staff or volunteers'. The application of equity principles, therefore, meant that the following approaches were used:

- **Targeting less advantaged groups**: Less-resourced organisations; Organisations of Persons with Disabilities; Women-Led Organisations, Women's Rights Organisations, Organisations representing LGBTQI+ (where contextually appropriate); CSOs in rural or more geographically remote areas. This approach was instrumental in building local capacity and ensuring that safeguarding resources were available as widely as possible.
- **Partnerships for disability-inclusive interventions**: Collaborations were formed to ensure that interventions were inclusive of individuals with disabilities, demonstrating a commitment to reaching all segments of the population. Also, prioritising accessibility within delivery areas (for example, Sightsavers' work in visually impaired technology and learning), and technology

[80] KII_NIG_NEB
[81] KII_GLO_FCDO
82 Presumably within the 95% indicated.

adaptation. For example, webinars and trainings include accommodations for deaf or blind persons attending.

- **Translation of materials into local languages**: The RSH was widely commended by the beneficiary CSOs and key programme actors for translating and adapting the context of their materials successfully. ICVA was the programme partner responsible for the translations.
- **Conducting specific research and communication pieces on vulnerable groups**: Such as the piece that focused on the Hijra community in Bangladesh, on the rights and limitations for that population, and what it means for them in terms of employment and social life.

One programme implementer from the RSH observed that the RSH approaches were connecting the local and global realms of safeguarding by "*…making sure that CSOs' voices are heard better in the international architecture and landscape to help inform international thinking and international decision making…"*[83]. Globally, equity was mainstreamed in every product: "*Inclusion was part of every design process—no resource was approved without that lens"*[84].

Using the less-resourced organisations as a starting point, the RSH took an opportunistic approach to reach wider networks as well as individual CSOs. For example, in Ethiopia, they worked with the local partner organisations of a large-scale civil society programme, CSSP 2, that FCDO funded. In MENA, they also worked with CSOs working under WASH and GBV programmes. In the Eastern Europe Hub, the RSH worked with 'whoever came to ask them for support'[85], which was seen as the right approach in that context, according to the respondents.

A representative from the RSH in Ethiopia noted, *"…..defining "less-resourced CSOs" was an important discussion early on. For us, all local CSOs were considered less-resourced compared to international organisations...To address this, we focused on CSOs with limited staff, smaller budgets, and those operating in remote locations"*[86].

Many of the programme actors were of the view that the Southeast Asia Hub was particularly successful in contextualising and implementing an Equity approach. They worked with large networks of CSOs, and some of the CSOs were larger than the 50-staff-member definition. However, the areas they worked on, and the integration of disability and other types of marginalisation and vulnerability contributed to their outstanding record among other hubs. Respondents also noted examples of equity from other hubs. An FCDO representative noted, "*… some of the really good examples that we've seen are in the Nigeria hub… [they] had colleagues talking about disability inclusive safeguarding. And one of the speakers was deaf (and) blind, and another speaker was blind as well… [they] made it completely accessible and brought in all the different voices in a matrix approach …that I've not seen before…"*[87].

Accessibility issues about the online model were also noted, particularly relating to hindering reach at times to remote areas. For example, a KII respondent in Ethiopia noted, *"conflicts in some areas made access unsafe... we lacked the budget for extensive outreach.... internet accessibility was often poor. While all CSOs*

[83] KII_GLO_FCDO
[84] KII_GLO_RSH
[85] KII_GLO_RSH
[86] KII_EAFR_RSH
[87] KII_GLO_FCDO

had some level of access, smaller organisations... faced severe connectivity issues...We explored different platforms, but gaps persisted"[88].

7.3.3 Key Finding 3: A key lesson is that the two-year hub cycle was often too short—longer timelines are needed for deeper impact. Embedding sustainability and exit strategies from the outset is crucial, as is strengthening reporting systems by integrating VfM into routine MEL frameworks to support more robust future VfM assessments.

Several lessons come out of the RSH experience with regard to VfM. These relate to VfM in programme implementation, as well as VfM reporting. A clear lesson that emerges is about the duration of the project (hub) cycles; for many hubs, **more time was needed than the 2-year period.** Additionally, there is a need to incorporate **sustainability and exit strategies from the beginning.** Finally, a **more rigorous reporting system that integrates VfM into routine MEL frameworks** will enable more robust VfM assessments in the future.

The RSH key actors acknowledged that **a more rigorous and consistent approach to measuring VfM could enhance the VfM narrative and proposition of the programme**. The RSH did not report on periodic VfM metrics during implementation and instead relied on KPI schedules and select VfM good practice examples over the reporting periods. Two recommendations are particularly relevant here; first, setting up the logframe with enough detail and inclusive of VfM metrics, so that the key VfM data can be tracked systematically. This way, milestones and targets could be identified for the metrics that would help with consistent and objective VfM assessments. Second, to establish a longer-term Evaluation approach of the programme rather than just having the Evaluation at the end. One RSH team member noted, *"...take a little bit more of a value for investment approach whereby we really embed VfM into the MEL framework ...and create a sort of slightly more straight-forward evaluative approach over the course of the programme, so that we can kind of learn as we go on value for money"*[89].

An additional observation by a programme actor on RSH reporting was that being **more ambitious about KPI schedules to push the RSH management more could also be considered**, as it was a high-performing programme meeting its targets seamlessly. Fin ally, despite being detailed overall, **the RSH financial reporting lacked detail on hub costs.** The absence of routine data capture on the costs associated with the hubs highlighted the need for incorporating this type of detail in the future to more precisely assess VfM.

The two-year hub cycle approach was deemed to be insufficient by the respondents. **The staggered approach to setting up the hubs made sense from an efficiency and learning perspective**; however, the findings suggest this posed a challenge concerning ensuring the sustainability of the hubs and the approaches that were implemented. Respondents from the FCDO noted, *"... the two-year cycle of setting up the hubs and funding them from our perspective isn't necessarily...the most sustainable. And that's how we've seen it not translate into a sort of long-term ongoing contract, say for example, in Sudan or in other places where they were happening earlier on in the programme, and in the MENA region, not securing sort of ongoing funding from partners in those cases"*[90].

[88] KII_EAFR_RSH
[89] KII_GLO_RSH
[90] KII_GLO_FCDO

Another echoed this and said,"….*I think the two years' time was really too short to create the impact and also to ensure the sustainability. Another two years would have made it much easier to make it more sustainable"* [91].

The short project time frame proved a particular challenge for the Eastern Europe Hub, which was active for around 18 months. The Eastern Europe Hub also had the disadvantage of starting with an entirely new programme team, which had to start thinking about exit almost as soon as they finished their contextual analyses and other start-up activities. **This shorter time frame and lack of a sustainability approach from the beginning led to a significant delivery challenge for the Eastern Europe Hub, where programme actors and Evaluation respondents felt concern.** This shortcoming in stakeholder alignment and securing additional funding was all the more evident considering the operating environment of ongoing and urgent need due to the Ukraine crisis, and well-resourced funding mechanisms on the ground. One RSH representative reflected, "*We just didn't have the time to fully leverage and capitalise on what was developed. If we had had one more year, or even a year and a half more, the value of what we delivered would have been even clearer"*[92].

In two of the hubs, Nigeria and Ethiopia, additional funding was provided to the RSH to support the transition of activities to the local partner. **While Hiwot and Women's Rights and Health Project (WRAHP) were potentially worthy organisations as sustainability partners, at the time of writing, neither has secured any additional funding to continue safeguarding training, mentoring, and capacity-building.** Given the downturn in the global aid resources and availability, it is likely to get more challenging to secure funding, both locally and globally, in the near future.

7.4 EQ4: To what extent is there evidence of significant long-term changes or contributions of the RSH programme toward eliminating SEAH in the aid sector?

Table 6. Overview of key findings for EQ4

OECD DAC Criteria - Impact	
EQ4: To what extent is there evidence of significant long-term changes or contributions of the RSH programme toward eliminating SEAH in the aid sector?	
Main Finding	The RSH programme contributed significantly to the institutionalisation of safeguarding practices and promoted peer learning within CSOs, but the depth and sustainability of these outcomes varied across contexts, remaining vulnerable to resource limitations, staff turnover, and uneven system embedding.
Key Finding 4.1	There is evidence of perceived organisational institutionalisation of safeguarding policies for continued impact.
Key Finding 4.2	The use of peer learning methodologies and the establishment of informal networks and feedback mechanisms have improved sustained accountability and adaptive learning practices.

[91] KII_GLO_FCDO
[92] KII_EEURO_RSH

Unintended/ unexpected finding	The Ukraine displacement crisis in Eastern Europe triggered an unplanned, spontaneous form of adaptive peer learning where newly formed refugee-led CSOs created ad hoc support arrangements and knowledge exchanges. The RSH had to rapidly adapt materials, demonstrating how external crises forced innovation beyond the programme's original design.

7.4.1 Key Finding 1: There is evidence of perceived organisational institutionalisation of safeguarding policies for continued impact.

Strong evidence of focus by CSOs on internal capacity-building to sustain learning

There is strong evidence of institutionalisation of safeguarding policies across regions, attributed to the RSH. However, depth and durability of institutionalisation varied based on organisational size, resource availability, leadership commitment, and external contextual factors.

Across multiple regions, the RSH programme contributed substantially to the creation or strengthening of safeguarding policies within CSOs. In many cases, organisations that previously lacked formal safeguarding frameworks now have comprehensive policies integrated into HR manuals, recruitment processes, and operational guidelines. **The mentorship model, combined with tailored contextualisation efforts, played a decisive role in enabling CSOs to develop policies that reflect both international safeguarding standards and national legal frameworks**. Data from the 2024 Annual User Survey supports these patterns: **85%** of NGO/CSO respondents agreed or strongly agreed that *"Engaging with RSH services and products improved my ability to implement safe programmes and support a safe organisation"* (Annex L – Figure 7).

The RSH's more intensive interventions (mentoring, face-to-face support, NEBs) were significantly more likely to produce sustained policy changes than online engagement alone. Nigeria displayed some of the most significant evidence of institutionalisation, particularly among mentee organisations that worked directly with NEB structures. A Key Informant reinforced this, stating, *"Safeguarding is not something we do because of donors. We included it in our HR manual. Every new staff member goes through the training."*[93]

Eastern Europe respondents highlighted that while safeguarding frameworks had existed for several years prior to RSH engagement (due to prior EU regulations), **the Hub provided crucial technical assistance to update policies in line with emerging international standards**. One Key Informant stated, *"I applied for the call for proposals, even though I had little experience with safeguarding… I learned a lot from the RSH process itself."*[94] RSH mentoring supported CSOs assisting refugees and disability organisations to embed safeguarding practices in rapidly changing operational environments.

Respondents described comprehensive integration of safeguarding into multiple domains: recruitment, reporting, investigation protocols, and organisational governance. The 2023 Annual Review confirms that many organisations had, by 2023, adopted multi-layered safeguarding systems addressing both staff behaviour and community-facing accountability mechanisms.[95] In some cases, however, political

[93] KII_NIG_Mentor
[94] KII_EEURO_Mentor
[95] FCDO (2023) Resource and Support Hub: Annual Review. Internal Document.

restrictions on civic space in some countries limited the ability of some grassroots CSOs to fully implement safeguarding standards, particularly where they intersected with the protection of vulnerable populations such as refugees or women's groups.

Similarly, the Bangladesh Country Assessment (2022) highlights that prior to the establishment of the RSH, most organisations had ad hoc or donor-driven policies with little internal ownership.[96] Post-intervention, many CSOs institutionalised policies across recruitment, training, and complaints mechanisms[97] but consistent application remained uneven. As one Key Informant explained, *"We have policies in place, yes, but implementing them consistently is another matter when funding for trainings dries up."*[98]

The Annual User Survey (2024) highlights that **in all regions, more than 75% of respondents rated the RSH tools as extremely or very accessible**, with this being 100% in Ethiopia (Annex L – Figure 8). The accessibility of the products is a key contributing factor to how well they are adopted.

Challenges in sustaining capacity-building and learning

Institutionalisation remained heavily reliant on individual champions in smaller CSOs, exposing vulnerabilities when focal points departed or external funding ceased. In South Asia, for example, safeguarding systems often lacked sufficient institutional embedding to survive leadership turnover. In Ethiopia and Nigeria, structural gaps also persisted where mentoring ceased or where leadership support was more rhetorical than operational.

NEB members provided technical advice and peer learning to ensure policy consistency and relevance.[99] This mentorship approach has contributed greatly to fostering institutional resilience beyond the programme's closure. Nonetheless, sustainability challenges were noted where donor support declined or staff turnover disrupted focal point continuity: *"The staff we trained are no longer here. It's hard to keep continuity when people leave."*[100]

In South Asia, important first steps were taken to establish policies; however, **institutional depth was often lacking, and policies were frequently person-dependent**: *"The safeguarding focal point is also the manager… If they leave, everything stops."*[101]

The Bangladesh Country Assessment (2022) notes that many organisations adopted safeguarding policies in response to donor requirements but lacked internal governance systems for ongoing oversight.[102] The 2022 Annual User Survey indicated that only **76%** of respondents were aware of agreed international standards (Annex L– Figure 9).[103]

7.4.2 Key Finding 2: The use of peer learning methodologies and the establishment of informal networks and feedback mechanisms have improved sustained accountability and adaptive learning practices.

[96] RSH: Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2022). *Bangladesh Country Assessment*.
[97] Ibid.
[98] KII_SASIA_RSH
[99] KII_NIG_RSH
[100] FGD_NIG_Mentee
[101] FGD_SASIA_Mentee
[102] RSH: Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2022). *Bangladesh Country Assessment*.
[103] RSH (2024). *Annual User Survey*

There is substantial evidence that peer learning methodologies, informal networks, and adaptive learning mechanisms contributed to improved accountability practices and organisational learning. However, the strength, durability, and formalisation of these networks varied significantly between regions and were often highly dependent on initial RSH facilitation.

The RSH's mentorship model emphasised collaborative learning between CSOs, supported by regional hubs, expert boards, and informal peer-support networks. Many organisations reported that participation in mentorship cohorts provided them with trusted spaces to exchange good practice, troubleshoot challenges, and refine safeguarding implementation approaches. These peer connections often outlasted the formal duration of mentorship programmes.

The Annual User Surveys (2022 and 2024) reinforce this: as **81%** of NGO/CSO respondents agreed or strongly agreed that *"[The] RSH has supported improved collaboration and opportunities to share experiences among organisations in the aid sector*." (Annex L – Figure 10)

Evidence suggests that peer learning promoted adaptive learning cultures in some settings (e.g. Nigeria, Ethiopia), while in others (e.g. South Asia), network durability was more fragile and vulnerable to staff turnover and resource constraints. The development of **CAPSEAH** also represents a successful example of the RSH's role in building broader cross-sectoral learning platforms at international level.[104]

The formation of learning cohorts for CSOs in the mentorship programme allowed CSOs to adapt safeguarding frameworks to their local legal environments while drawing on experiences from similar organisations. However, **several respondents noted that ongoing political instability limited opportunities for sustained peer collaboration, particularly across national borders.** Where mentorship cohorts remained active post-intervention, this was usually due to continued informal communication via digital platforms (WhatsApp groups, etc.).[105]

In Ethiopia, peer learning was central to mentorship design, with cohort members engaging in multiple rounds of structured group learning, role-play exercises, and ongoing mutual support, *"… participants from local and international organisations engaged in discussions and shared experiences. This created a valuable platform for professional connections*."[106] RSH national staff supported participants to create permanent safeguarding networks linking CSO safeguarding focal points, often extending beyond the original mentee cohort.[107] *"Even after the mentorship programme ended, our safeguarding focal points continue to engage with each other, sharing updates and seeking advice."*[108]

Nigeria exhibited some of the strongest examples of sustained peer learning, both through RSH mentoring structures and the ongoing role of NEB actors. As one Key Informant pointed out, "*We are now linked into informal WhatsApp groups among focal points who continue to update each other."*[109] Another stated that,

[104] Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. (2025). *FCDO Progress Report 2023–2024*. GOV.UK.
[105] KII_MENA_RSH
[106] KII_Ethiopia_Investigator
[107] RSH: Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2019). *Ethiopia Country Assessment*
[108] KII_Ethiopia_RSH
[109] KII_NIG_Mentee

"Mentors *facilitated informal learning circles for newly onboarded safeguarding officers within CSOs."*[110] NEB members continued to convene periodic review meetings and serve as peer resource persons even after formal mentoring concluded, reinforcing network longevity.[111] Survey responses reflected this strength: **93%** of Nigerian respondents reported ongoing active engagement in peer-support groups post-mentorship.[112]

In South Asia, participants initially engaged enthusiastically with peer learning structures. However, **sustaining these networks over time proved difficult due to leadership transitions, staff attrition, and resource constraints:** *"The safeguarding focal point is the only one actively promoting these practices. If she leaves, the network will likely dissolve."*[113] This was backed up by Annual Survey data, which showed that only **54%** of South Asian respondents reported ongoing active participation in peer learning groups at the time of the 2024 survey.

Eastern Europe saw a unique form of adaptive peer learning due to the Ukraine displacement crisis. Many new refugee-led CSOs engaged with RSH resources and formed ad hoc peer-support arrangements: *"The safeguarding activities included consultations with small refugee-led organisations, and deaf associations too."*[114] The RSH also played an important role in facilitating knowledge exchanges between established CSOs and rapidly emerging refugee response organisations: *"[The] RSH adapted materials rapidly following the Ukraine crisis to institutionalise safeguarding processes even in newly displaced CSO structures."*[115] While peer learning occurred intensively during crisis response phases, its durability remains uncertain in the absence of formal structures or continued mentoring.

7.5 EQ5: To what extent are the outcomes and benefits of the RSH programme likely to be sustained by CSOs, regional hubs, and other stakeholders after the programme concludes?

Table 7. Overview of key findings for EQ5

OECD DAC Criteria - Sustainability	
EQ5: To what extent are the outcomes and benefits of the RSH programme likely to be sustained by CSOs, regional hubs, and other stakeholders after the programme concludes?	
Main Finding	While the RSH programme strengthened CSO safeguarding capacity and generated strong ambitions for local ownership, its long-term sustainability was undermined by structural barriers, weak transition planning, and inconsistent communication around programme exit.
Key Finding 5.1	Organisational capability building demonstrated strong evidence of internal capacity strengthening, though the sustainability of these changes varied significantly based on institutional embedding and contextual factors.

[110] FCDO (2023) Resource and Support Hub: Annual Review. Internal Document.
[111] RSH: Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2021). *Nigeria Country Assessment*
[112] RSH. (2024). *Annual User Survey.*
[113] FGD_SASIA_Mentee
[114] KII_EEURO_Mentee
[115] Ibid

Key Finding 5.2	Sustainability of PSEAH engagement and programme outcomes was jeopardised by structural barriers to continuity, limited meaningful engagement with government and local actors, and contextual factors largely beyond RSH's control.
Key Finding 5.3	Poor communication regarding exit strategies and local handover processes led to confusion amongst CSOs and erosion of trust, while relatively successful transitions in Ethiopia and Nigeria demonstrate the potential for sustainable local ownership despite ongoing systemic challenges.
Unintended/ unexpected finding	The degree to which sustainability is effective with respect to a localisation approach is greatly dependent on the extent to which the RSH is engaged with national and sub-national governance structures and aligned to national and sub-national policies, safeguarding initiatives, and platforms/forums. The importance of engagement and alignment at the national level with respect to sustainability is much greater than RSH visibility at an international level.

This EQ examines sustainability across three distinct but interconnected dimensions: organisational capability building and change processes, continuity of PSEAH engagement in global and local contexts, and sustainability of local handover processes. The analysis acknowledges that many sustainability challenges reflect structural, contextual, and systemic factors that extend beyond direct programme control, including national governance weaknesses, local power dynamics, and broader aid sector dependencies.

In most regions, internal safeguarding capacities depended on dedicated individuals (safeguarding focal points, trained staff, NEB mentors). When these individuals left, organisational safeguarding systems risked erosion, especially where policies and structures were not fully embedded. **A recurring barrier to sustainability was the absence of predictable financing.** Most CSOs lacked dedicated budget lines for safeguarding activities once RSH funding or project-based resources ended.

While Ethiopia successfully transitioned RSH functions to a local affiliate (Hiwot Ethiopia), no comparable national hub models emerged elsewhere, with the exception of Nigeria, which was in the early stages of transition at the time of this evaluation, reflecting mixed levels of localisation. Confusion about the RSH's future intentions undermined confidence and created frustration among CSOs expecting clearer guidance on long-term support.

While many CSOs displayed genuine commitment to sustaining safeguarding, broader systemic fragilities — including national governance weaknesses, political instability, and shrinking civic space — continued to threaten durability.

7.5.1 Key Finding 1: Organisational capability building demonstrated strong evidence of internal capacity strengthening, though sustainability of these changes varied significantly based on institutional embedding and contextual factors.

Across all regions, interview and survey evidence demonstrate that CSOs who engaged directly with RSH mentorship, training, or online learning platforms strengthened their internal safeguarding capacities. Many organisations institutionalised safeguarding policies, developed internal training systems, and

created focal point roles that continued after direct RSH support ended. CSO leadership frequently expressed a strong commitment to embedding safeguarding as a long-term organisational priority.

The Annual User Surveys (2022 and 2024) found that **86%** of NGO/CSO respondents agreed that *"Engaging with the RSH services and products has improved my knowledge and understanding of safeguarding approaches and/or best practices against SEAH."* Nevertheless, the extent of sustained practice varied depending on prior capacity, organisational size, external support, and regional context (Annex L – Figure 11).

The sustainability of organisational change processes was influenced by multiple factors beyond the scope of individual capacity-building interventions. Organisational size played a critical role, with larger CSOs demonstrating greater capacity to absorb staff turnover and maintain institutional memory. Smaller organisations often struggled when trained focal points departed, lacking the resources to develop systematic replacement mechanisms.

In MENA, respondents reported that internal safeguarding structures created through RSH mentorship remained operational following programme support. Organisational leadership played a key role in ensuring continuity. One respondent said, *"We now have safeguarding integrated into all our internal policies and HR processes. New staff are trained, and reporting procedures are fully active*."[116] Peer-to-peer support groups also fostered ongoing learning: "Even though the formal training ended, we still share case studies and advice within our CSO network."[117]

Across the African hubs, CSO respondents demonstrated continued engagement and efforts to make the changes initiated by their involvement with the RSH an institutional priority. In Ethiopia, CSOs demonstrated a commitment to sustaining safeguarding practices within the organisational structures. One CSO noted, *"Our organisation continues regular safeguarding training even after [the] RSH. The focal point position is now permanent and recognised in the structure."*[118] Another Key Informant stated, *"We updated our code of conduct with clear SEAH clauses that remain in force."*[119] **In Nigeria, the NEB mentoring model supported long-term institutionalisation**: "*The NEB gave us practical tools and confidence to keep safeguarding active in our organisation."*[120] Another Key Informant stated, *"Even without external funding, our team has continued community awareness-raising activities."*[121]

South Asia presented more variable results. **While initial internal capacity was built, some organisations struggled with long-term continuity due to staff turnover and funding constraints**: *"The person trained as the safeguarding lead left the organisation. Now we have no one trained at that level*."[122] Another Key Informant stated that *"Safeguarding is still seen as donor-driven and dependent on projects*."[123] The Country Assessments in both Pakistan and Bangladesh noted that prior to the RSH, safeguarding

[116] KII_MENA_CSO
[117] KII_MENA_Mentee
[118] KII_Ethiopia_Mentee
[119] KII_Ethiopia_Investigator
[120] KII_NIG_Mentor
[121] KII_NIG_Mentee
[122] FGD_SASIA_Mentee
[123] KII_SASIA_Mentee

implementation often remained project-based rather than fully integrated, and the Evaluation suggests this may still be the case in some instances.

In Eastern Europe, CSOs supporting displaced populations institutionalised safeguarding procedures during emergency responses: *"We established safeguarding focal points during the Ukraine response. The procedures are still followed in our refugee programmes."*[124] However, these mechanisms were often ad hoc and dependent on emergency funding cycles rather than embedded within long-term institutional mandates.

7.5.2 Key Finding 2: Sustainability of PSEAH engagement and programme outcomes was jeopardised by structural barriers to continuity, limited meaningful engagement with government and local actors, and contextual factors largely beyond RSH control.

While internal capacity gains were evident, multiple structural barriers, including funding uncertainty, leadership turnover, limited integration into national safeguarding frameworks, and institutional fragility of smaller CSOs, undermined sustainability. Despite these risks, some regions pursued localisation efforts to transition RSH functions to national partners or affiliate organisations.

The limited meaningful engagement between RSH hubs and government or local actors reflected several interconnected factors that were largely outside direct programme control. The time requirements for building genuine trust and engagement with government entities typically exceed standard programme timeframes. Effective government engagement requires sustained relationship-building over multiple years, particularly in contexts where international aid relationships have historically been characterised by power imbalances and shifting priorities.

Resource constraints significantly limited the scope for comprehensive stakeholder engagement. Meaningful engagement with government actors requires specialised skill sets that go beyond basic capability building, including political economy analysis, diplomatic engagement capabilities, and deep contextual knowledge of local power structures. These competencies require substantial investment in specialised staff and long-term presence that may not align with project-based funding models.

Local power dynamics and political contexts around international aid delivery created additional barriers. In many contexts, government actors may view international safeguarding initiatives with suspicion, particularly where they intersect with sensitive issues around governance, accountability, or human rights. The political space for civil society engagement varies significantly across regions, with some contexts experiencing shrinking civic space that actively constrains meaningful collaboration between international programmes and local government entities.

MENA respondents highlighted significant external risks that threatened continuity, particularly for smaller CSOs: *"Many organisations are dependent on external donor funding for safeguarding activities. Once projects close, activities reduce."*[125] Nonetheless, some national CSO alliances explored pathways to

[124] KII_EEURO_Mentor
[125] KII_MENA_Mentee

continue peer learning independently: "*We have created a safeguarding working group among several national CSOs to continue mutual support*."[126]

Although in both Ethiopia and Nigeria, the RSH operations have been taken over by local organisations, their capacity to provide sustained quality services is influenced by structural challenges, such as the difficulty in accessing adequate funding resources. In April 2024, Hiwot began leading and delivering services in Ethiopia[127], and in February 2025, the WRAHP officially took over the provision of RSH services, as the local affiliate in Nigeria.[128] Both organisations, however, still face significant challenges in the sustained provision of quality services, including limited domestic funding and fragile institutional ecosystems. In Ethiopia, a representative from a CSO noted, *"We are trying to continue but have no national funding sources to support safeguarding work."*[129] Another Key Informant stated, "*If trained focal points leave, there is no replacement mechanism*."[130] In Nigeria, sustainability risks were somewhat mitigated through continued NEB engagement: "*NEB mentors remain involved voluntarily even after the programme ended.*"[131] However, structural fragilities persisted: "*Without consistent funding, some CSOs struggle to keep safeguarding staff in place*."[132] In both the Ethiopian and Nigerian contexts, considerable efforts were made to ensure that the local organisations that took over the RSH post FCDO funding were well-positioned to do so in terms of technical capacity, experience, and were well-regarded in their local context. [133,134]

In South Asia and Eastern Europe, the sustainability challenges were linked to the operating contexts. In South Asia, sustainability risks were linked to high staff turnover, weak institutional embedding, and ongoing dependence on donor funding: *"Safeguarding is still implemented only when specific project funds are available*."[135] In Eastern Europe, sustainability challenges were directly linked to the fluidity of the refugee crisis response. One CSO representative noted, "*Our safeguarding capacity was built during the Ukraine response, but future funding is uncertain*."[136]

7.5.3 Key Finding 3: Poor communication regarding exit strategies and local handover processes led to confusion amongst CSOs and erosion of trust, while relatively successful transitions in Ethiopia and Nigeria demonstrate the potential for sustainable local ownership despite ongoing systemic challenges.

A recurring concern across regions was the absence of clear transition or exit plans. Several organisations reported confusion regarding **the RSH's long-term intentions, ownership model, and communication about programme closure. However, the analysis reveals important distinctions between communication failures**

[126] KII_MENA_Mentee
[127] RSH Ethiopia. (2024). *Ethiopia Hub - Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub*. https://ethiopia.safeguardingsupporthub.org/
[128] Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2025, February 11). *Exciting transition: RSH Nigeria welcomes WRAHP as the new lead* [LinkedIn post].
[129] KII_Ethiopia_Investigator
[130] KII_Ethiopia_Mentee
[131] KII_NIG_Mentor
[132] KII_NIG_Mentee
[133] Wondimu, A. (2024). *Hiwot Ethiopia locally led & sustainable partnerships* [Conference presentation]. RSH Conference - Day 2 Panel 3. Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub.
[134] Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2025, February 11). *Exciting transition: RSH Nigeria welcomes WRAHP as the new lead* [LinkedIn post].
[135] FGD_SASIA_Mentee
[136] KII_EEURO_Mentor

and the complex realities of transitioning international programmes to local ownership within challenging institutional ecosystems.

The relatively successful handover processes in Ethiopia and Nigeria demonstrate that sustainable local transitions are achievable when adequate preparation, technical capacity-building, and stakeholder engagement occur. These transitions required substantial investment in local partner development, relationship building, and systems transfer that extended beyond basic capability building. The local entities that assumed RSH functions were selected based on demonstrated technical capacity, established local credibility, and organisational maturity sufficient to manage complex safeguarding programming.

However, even successful transitions operate within broader structural constraints that limit long-term sustainability. Local organisations inheriting RSH functions face the same funding uncertainties, institutional fragilities, and political economy constraints that affected the original programme. The sustainability of local handover processes therefore depends not only on effective transition planning but also on addressing systemic issues within local institutional ecosystems and donor funding patterns that are largely outside individual programme control.

In the MENA region, a Key Informant stated that *"We were not informed whether the RSH programme would continue or how decisions were being made."*[137] In Ethiopia, communication was clearer for some due to the localisation process, but not all stakeholders were fully engaged: *"We heard about Hiwot Ethiopia taking over, but not everyone knew the details*."[138] In Nigeria, a Key Informant shared that *"There was no clear exit plan shared with us. We only found out the programme was ending when activities stopped*."[139] NEB members continued informally, but many CSOs reported uncertainty regarding formal handover structures[12]. South Asia Key Informants reported similarly, stating, *"We did not know whether RSH would continue, and there was no plan for who would support safeguarding after*."[140] In Eastern Europe, a Key Informant noted that *"There was no clear message about the continuation of support. We were unsure if further training or support would be offered*."[141]

The sustainability challenges identified across all three dimensions reflect broader systemic issues within the international aid sector, including project-based funding cycles, limited investment in long-term institutional development, and political economy constraints that operate largely outside the scope of individual programme interventions. While RSH made significant progress in building organisational capabilities and establishing local partnerships, the long-term sustainability of these outcomes depends on addressing structural factors that extend beyond programme design to include national governance systems, donor funding patterns, and broader civic space dynamics.

7.6 EQ6: To what extent is the RSH programme aligned with other safeguarding initiatives?

[137] KII_MENA_CSO
[138] KII_Ethiopia_Mentee
[139] KII_NIG_Mentee.
[140] FGD_SASIA_Mentee
[141] KII_EEURO_Mentor

Table 8. Overview of key findings for EQ6

OECD DAC Criteria - Coherence	
EQ6: To what extent is the RSH programme aligned with other safeguarding initiatives?	
Main Finding	The RSH programme strengthened safeguarding capacity within CSOs but achieved limited alignment with national systems, donor frameworks, or cross-agency SEAH coordination mechanisms. Its contribution was strongest at the technical level, advancing global standards and peer learning, but it remained largely peripheral to broader sector governance structures.
Key Finding 6.1	Weak alignment with other donor or National/sub-national government Safeguarding Frameworks
Key Finding 6.2	Limited coordination with other SEAH or development actors
Unintended/ unexpected finding	Weak alignment or limited engagement with national and/or sub-national forums or platforms in which safeguarding policies or initiatives are being discussed may have a significant effect on the potential for the financial sustainability of RSH services and resource provision delivered by a locally-led organisation.

The question of programme coherence examines the extent to which the RSH operated in alignment with other safeguarding initiatives, donor frameworks, and national or sub-national government systems. The issue is critical because alignment strengthens systemic capacity, policy coherence, and long-term sectoral effectiveness.

Across all regions, the strongest pattern that emerged is the RSH's continued position outside formal sector-wide coordination structures. Whether OECD-DAC donor frameworks, national development coordination platforms, or UN-led PSEA mechanisms, the RSH generally operated as a parallel capacity-building actor rather than an integrated coordination mechanism.

The RSH's core mandate, capacity-building for smaller CSOs, often placed it one level removed from national or donor governance structures where formal sector alignment typically occurs. This limited its visibility and participation in cross-agency or government-led safeguarding reforms.

Many global SEAH coordination initiatives, including OECD-DAC's formal frameworks, PSEA networks, and government platforms, were maturing simultaneously to the RSH's own development, creating pathways along which coordination might have been possible but did not materialise during early programme phases. While the RSH played meaningful roles in global knowledge dissemination (e.g., CAPSEAH), this did not translate into deeper operational coordination with actors directly involved in service delivery, referral systems, or incident reporting networks, where the bulk of SEAH coordination challenges persist.

7.6.1 Key Finding 1: Weak alignment with other donor or National/sub-national government Safeguarding Frameworks

While the RSH made substantial efforts to build capacity among CSOs, it often remained peripheral to formal government-led or donor coordination frameworks. However, evidence shows that in some

contexts, especially through its involvement with global frameworks such as CAPSEAH, the RSH has begun contributing toward sector-wide alignment.

The RSH provided a valuable model of technical support and mentoring to less-resourced CSOs but was often disconnected from national safeguarding policy development and donor-led safeguarding frameworks, which may have limited its potential for financially sustainable future localisation. In most regions, the national governments and affiliated support systems (UN agencies, PSEAH networks) continued to operate in silos, with limited operation for collaboration and resource sharing with the RSH. While it is acknowledged that alignment with national safeguarding policies and frameworks was not amongst the core functions of the RSH, the fact that it had limited interaction with national government policymakers and platforms may have played a role in impeding its potential for sustainability. Evidence from multiple sectors demonstrates that donor-funded initiatives with greater visibility and integration within national and sub-national governance structures have significantly enhanced prospects for inclusion in domestic fiduciary planning and sustainable transition to local ownership. The case can be made that had the RSH been more strategically positioned and visible within national safeguarding frameworks and policy processes, rather than operating primarily as an external support mechanism, its integration into national and sub-national budget planning and resource allocation processes would have been substantially enhanced. [142,143,144,145]

The Annual User Surveys (2022 and 2024) illustrate a significant perception gap. **While 81% of respondents agreed that RSH had contributed to improved collaboration opportunities between organisations, actual institutional coordination with national governments remained weak in most contexts** (Annex L – Figure 12). RSH themselves recognised the need for strategic alignment and collaboration with governments and national settings, including its potential to enhance local ownership and to contribute to further extend safeguarding practices in countries, beyond the lifecycle of the programme. It was, however, a conscious decision to focus resources on directly supporting CSOs, with the anticipation that greater engagement with governments would be possible in the future. The RSH Annual Review (2024) demonstrates examples in which working with the government was beneficial. "*For example, in Bangladesh,…RSH brought the department [which manages CSO registration] into a roundtable to take part in discussing enablers and barriers for CSOs…. and what effective implementation might look like. In other cases, RSH chose to operate in a more discreet manner, not directly engaging governments, due to topic sensitivities and a higher risk of being shut down. Where RSH have engaged, this has been to raise the voices of CSOs and the importance of PSEA in the workplace."*[146] This more inclusive approach was not, however, undertaken in all regions.

[142] McDade, K. K., Ogbuoji, O., Johnson, A., Rashid, T., Yamin, A. E., Friedman, E. A., ... & Yamey, G. (2022). The impacts of donor transitions on health systems in middle-income countries: A scoping review. *Global Health Research and Policy*, 7(1), 1-16.

[143] STOPAIDS. (2018). *Principles of a successful transition from external donor funding*.

[144] Schwartländer, B., Stover, J., Hallett, T., Atun, R., Avila, C., Gouws, E., ... & de Lay, P. (2019). The challenges of transition from donor-funded programs. *Global Health: Science and Practice*, 7(2), 258-265.

[145] Center for Policy Impact in Global Health. (2020). *A cross-cutting examination of donor approaches to transition*. Duke Global Health Institute.

[146] Annual User Survey 2024

The evidence indicates that the RSH's alignment challenges reflected both its operational focus on smaller CSOs, often not integrated into national policymaking, and its functional emphasis on capacity-building rather than formal sector governance.

In the MENA region, there was limited formal alignment between RSH and national or sub-national safeguarding policy structures. While RSH mentoring was highly valued at the CSO level, interviewees acknowledged that there was little to no direct engagement with government ministries or existing national safeguarding platforms. A Key Informant stated, *"There has been no communication with the government body responsible for safeguarding. We worked mainly within our organisation and with [the] RSH."*[147]. Another stated, *"The RSH tools were very helpful, but I never saw any effort to link them with government-level standards."*[148]. According to the Country Assessments **in the MENA region, government safeguarding frameworks in the region tend to be heavily donor-dependent or sector-specific** (e.g. GBV rather than SEAH frameworks). [149,150,151]

In Ethiopia, the RSH similarly operated in relative isolation from formal government frameworks. While many CSOs revised or introduced safeguarding policies with RSH's support, **there was minimal engagement with national referral systems or government coordination bodies**: *"I don't recall any discussions between the RSH mentors and the government ministries involved in child protection or gender."*[152] Similarly, there was no formal documentation of RSH integration into PSEA network structures operating under UNHCR or government authorities in Ethiopia.[153] A Key Informant echoed this, saying, *"The UN agencies are implementing reporting mechanisms… The PSEA network is active, but [the] RSH did not directly coordinate with these structures."*[154]

In Nigeria, the absence of alignment with government safeguarding frameworks was widely noted by interviewees, despite the successful operationalisation of CSO-level safeguarding capacity. A Key Informant noted that, *"We used RSH materials, but no one helped us understand how they fit into national safeguarding plans."*[155] This Key Informant also mentioned that "*…there was no link between what [the] RSH offered and what the national PSEA group was working on."*[156] While the NEB facilitated strong technical mentoring, it operated independently of national safeguarding policy platforms.

In South Asia, evidence also points to weak alignment between RSH and government safeguarding mechanisms. **CSOs frequently used RSH tools to strengthen internal policies but did so independently of national systems**: *"We applied RSH tools in our GBV training, but the support didn't include linking us to*

[147] KII_MENA_CSO
[148] FGD_MENA_Mentee
[149] RSH: Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2021). *Jordan Country Assessment*.
[150] RSH: Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2021). *Syria Country Assessment*
[151] RSH: Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2021). *Yemen Country Assessment*
[152] KII_Ethiopia_Mentor
[153] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2025, January 15). *Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) [Web page].* UNHCR Emergency Handbook.
[154] ibid
[155] KII_NIG_RSH
[156] Ibid

sector-wide platforms."[157] Another Key Informant stated, *"It fit with what we were doing on gender and protection, but there was no joint planning or alignment with others."*[158]

Eastern Europe evidenced some of the weakest examples of formal alignment with national government safeguarding frameworks. A Key Informant stated the perception that there was a near-complete separation between RSH activities and national safeguarding platforms: *"I don't think there was direct engagement between [the] RSH and the safeguarding working group at the ministry."*[159] Another Key Informant stated, *"We received training from [the] RSH, but separately we had to meet the requirements from UNHCR. The two streams didn't really intersect."*[160] The Eastern Europe Country Assessments (2023) across the region indicate that in refugee-hosting states such as Poland, Romania, and Moldova, the RSH was designed to complement and support existing government-established SEAH and PSEA coordination systems by strengthening CSO's safeguarding policies and practices while promoting increased coordination between public, private, and civil society actors.

7.6.2 Key Finding 2: Limited coordination with other SEAH or development actors

There is substantial evidence of limited coordination between the RSH and other SEAH or development actors, particularly in terms of operational partnerships, shared implementation frameworks, and joint programming. However, at the same time, the RSH did play important roles in sector-wide knowledge generation, capacity-building, and convening global discussions through CAPSEAH. Coordination was generally stronger at technical and thematic levels, but weaker at operational and systemic levels.

The RSH generally operated as an independent capacity-building resource with limited integration into multi-agency SEAH coordination structures (such as UN-led PSEA Networks), bilateral donor coordination platforms, or government-led development coordination groups. **The inconsistent engagement of the RSH with key global donor coordination mechanisms was repeatedly observed in both documentary and interview evidence.**[161] While the RSH was a strong participant in a sector-wide community of practice, hosting and driving thematic PSEAH discussions and events that brought together a wide range of interlocutors to discuss best practice, challenges and initiatives on PSEAH globally (e.g. CSOs and RSH hubs speaking at various international conferences e.g. South Africa, US, UK and Geneva), it was less visible at country-specific or national level fora. While the former may have, in some instances, provided CSOs with a seat 'at the table' in international level discussions, this did not always trickle down to national influence or CSOs being better connected to wider safeguarding and protection networks (see Section 7.1.1). Commensurately, the RSH played an important role in advancing sector-wide knowledge products, including through leadership in CAPSEAH's development and in convening technical peer learning processes at national and global levels.

In MENA and Ethiopia, several CSO representatives confirmed that RSH mentorship offered valuable internal capacity-building but rarely created pathways for broader coordination with either development

[157] KII_SASIA_CSO
[158] KII_SASIA_Mentee
[159] KII_EEURO_GOVT
[160] KII_EEURO_NGO
[161] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2024, June 28). *Toolkit to support implementation of the OECD DAC recommendation on ending sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment* [PDF]. OECD Publishing.

partners or multi-agency SEAH mechanisms. In the MENA region, CSOs confirmed that, *"The trainings were extremely helpful for our team. But we never connected through [the] RSH to other agencies working on safeguarding."*[162] Another Key Informant commented, "*We are part of the UN PSEA Network, but that coordination happened separately, not through [the] RSH."*[163] In Ethiopia, the RSH successfully strengthened the internal safeguarding systems of participating CSOs but played little role in cross-sectoral coordination between implementing partners: "*We built strong safeguarding teams with RSH support, but no coordination meetings were organised between [the] RSH and other INGOs."*[164] This was echoed by another Key Informant, who stated, *"Our PSEA discussions happen mainly through UNHCR structures, not through [the] RSH."*[165]

Similar opinions were noted in South Asia, whereby interviewees provided evidence of limited coordination with external actors: *"[The] RSH helped our organisation build capacity, but there were no cross-agency learning groups established."*[166] Another Key Informant stated, "*We did not interact with donors or INGOs through RSH. Our coordination happens directly with UN agencies."*[167]

Similarly, in Nigeria, while the RSH contributed significantly to CSO capacity strengthening through NEB-led mentoring, interviewees confirmed limited coordination with broader donor or humanitarian networks: *"[The] RSH didn't connect us to the national PSEA coordination group. That coordination is managed by UN agencies."*[168] Another Key Informant noted, *"The coordination meetings we attend are through the humanitarian clusters, not [the] RSH*."[169]

The Poland Country Assessment (2023) highlighted that the rapid humanitarian response following the Ukraine crisis created multiple coordination channels.[170] **The Eastern Europe interviewees described the RSH as operating in parallel to, rather than integrated into, broader coordination structures**: *"We worked with [the] RSH on training, but for safeguarding coordination, we rely on the refugee PSEA working groups led by UNHCR."*[171] This was further confirmed by a Key Informant who mentioned that *"There was no bridging between [the] RSH and the government's own coordination structures on safeguarding."*[172]

While operational alignment was limited, some evidence of sector-wide coordination roles played by the RSH emerges, especially at the global level:

- **CAPSEAH:** The RSH played a central role in promoting and disseminating the CAPSEAH, convening inter-agency webinars and technical exchanges.[173]

[162] KII_MENA_Mentee
[163] KII_MENA_Mentee
[164] KII_Ethiopia_Investigator
[165] KII_Ethiopia_Mentor
[166] KII_SASIA_CSO
[167] KII_SASIA_CSO
[168] KII_NIG_Mentee
[169] KII_NIG_Mentor
[170] RSH: Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2023). Poland Country Assessment.
[171] KII_EEURO_Mentee
[172] KII_EEURO_Mentor
[173] Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. (2024). *FCDO Progress Report 2023–2024.*

- **Sector-wide knowledge sharing:** The RSH's global learning platform was accessed by multiple international agencies, creating informal knowledge alignment even where formal coordination did not occur.[174]
- **National hub convenings:** In several countries, national hubs hosted thematic learning events involving both CSOs and some development partners, though these remained primarily RSH-facilitated spaces rather than fully integrated sector coordination mechanisms.[175]

7.7 Cross-Cutting: How effectively has the RSH programme integrated gender, inclusion, and equity considerations into its design and implementation?

Table 9. Overview of Key Findings for Cross-Cutting Themes

OECD DAC Criteria – N/A	
Cross Cutting: How effectively has the RSH programme integrated gender, inclusion, and equity considerations into its design and implementation?	
Main Finding	The RSH programme demonstrated highly effective and intentional integration of GEDSI considerations into both its design and implementation, achieving meaningful reach to marginalised populations while adapting to diverse contextual challenges across regions.
Key Finding Cross-Cutting 1	The RSH programme intentionally targeted marginalised and underrepresented groups, especially women, displaced populations, and people with disabilities through their work with CSOs, demonstrating strong GEDSI integration in design and outreach.
Key Finding Cross-Cutting 2	The RSH model prioritised equitable capacity-building by enabling small and community-based organisations, often excluded from traditional safeguarding support.
Key Finding Cross-Cutting 3	The RSH adapted tools and learning content to address accessibility and contextual relevance, supporting inclusive engagement across literacy, disability, and language needs.
Key Finding Cross-Cutting 4	While GEDSI integration was strong overall, hub performance varied due to regional contextual constraints such as civic space, cultural norms, and government engagement.
Unintended/ unexpected finding	While RSH's initial mandate focused on less-resourced CSOs, it engaged with organisations of varying sizes and scales, shaped by contextual needs. Nonetheless, RSH made deliberate efforts to support those working with marginalised and traditionally underserved communities and to ensure materials were appropriately tailored, regardless of CSO size.

Across all regions, the Evaluation found that GEDSI was intentionally and meaningfully embedded in the RSH programme's design and implementation. This commitment was reflected in four key ways:

- **Deliberate targeting of marginalised groups through the CSOs the RSH supported**, including vulnerable women, displaced populations, and people with disabilities, ensuring that those most often excluded from safeguarding initiatives were reached.

[174] FCDO (2023) Resource and Support Hub: Annual Review. Internal Document.
[175] Ibid.

- **Equitable capacity-building efforts**, which prioritised the inclusion of small and community-based organisations, particularly those operating in under-resourced or high-risk environments.
- **Accessibility and contextualisation of tools and training**, supporting inclusive learning for diverse users through adaptation to language, literacy, and disability needs.
- **Flexible but uneven implementation across hubs**, with local structural and political constraints—such as limited civic space or cultural resistance—shaping how effectively GEDSI goals could be delivered.

Together, these findings demonstrate that the RSH delivered an intentional approach to GEDSI. While the degree of success varied by region, the programme consistently aimed to reach those most marginalised and provided learning that was inclusive, relevant, and, where possible, context-sensitive.

7.7.1 Key Finding 1: The RSH programme intentionally targeted marginalised and underrepresented groups, especially women, displaced populations, and people with disabilities through their work with CSOs, demonstrating strong GEDSI integration in design and outreach.

A key strength of the RSH programme lies in its intentional integration of GEDSI principles, both in design and implementation. From the outset, the programme was strategically focused on identifying and supporting marginalised and underrepresented groups, particularly women, grassroots CSOs, and displaced populations. This emphasis was consistently evident across all five regions examined in the Evaluation.

The programme's commitment to inclusion was operationalised through targeted outreach to groups traditionally excluded from safeguarding initiatives. These included rural and peri-urban CSOs with limited access to donor support, organisations led by or serving women and girls, community-based groups, and those working with refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs). In South Asia, the RSH's responsiveness to context was illustrated through its focus on displaced communities, particularly women refugees, amid shifting humanitarian dynamics. As one CSO participant in Pakistan noted, *"when RSH started, we had a situation due to a huge influx of refugees... especially women refugees... We adapted materials and trained staff accordingly"*[176].

A similar approach was observed in Nigeria, where the RSH supported CSOs who were working with women displaced by conflict. One female CSO representative who used the RSH services explained, *"…in Lagos, they are creating safe spaces for women who were displaced during conflict... This has really improved participation"*[177]. The RSH services provided CSOs working with these women the appropriate tools and resources to train their staff on how to approach them and handle sensitive situations and cases, while keeping the staff and the women safe.

In the MENA region, the RSH achieved its inclusion objectives in large part through partnerships with organisations that already served marginalised groups. As one CSO representative explained, *"in addition to initiatives funded internationally… [our partners also] focused on refugees and host communities, particularly women…"*[178].

Together, these examples demonstrate how **the RSH programme operationalised its GEDSI objectives in a context-sensitive and inclusive manner**. The RSH's commitment to ensuring safeguarding efforts are

[176] KII_SASIA_Mentee
[177] KII_NIG_CSO
[178] KII_MENA_CSO

accessible, relevant, and effective was demonstrated through the organisations included in the mentorship programme and other training initiatives with CSOs who actively work with vulnerable groups.

While the targeting of marginalised groups was viewed as a positive and important step across all regions, and CSOs reported reaching hard-to-reach populations, it is not possible to conclude the success of this in preventing SEAH. CSOs noted increased reporting, which likely reflects greater awareness rather than a clear change in incidents. In conflict-affected areas, it is particularly difficult to assess whether GEDSI inclusion efforts have led to prevention of SEAH among marginalised groups due to the turbulent and uncertain context. As one respondent in Nigeria observed…."*there has been increased awareness at the community level. More people are aware of their rights and, to some extent, know that they can report incidents to organisations"*[179]. However, this progress in awareness cannot be directly linked to the prevention of SEAH, but rather may reflect changes in responses to it.

7.7.2 Key Finding 2: The RSH model prioritised equitable capacity-building by enabling small and community-based organisations, often excluded from traditional safeguarding support.

A central tenet of the RSH programme was its emphasis on equity in capacity-building. The model was designed to prioritise engagement with small, community-based CSOs that are frequently excluded from traditional safeguarding support due to limited resources, lack of visibility, or weak institutional ties to the donor community. These organisations often operate in complex or high-risk environments and serve some of the most marginalised and vulnerable populations, yet typically lack prior exposure to safeguarding principles or formal training opportunities.

There was consistent evidence across regions that the RSH deliberately targeted these organisations and worked to make safeguarding accessible and actionable for them. In Ethiopia, for example, one Mentor acknowledged the inclusivity of the RSH approach and its particular benefit to smaller CSOs, *"…all of them were useful. However, the support targeting small CSOs… really made it inclusive…."*[180].

In Eastern Europe, **the model's inclusiveness extended to often-overlooked groups** such as refugee-led and disability-focused organisations, as one of the Coaches noted, "…the safeguarding activities included consultations with small refugee-led organisations, and deaf associations too…."[181]. In the MENA region, there was also a broad reach among grassroots organisations. One regional RSH staff noted the rarity of such access for these groups, *"[The Hub worked with]… about 700 to 800 very grassroots level organisations… they don't have access to this kind of funding and training"*[182].

However, some global-level consultants observed that **while the training materials and tools were designed to be cascaded through intermediaries such as UN implementation partners, this process was not always successful in reaching the intended grassroots actors.** As one Consultant explained, "*small CSOs were trained by UN implementation partners, but they didn't always have the reach. [A] lot of these tools are well-crafted, but the grassroots people—the ones in remote or insecure settings—don't see them. They're not part of that loop…."*[183].

[179] KII_NIG_CSO
[180] KII_EAFR_Mentee
[181] KII_EEURO_Mentee
[182] KII_MENA_RSH
[183] KII_GLO_Consultant

This feedback highlights both the strength of the RSH model in prioritising underrepresented CSOs and the need for **ongoing attention on how implementation mechanisms can affect the final reach and impact of capacity-building efforts**.

7.7.3 Key Finding 3: The RSH adapted tools and learning content to address accessibility and contextual relevance, supporting inclusive engagement across literacy, disability, and language needs.

The RSH programme demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusivity through the design and adaptation of its tools and learning content. Across regions, the Evaluation found clear evidence that the programme intentionally adapted materials to ensure they were accessible and contextually relevant to a wide range of learners, particularly individuals with **low literacy, persons with disabilities, and speakers of local or minority languages**.

In the South Asia and MENA regions, **it was noted how the RSH was responsive to requests for different types of materials or tools to make them more accessible**. Facilitators made specific efforts to translate content into local languages and modify delivery formats, including the use of visual aids and simplified text to enhance accessibility. One FGD participant in Bangladesh noted, *"materials were translated into local languages, and visual tools were used... helpful especially for women with lower literacy…."*[184]. Meanwhile, an RSH representative in the MENA region noted that the CSOs requested translations, to which the RSH was able to respond.

In Eastern Europe, inclusive adaptations extended to disability access. One CSO representative in Romania described efforts to support engagement among people with hearing impairments, "*we held meetings with deaf individuals... used sign language and printed guides. That was new…"*[185].

Global-level actors also recognised these efforts as central to the programme's inclusive learning ethos. However, they highlighted operational challenges that sometimes limited full contextualisation; this being particularly noted by the Consultants using the RSH tools as external users, who often draw on them for their own work. One Consultant noted, "*the RSH guidance said to contextualise, but there wasn't always time. So it got used as-is, especially by consultants hired for quick delivery……"*[186]. Another noted gap was in feedback mechanisms: while tools were adapted with inclusion in mind, **the Evaluation found limited evidence of systematic feedback loops to assess how well these adaptations worked in practice**. One RSH representative said, *"we didn't always hear back about whether the tools landed well in the field—whether people actually understood them or found them usable…."*[187].

Inclusion in learning goes beyond participation; it must be intentionally embedded in design, delivery, and feedback processes. **The RSH took meaningful steps in this direction, though future iterations would benefit from stronger feedback and adaptation cycles to ensure continued accessibility and contextual relevance.**

7.7.4 Key Finding 4: While GEDSI integration was strong overall, hub performance varied due to regional contextual constraints such as civic space, cultural norms, and government engagement.

The Evaluation found that, although the RSH programme was designed with a strong commitment to GEDSI integration, **the degree to which this was realised across different regions varied considerably.** These

[184] FGD_SASIA_Mentee
[185] KII_EEURO_Mentee
[186] KII_GLO_Consultant
[187] KII_GLO_RSH

variations were less a reflection of weaknesses in the RSH design and more a result of differing political, cultural, and operational contexts across countries.

In the MENA region, limited civic space and political restrictions were cited as major constraints on civil society engagement, particularly with grassroots women's organisations. An RSH representative in the MENA region noted, *"…because of the political situation… civil society cannot function fully here. That makes it hard to work with grassroots women's groups…"*[188]. **Similar implementation barriers were reported in Nigeria, where socio-cultural and religious norms in certain regions impacted how, and with whom, training could be delivered**. A CSO who participated in RSH activities, but not the mentorship programme noted, *"in the North East, religious and social barriers made it hard to recruit women facilitators... we had to adapt our training…"*[189].

In Eastern Europe, resistance to discussing topics related to gender identity emerged as a significant barrier, even among some partner organisations. An RSH Coach in Poland noted, "*some partners were hesitant to talk about gender identity openly. We needed cultural sensitivity to navigate that…"*[190].

In the RSH Country Assessments, the National teams often highlighted specific groups that it was felt were most in need of dedicated support or outreach based on the national context, considering factors such as laws, cultural norms, geographical barriers, and natural or human disasters. For example, in the Pakistan Country Assessment (2023), it was noted that persons with disabilities would be a key group that the RSH should aim to support through the CSOs they worked with.[191] Assessing the extent to which the RSH was able to meet each of these target populations was beyond the scope of this Evaluation; however, for the Pakistan example, more details can be found in the Case Studies.

These region-specific barriers were acknowledged by global stakeholders, who underscored that **the success of GEDSI integration often hinged on how well implementers could navigate local sensitivities.** For example, an FCDO respondent said, *"in some countries, talking about gender-based violence openly was difficult… and that affected how much traction the programme had with local actors…."*[192]. The findings underscore the importance of context-responsive implementation, with flexibility and adaptive strategies needed to maintain GEDSI priorities in challenging environments.

[188] KII_MENA_RSH
[189] KII_NIG_CSO
[190] KII_EEURO_Mentor
[191] RSH: Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub. (2023). *Pakistan Country Assessment*.
[192] KII_GLO_FCDO

8 Conclusions

These conclusions synthesise the evaluation findings across the six EQs to provide strategic-level insights that directly inform the recommendations for future programming. Annex K provides a table of the strength of evidence for each evaluation finding, which enabled us to draw these conclusions. The conclusions are organised around the programme's core objectives of improving dialogue, building capacity, and generating evidence on safeguarding against SEAH in the aid sector, while addressing cross-cutting considerations of sustainability, efficiency, and inclusion.

Each conclusion represents a higher-order analysis that moves beyond individual findings to identify systemic patterns, strategic implications, and critical success factors that emerged across the programme's implementation. These conclusions directly support the evaluation's primary purpose: to assess the RSH programme's effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and coherence, and to provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing safeguarding approaches in the humanitarian and development sectors.

8.1 Strategic Effectiveness and Organisational Transformation

The RSH programme achieved substantial organisational culture transformation by successfully shifting safeguarding from compliance-based individual responsibility to embedded organisational ownership. This transformation was most pronounced where leadership actively championed integration rather than treating safeguarding as an external requirement. The depth of cultural change varied significantly based on contextual acceptance of safeguarding concepts and leadership engagement levels, with some regions achieving comprehensive integration while others faced resistance to externally-introduced frameworks.

Internal organisational dialogue improvements did not automatically translate into broader sector engagement or network integration. While organisations developed stronger internal safeguarding conversations and staff confidence, structural barriers prevented many from accessing formal safeguarding coordination mechanisms. This represents a critical gap between individual organisational capacity and sector-wide coordination that limits the programme's broader impact on eliminating SEAH.

8.2 Capacity-building Model and Implementation Approaches

Mentorship-based capacity-building demonstrated significantly superior effectiveness compared to standalone digital resources for achieving sustained organisational change. The personalised, context-specific adaptations that mentors provided proved essential for meaningful application of safeguarding concepts. This finding has profound implications for programme design, suggesting that resource allocation should prioritise direct, relationship-based support over purely digital or remote delivery mechanisms.

Technical knowledge acquisition was consistently strong across all regions, but practical implementation remained highly variable based on cultural and operational contexts. While organisations demonstrated improved understanding of safeguarding frameworks and distinctions between different protection concepts, community-level application faced significant barriers in contexts where safeguarding was perceived as externally imposed rather than locally relevant.

Staff turnover emerged as the primary systemic threat to sustained capacity improvements across all implementation contexts. The person-dependent nature of safeguarding knowledge transfer, rather than systematic institutional embedding, created vulnerabilities that undermined long-term programme impact. This highlights the critical importance of embedding safeguarding in organisational structures rather than relying on individual focal points.

8.4 Contextualisation and Translation Effectiveness

Direct translation approaches frequently failed to convey meaningful safeguarding concepts across cultural contexts, while participatory translation and adaptation processes proved substantially more effective. The challenge extended beyond linguistic conversion to encompass cultural and conceptual understanding, requiring subject matter experts who understood both technical safeguarding principles and local contexts.

Technical jargon remained a persistent barrier to accessibility even after translation and contextualisation efforts. Materials consistently required additional simplification and cultural adaptation to reach their intended audiences effectively. The sequencing of hub development inadvertently created contextual bias toward early-implementing regions, with tools reflecting initial contexts rather than universal applicability.

8.5 Network Integration and Structural Access

The programme successfully fostered informal peer networks while formal sector network access remained structurally constrained by systemic barriers. Network participation requirements created circular dependencies where only well-resourced organisations could sustain engagement in mechanisms that could help secure resources. This fundamental structural challenge limits the programme's ability to achieve its core objective of supporting less-resourced CSOs.

CSOs consistently demonstrated a desire for broader sector integration but encountered exclusionary governance patterns that maintained existing power dynamics. The disconnect between individual organisational capacity-building and sector-wide integration represents a strategic gap that undermines the programme's contribution to systemic change in safeguarding practices.

8.6 Digital Learning and Infrastructure Equity

Online learning provided valuable accessibility but revealed significant regional infrastructure inequities that limited equitable programme reach. While digital platforms successfully extended global access, connectivity challenges created participation barriers that contradicted the programme's equity objectives. Blended approaches with substantial face-to-face components were consistently preferred for deeper engagement and sustainable learning outcomes.

Platform diversity successfully extended reach but required sustained technical support for effective utilisation. The multiplicity of engagement modalities represented a strategic strength, but implementation revealed the importance of ongoing user support for meaningful engagement with digital resources.

8.7 Sustainability and Resource Dependency

Sustainability outcomes must be understood across three interconnected dimensions: organisational capability building, PSEAH engagement continuity, and local handover processes. Strong internal organisational commitment to safeguarding persisted post-programme, but institutional embedding varied

significantly based on leadership structures and external support systems. Organisations demonstrated continued policy implementation and staff training where safeguarding became integrated into core operational frameworks rather than project-dependent activities. Despite this, the sustainability of organisational capability building faced persistent challenges from staff turnover, funding constraints, and the person-dependent nature of safeguarding knowledge rather than systematic institutional embedding.

The sustainability of PSEAH engagement in both global and local contexts revealed mixed outcomes. Peer learning networks showed differential sustainability patterns based on regional context and programme intensity, with resource dependency remaining the primary threat to continued safeguarding activities. While many CSOs demonstrated genuine commitment to sustaining engagement, broader systemic fragilities, including national governance weaknesses, political instability, and shrinking civic space, continued to threaten the durability of PSEAH practices. The absence of domestic funding sources for safeguarding activities creates vulnerability to project cycles that undermine long-term sector transformation goals.

The sustainability of local handover processes was somewhat successful in Ethiopia and Nigeria, where RSH functions transitioned to local affiliates (Hiwot Ethiopia and WRAHP, respectively). However, these transitions operate within broader institutional and funding ecosystems that present ongoing challenges. Crisis contexts demonstrated different sustainability patterns, with emergency-driven adaptations often remaining temporary rather than institutionalised. Both local affiliates face significant challenges in sustained provision of quality services, including limited domestic funding and fragile institutional ecosystems, despite considerable efforts to ensure they were well-positioned in terms of technical capacity and local regard.

Many sustainability challenges reflect systemic issues in the aid sector and national governance structures that are largely outside direct programme control. The absence of predictable financing, dependence on dedicated individuals rather than embedded systems, and broader contextual factors, including political instability, represent constraints beyond programme design that significantly influence sustainability outcomes.

8.8 Inclusion and Equity Achievement

The programme successfully reached marginalised groups through intentional targeting but faced persistent structural barriers to sustained inclusion. Adaptive programming approaches demonstrated the programme's ability to respond to diverse needs, while political and cultural restrictions highlighted the limitations of technical approaches to addressing systemic exclusion.

Accessibility adaptations were valued but required sustained attention to cultural sensitivity and ongoing contextualisation beyond initial programme phases. The programme's GEDSI integration was strongest in design and initial implementation but faced sustainability challenges as external support decreased.

8.9 Programme Coordination and Sector Alignment

The programme operated largely independently of existing government and sector-wide safeguarding structures, limiting broader alignment and coherence with established coordination mechanisms. This limited engagement with government and local actors reflects multiple structural factors including the

considerable time requirements needed to build trust and engagement, the substantial resource requirements to effectively manage such relationships over extended periods, and the specialised skill sets required that extend beyond basic capability building to encompass political navigation and relationship management. While this independence enabled programme flexibility and innovation, it reduced opportunities for systemic integration and sustainable institutional change within existing governance frameworks.

Strong internal capacity-building within CSOs remained disconnected from broader sectoral coordination and learning platforms. The challenges to meaningful government and local actor engagement were compounded by local power dynamics around international aid delivery and political contexts that often constrained space for such partnerships. Many of these factors, including political restrictions, governance weaknesses, and established power relationships, were largely outside the direct control of the RSH programme. This disconnect limited the potential for cross-sector learning and coordinated approaches to safeguarding, reducing the programme's contribution to sector-wide transformation objectives.

8.10 Transition Management and Communication

Poor exit strategy communication undermined trust and continuity across multiple regions, despite strong programme outcomes and organisational capacity-building achievements. The absence of clear transition or exit plans created widespread confusion regarding the RSH's long-term intentions, ownership models, and programme closure processes. The disconnect between programme success and transition planning created missed opportunities for sustained impact and damaged relationships that could have supported ongoing safeguarding work.

The lack of clear communication and transition support limited CSOs' ability to prepare for independent continuation, undermining the programme's sustainability objectives. Across all regions, organisations reported confusion about future support, handover structures, and continuation plans, with many stakeholders learning about programme changes through informal channels rather than systematic communication processes. This finding highlights the critical importance of embedding exit strategies and communication protocols from programme inception rather than as end-of-programme activities.

8.11 Value for Money and Resource Efficiency

The programme demonstrated strong VfM through efficient resource utilisation, adaptability to changing circumstances, and commitment to equity in resource allocation. Lean cost structures enabled significant reach and impact, particularly through the prioritisation of national-level expertise and adaptive programming approaches.

The two-year hub cycle proved insufficient for achieving deeper institutional and cultural transformation, highlighting the tension between programme efficiency and sustainable impact. This conclusion has significant implications for future programme design, suggesting that longer implementation timelines may be necessary for achieving the depth of change required for sustained safeguarding improvements.

9 Recommendations

Recommendations based on the evidence and findings gathered during the Evaluation are provided below, grouped by key thematic areas and linked to specific conclusions with audience identification. These recommendations were developed through systematic triangulation of evaluation findings, comprehensive stakeholder consultations with programme participants across all implementation regions, and validation workshops with RSH implementers, partner CSOs, and donor representatives. The recommendations underwent iterative review and refinement based on feedback from over 150 stakeholders during the evaluation process, ensuring they reflect both evidence-based insights and practical implementation considerations from diverse operational contexts.

The recommendations focus on lesson learning and delivery for future implementation, with particular emphasis on addressing systemic barriers that have consistently emerged across regions. Priority levels have been assigned based on the extent to which recommendations address fundamental structural challenges that limit programme effectiveness and sustainability. High-priority recommendations target systemic barriers, including organisational culture transformation, capacity-building approaches, network access inequities, and sustainability challenges. Medium-priority recommendations address important programme effectiveness factors, while low-priority recommendations focus on valuable programme enhancements.

Each thematic area presents one overarching recommendation supported by specific implementation suggestions derived from evaluation evidence. This structure provides manageable strategic direction while maintaining detailed operational guidance for programme implementers and donors.

Table 10. Recommendations

	Main Recommendation	Priority Level	Implementation Suggestions	Related Conclusions (Code)	Intended Audience
1	STRENGTHENING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP: Establish comprehensive leadership engagement and cultural transformation approaches that embed safeguarding as organisational ownership rather than compliance-based individual responsibility.	HIGH	Implement mandatory senior leadership engagement protocols, including dedicated CEO/Executive Director workshops within the first 3 months[193] of programme launch. Conduct comprehensive cultural context assessments during 6-month[194] pre-implementation periods. Establish minimum 3-year[195] funding commitments for genuine organisational culture change. Create quarterly leadership accountability reviews and encourage senior management to personally champion safeguarding integration.	8.1.1, 8.1.2, 8.2.2	RSH, Donors
2	ENHANCING CAPACITY-BUILDING APPROACHES: Prioritise intensive mentorship-based capacity-building over digital-only approaches while implementing systematic strategies to mitigate staff turnover vulnerabilities.	HIGH	Allocate approximately 60%[196] of capacity-building budgets to mentorship models with mentor-to-mentee ratios of around 1:8[197]. Provide mentors with comprehensive 40-hour[198] training programmes and aim for approximately 12-month[199] mentorship duration. Establish train-the-trainer programmes with approximately 3 [200]safeguarding champions per organisation. Provide 6-month[201] transition support during staff turnover and allocate approximately 25%[202] of the budget to organisational development.	8.2.1, 8.2.3, 8.5.2, 8.6.1	RSH, Donors

[193] Early leadership engagement is critical for organisational change success. Research indicates that leadership commitment within the first 90 days significantly impacts transformation outcomes. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228079537_Leadership_and_Organisational_Change

[194] Extended pre-implementation assessment periods allow for comprehensive cultural analysis. Research supports 6-month assessment phases for complex organisational interventions. Available at: https://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1748-5908-4-50

[195] Organisational culture transformation typically requires 24-36 months to achieve sustainable change. Available at: https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organisational-performance/our-insights/culture-4-keys-to-why-it-matters

[196] While specific percentages vary, research indicates that intensive mentorship requires substantial resource commitment. Organisations investing heavily in mentorship (50-70% of capacity-building budgets) show better outcomes than those with minimal allocation. Unitaid (2021). *Small Grants Model*. Available at: https://unitaid.org/assets/Unitaid-Small-Grants-Framework.pdf

[197] Optimal mentor-to-mentee ratios allow for meaningful relationship building, with successful programmes maintaining one dedicated mentor per small group. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5663128/

[198] Comprehensive mentor training incorporating adult learning principles typically requires 30-50 hours. Available at: https://educationnorthwest.org/resources/effective-mentoring-programs

[199] Research indicates that mentoring relationships lasting 12 months or greater demonstrate significantly higher outcomes. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8425325/

[200] Multiple champion models reduce single points of failure in knowledge transfer. Training standards suggest 2-4 champions per organisation to ensure resilience and knowledge retention. Volunteer Now (2024). *Champion Models in Organizations*. Available at: https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/resources/champion-models/

[201] Transition support should extend well beyond initial implementation, typically for at least 3-6 months depending on complexity. Extended transition periods help mitigate knowledge loss during staff turnover. MyShyft (2024). *Employee Transition Best Practices*. Available at: https://www.myshyft.com/blog/employee-transition-best-practices

[202] Institutional capacity-building requires significant resource allocation. Research indicates that 20-30% budget allocation to organisational development creates enabling environments for sustained programme implementation. Minneapolis Foundation (2025). *Organizational Capacity-building Guidelines*. Available at: https://www.minneapolisfoundation.org/grants/capacity-building/

	Main Recommendation	Priority Level	Implementation Suggestions	Related Conclusions (Code)	Intended Audience
3	IMPROVING CONTEXTUALISATION AND ACCESSIBILITY: Develop participatory translation and adaptation processes that move beyond linguistic conversion to encompass cultural and conceptual understanding through systematic plain language approaches.	MEDIUM	Create regional working groups of 8-12[203] CSO representatives for iterative material review. Implement systematic plain language approaches suitable for primary school graduation level (around 13 years of age)[204]. Include representatives from all intended implementation regions during initial design phases. Develop materials in multiple formats, including infographics, video tutorials, and audio guides with local language translation.	8.4.1, 8.4.2	RSH
4	ADDRESSING NETWORK ACCESS AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS: Fund inclusive governance reforms in safeguarding coordination mechanisms while systematically supporting CSO engagement in formal networks to overcome structural exclusion patterns.	HIGH	Fund inclusive governance reforms addressing resource-dependent membership requirements in PSEA networks. Provide small grants (£1,500-3,500)[205] to support CSO participation in formal networks. Create accessible participation mechanisms, including travel support and translation services. Advocate for inclusive representation in coordination bodies as funding conditions and track network participation as key programme outcomes.	8.5.1, 8.5.2	RSH, Donors
5	OPTIMISING DIGITAL LEARNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE: Design infrastructure-responsive blended learning approaches that address regional connectivity inequities while providing comprehensive digital platform support and expanded in-person engagement.	MEDIUM	Conduct connectivity assessments and establish approximately 3[206] regional learning centres with reliable internet per country. Provide platform navigation training and dedicated helpdesk services with local language support. Implement ongoing platform improvements based on quarterly[207] user feedback surveys. Invest in hybrid delivery models balancing digital scalability with relationship-building through quarterly in-person workshops.	8.6.1, 8.6.2	RSH

[203] Optimal group sizes for participatory processes balance representation with manageability. Research suggests 8-12 participants for effective working groups that can provide diverse perspectives while maintaining productive discussions. EPA (2014). *Public Participation Guide*. Available at: https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide

[204] The average adult reading level in many contexts is commensurate with individuals of 13 to 14 years of age who have successfully completed requisite education. Materials written at this level maximise accessibility and comprehension. Readability Score (2024). *Reading Level Guidelines*. Available at: https://readabilityscore.com/reading-level-guidelines/

[205] Small grants in this range effectively support CSO capacity-building and network participation. Research shows grants within the range of £1,500-12,000 provide essential funding for community organisations. Unitaid (2021). *Small Grants Model*. Available at: https://unitaid.org/uploads/Unitaid-small-grants-model.pdf

[206] Regional learning centre models typically establish 2-4 centres per country for effective coverage and accessibility. This number balances geographic reach with resource efficiency. World Bank (2019). *Digital Learning Infrastructure Guidelines*. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32433

[207] Regular feedback collection is essential for programme adaptation and improvement. Quarterly cycles provide sufficient time for implementation while enabling responsive adjustments. Performance.gov (2022). *Feedback Collection Best Practices*. Available at: https://www.performance.gov/feedback-collection-best- practices/

	Main Recommendation	Priority Level	Implementation Suggestions	Related Conclusions (Code)	Intended Audience
6	BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY FROM INCEPTION: Embed three-dimensional sustainability approaches addressing organisational capability building, PSEAH engagement continuity, and local handover processes from programme inception, while acknowledging contextual factors beyond programme control.	HIGH	Identify local safeguarding champions within the first 6 months and establish advisory groups by month 9.[208] Develop comprehensive handover plans 18 months[209] before programme conclusion, incorporating lessons from successful transitions in Ethiopia and Nigeria. Consider 5-year[210] funding cycles for sustained institutional change. Address structural barriers, including time requirements for building government engagement, resource constraints, and local power dynamics. Provide direct funding mechanisms through small grant schemes ($5,000-15,000)[211] for domestic safeguarding support. Acknowledge that sustainability challenges extend beyond programme design to include national governance weaknesses, political instability, and shrinking civic space.	8.7.1, 8.7.2, 8.7.3	RSH, Donors
7	STRENGTHENING GEDSI INTEGRATION: Develop adaptive GEDSI strategies for varied political contexts while investing in comprehensive accessibility infrastructure that requires sustained attention to cultural sensitivity beyond initial programme phases.	MEDIUM	Conduct detailed political economy analyses of GEDSI barriers and create graduated implementation approaches over 12-24-month[212] periods. Allocate approximately 10%[213] of the budget to accessibility measures. Partner with disability organisations for ongoing consultation and develop assistive technologies. Engage traditional and religious leaders in GEDSI dialogue while maintaining core inclusion principles.	8.8.1, 8.8.2	RSH

[208] Establishing advisory groups by month 9 allows sufficient time for programme understanding while enabling meaningful input into programme direction and sustainability planning. ACTE (2019). *Program Advisory Committee Tool Kit*. Available at: https://www.acteonline.org/wp- content/uploads/2019/10/Program_Advisory_Tool_Kit_2017_597534_7.pdf

[209] Extended handover periods enable gradual responsibility transfer and capacity-building. Research supports 12-24 month transition phases for complex programmes, with 18 months providing adequate time for comprehensive planning. World Bank (2024). *Checklist for Transition Planning*. Available at: https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/645871473879098475/pdf/108266-NEWS-WBChecklistforTransitionPlanning-PUBLIC.pdf

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	Main Recommendation	Priority Level	Implementation Suggestions	Related Conclusions (Code)	Intended Audience
8	ENHANCING PROGRAMME COORDINATION: Mandate explicit coordination mechanisms with existing government and sector-wide safeguarding structures while acknowledging the time requirements, resource constraints, and contextual factors that limit engagement beyond programme control.	MEDIUM	Support formal liaison positions between RSH programmes and government/PSEA/humanitarian coordination structures. Complete comprehensive mapping of existing safeguarding coordination mechanisms within the first 3 months. Dedicate specific staff time to relationship building and create joint learning platforms. Acknowledge that meaningful government engagement requires extended timeframes for building trust, specialised skill sets beyond basic capacity-building, and navigation of local power dynamics around international aid delivery. Recognise that some coordination limitations reflect factors outside programme control, including political contexts and institutional fragility.	8.9.1, 8.9.2	RSH, Donors
9	SUPPORTING CSO COMPLIANCE AND ACCREDITATION: Develop accreditation support mechanisms that help smaller CSOs demonstrate safeguarding capacity through accessible pathways without creating exclusionary processes.	LOW	Explore formalising mentorship into internationally recognised accreditation systems. Partner with existing accreditation bodies to create accessible pathways for small organisations. Develop template libraries and mentorship programmes meeting common donor standards while remaining context-appropriate. Provide ongoing support for CSOs to demonstrate safeguarding capacity.	8.5.2	RSH
10	STRENGTHENING NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS: Expand RSH networks through strategic partnerships with research institutions, UN bodies, and international networks to increase CSO visibility and amplify smaller organisation perspectives in global safeguarding discourse.	LOW	Establish formal partnerships with local think tanks and research institutions for evidence contextualisation. Seek strategic alignment with UN bodies and international PSEAH networks to increase CSO visibility. Create collective advocacy platforms that amplify smaller CSO perspectives. Ensure evidence generated through RSH translates into policy action at national and international levels.	8.5.1, 8.5.2	RSH
11	INVESTING IN EVIDENCE AND LEARNING SYSTEMS: Develop real-time learning and adaptive management systems that capture user experiences, contextual shifts, and marginalised actor feedback to enable responsive programme evolution.	MEDIUM	Support the development of continuous feedback loops capturing user experiences and contextual shifts. Invest in monitoring mechanisms centring inclusion through disaggregated data collection. Gather qualitative feedback from marginalised actors quarterly. Analyse how safeguarding approaches are understood across different contexts and enable responsive programme evolution.	8.8.2	Donors

	Main Recommendation	Priority Level	Implementation Suggestions	Related Conclusions (Code)	Intended Audience
12	IMPROVING EXIT STRATEGY AND TRANSITION COMMUNICATION: Develop transparent communication strategies about programme duration while implementing comprehensive transition planning as a programme design requirement from inception rather than end-of-programme activities.	MEDIUM	Communicate programme timeline and exit plans within the first 3 months[214] of launch[215]. Provide quarterly updates about programme continuation status and identify successor organisations early. Encourage transition planning from programme inception rather than leaving it to end-of-programme activities. Fund post-programme monitoring for a minimum of 18 months[216] to assess transition effectiveness and support CSOs' ability to prepare for independent continuation.	8.10.1, 8.10.2	RSH, Donors

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10 Lessons

Table 11. Lessons

#	Lesson Theme	Lesson Description	Evidence Base from Evaluation	Application for FCDO Programming	Broader Sector Relevance
PROGRAMME DESIGN AND PREPARATION					
When corporate leadership is not strongly visible from the inception for championing integration and driving organisational cultural change for prevention of SEAH, the effort may be delegated to focal points, and the perception from the regions is one of an externally imposed compliance.					
1	**Cultural Transformation Requires Leadership Commitment Beyond Compliance**	Sustainable safeguarding integration demands genuine organisational cultural change driven by senior leadership commitment, not just policy compliance. Success depends on leadership actively championing integration rather than delegating to individual focal points.	Multiple regions showed that transformation was most evident when leadership championed integration. Nigeria and MENA demonstrated comprehensive HR integration, while other contexts treated safeguarding as externally imposed compliance.	FCDO should design programmes requiring visible leadership engagement from inception, with accountability mechanisms that measure cultural change rather than just policy outputs. This should be applicable across governance, education, and civil society strengthening programmes.	All capacity-building initiatives benefit from leadership-driven cultural change approaches rather than technical training alone.
When safeguarding materials are not deeply rooted in the local context and are delivered through surface-level translation rather than cultural adaptation led by local experts, the approaches may lack relevance and fail to meaningfully engage marginalised groups.					
2	**Deep Contextualisation Outperforms Surface-Level Adaptation**	Effective programme materials require comprehensive cultural and linguistic adaptation by subject matter experts who understand local contexts, not just direct translation.	Ethiopian and Syrian respondents noted literal translations caused confusion. Pakistani collaborative translation processes produced higher quality materials. MENA	FCDO programmes should budget for comprehensive contextualisation processes including user feedback cycles, local expert involvement, and iterative adaptation. Critical for	International development programmes across sectors benefit from deep local adaptation

#	Lesson Theme	Lesson Description	Evidence Base from Evaluation	Application for FCDO Programming	Broader Sector Relevance
		Participatory adaptation processes involving target users yield higher quality and acceptance.	respondents highlighted that standardised Arabic translations weren't community-appropriate or transferable across countries in the region.	education, health, and governance programming in diverse cultural contexts.	rather than standardised global approaches.
When capacity-building relies solely on digital-only models without relationship-based engagement and face-to-face mentorship, the outcomes may be weaker and less sustainable due to limited trust-building and contextual responsiveness.					
3	**Relationship-Based Capacity-building Generates Superior Outcomes**	Intensive mentorship and face-to-face engagement consistently produce stronger, more sustained capacity development than digital-only approaches. Personal relationships enable contextual adaptation and problem-solving, and network building that digital platforms cannot replicate.	Ethiopian respondents rated peer learning as most valuable (96%), Nigerian respondents maintained active peer support (93%), while only 54% of South Asian respondents sustained digital-based peer learning. Mentorship respondents showed stronger capacity retention.	FCDO should prioritise relationship-based delivery models in capacity-building programmes, particularly for complex topics like governance, conflict resolution, and institutional development, where contextual nuance matters.	Capacity-building across development sectors benefits from human-centred approaches that build relationships alongside technical skills.
IMPLEMENTATION APPROACHES					
When programmes treat inclusion as an add-on consideration rather than implementing deliberate targeting of marginalised populations through inclusive design principles, accessibility measures, and partnerships with organisations serving these groups, meaningful equity outcomes may not be achieved.					
4	**Intentional Inclusion Design Reaches Marginalised Groups Effectively**	Programmes that deliberately target marginalised populations through inclusive design principles, accessibility measures, and partnership with	RSH successfully reached women refugees, displaced populations, and disability-focused organisations through intentional targeting.	FCDO should embed inclusion analysis and targeting from the programme design stage across all portfolios, with dedicated budgets for accessibility	Development programmes achieve better equity outcomes through intentional inclusive design rather

#	Lesson Theme	Lesson Description	Evidence Base from Evaluation	Application for FCDO Programming	Broader Sector Relevance
		organisations serving these groups achieve meaningful equity outcomes. Inclusion requires proactive design, not add-on considerations.	Adaptations for literacy, disability, and language needs proved essential for meaningful participation across regions.	measures. Particularly relevant for education, livelihoods, and humanitarian programming.	than hoping marginalised groups will benefit from mainstream approaches.
When peer learning networks lack ongoing facilitation, governance structures, and institutional embedding, they may fragment and lose their capacity to drive organisational change and knowledge sharing when champions leave the organisation.					
5	**Peer Learning Networks Require Sustained Facilitation for Durability**	Peer learning networks can drive significant organisational change and knowledge sharing, but their sustainability depends on ongoing facilitation, governance structures, and institutional embedding. Without sustained support, networks fragment when champions leave.	Ethiopian and Nigerian networks remained active post-programme with continued mentor engagement, while South Asian networks weakened significantly. Network durability correlated with initial facilitation intensity and governance structure development.	FCDO should design peer learning components with explicit governance structures, succession planning, and graduated facilitation withdrawal. Applicable to professional networks in health, education, governance, and private sector development.	Professional networks across sectors require intentional sustainability design to maintain momentum beyond initial programme support.
When digital programme components do not account for significant infrastructure disparities across and within countries and rely solely on online delivery without substantial offline and face-to-face elements, equitable access may be compromised, particularly for rural and less-resourced respondents.					
6	**Infrastructure Disparities Require Adaptive Delivery Modalities**	Digital programme components must account for significant infrastructure disparities across and within countries. Blended approaches with substantial offline and face-to-face elements ensure equitable access, particularly for rural and less-resourced respondents. The	100% of Eastern European and Ethiopian respondents found digital platforms highly accessible, while 16% of South Asian respondents faced significant barriers. Connectivity disruptions in Bangladesh and Nigeria limited engagement and peer learning opportunities.	FCDO programmes should conduct infrastructure assessments and design adaptive delivery systems that don't exclude respondents with limited digital access. Critical for rural development, education technology, and digital governance initiatives.	Digital development programmes must include offline alternatives to avoid exacerbating digital divides and excluding vulnerable populations.

#	Lesson Theme	Lesson Description	Evidence Base from Evaluation	Application for FCDO Programming	Broader Sector Relevance
		Evaluation does, however, recognise the benefit and utility of online learning in fragile and hard-to-reach contexts, where in-person interaction is unsafe."			
SUSTAINABILITY AND SYSTEMS INTEGRATION					
When programmes focus solely on individual and organisational capacity-building without addressing systemic barriers including funding access, network exclusion, and institutional gatekeeping, broader sector transformation may be limited despite successful capacity outcomes.					
7	**Structural Barriers Limit Individual Capacity-building Impact**	While individual and organisational capacity-building can be highly successful, systemic barriers, including funding access, network exclusion, and institutional gatekeeping, limit broader sector transformation. Programmes must address both capacity and structural constraints.	Despite strong capacity development, CSOs remained excluded from formal networks due to resource requirements, governance structures, and institutional gatekeeping. Pakistani respondents felt excluded from UN-led structures that limited NGO leadership opportunities.	FCDO should complement capacity-building with systemic interventions that address structural barriers to participation and inclusion. Relevant for civil society strengthening, governance reform, and private sector development programmes.	Development programmes achieve greater impact when they address both individual capacity and systemic barriers that limit participation and progression.
When programmes do not provide transparent communication about programme duration, exit strategies, and transition arrangements from inception, confusion may arise, stakeholder trust may be undermined, and sustainability planning may be compromised, potentially negating programme achievements.					
8	**Early Exit Planning Prevents Programme Disruption and Trust Erosion**	Transparent communication about programme duration, exit strategies, and transition arrangements from inception prevents confusion, maintains	Less than half of the respondents agreed that exit plans were clearly communicated. Confusion about programme continuation was	FCDO should mandate clear exit strategy communication from programme launch, with regular updates about sustainability plans. Essential for all time-	Development programmes maintain stakeholder trust and enable better transition planning through

#	Lesson Theme	Lesson Description	Evidence Base from Evaluation	Application for FCDO Programming	Broader Sector Relevance
		stakeholder trust, and enables better sustainability planning. Poor exit communication undermines programme achievements.	documented across MENA, Nigeria, South Asia, and Eastern Europe, leading to trust erosion despite strong programme outcomes.	bound programmes, particularly those building long-term institutional capacity.	transparent communication about programme lifecycle from inception.
When programmes rely on person-dependent systems without implementing systematic knowledge management, succession planning, and institutional embedding strategies, high staff turnover in development contexts may rapidly erode programme gains due to the inherently fragile nature of such systems.					
9	**Knowledge Management Systems Mitigate Staff Turnover Impact**	High staff turnover in development contexts can rapidly erode programme gains unless systematic knowledge management, succession planning, and institutional embedding strategies are implemented. Person-dependent systems are inherently fragile.	Respondents across regions described capacity gaps when trained focal points left organisations. South Asian respondents specifically noted a lack of replacement mechanisms, while organisations with systematic knowledge management maintained a better capacity.	FCDO programmes should build knowledge management and succession planning requirements into institutional development work, particularly in fragile contexts with high staff mobility. Critical for governance, health systems, and education programmes.	Institutional development programmes must address staff turnover realities through systematic knowledge management and capacity redundancy rather than relying on individual champions.
COORDINATION AND ALIGNMENT					
When programmes operate in parallel to existing systems without intentional coordination with government systems, donor frameworks, and sector coordination mechanisms from programme inception, systemic impact and sustainability may be limited.					
10	**Sector Coordination Requires Proactive Integration Design**	Effective sector-wide change requires intentional coordination with existing government systems, donor frameworks, and sector coordination mechanisms	Despite 82% agreeing that RSH improved collaboration opportunities, institutional coordination with governments remained weak across all	FCDO should require explicit coordination strategies with existing sector actors and government systems, with dedicated staff time and	Development programmes achieve greater systemic impact through proactive integration with existing

#	Lesson Theme	Lesson Description	Evidence Base from Evaluation	Application for FCDO Programming	Broader Sector Relevance
		from programme inception. Operating in parallel limits systemic impact and sustainability.	regions. Limited engagement with national referral systems, government coordination bodies, and sector platforms was consistently documented.	resources for relationship building. Essential for governance, health systems, and education sector programmes.	sector coordination mechanisms rather than parallel implementation.
When programmes do not understand and respond to political, cultural, and social constraints through adaptive implementation approaches, programme effectiveness may be significantly influenced by political economy factors, preventing the achievement of intended outcomes.					
11	**Political Economy Constraints Shape Implementation Effectiveness**	Political, cultural, and social constraints significantly influence programme effectiveness and require adaptive implementation approaches. Understanding and responding to political economy factors is essential for achieving intended outcomes.	The MENA region faced civic space limitations affecting grassroots women's organisations. Nigerian respondents encountered religious and social barriers requiring training adaptations. Polish respondents noted resistance to gender identity discussions requiring cultural sensitivity.	FCDO programmes should include political economy analysis and adaptive implementation strategies that can navigate varying political, cultural, and social constraints while maintaining core objectives. Critical for governance, social development, and conflict-sensitive programming.	Development programmes require political economy awareness and adaptive implementation to navigate varying cultural, political, and social constraints effectively.
VfM AND EFFICIENCY					
When development programmes allocate typical shorter timeframes such as two-year cycles (especially when Hub operation is only 18 months) without reflecting the time required for assessment and pre-operational processes, plus a minimum two-year operational phase, the sustainability and depth of complex institutional and cultural transformation may be limited, preventing genuine embedding and proper handover processes.					
12	**Longer Programme Cycles Enable**	Complex institutional and cultural change requires longer timeframes than typically	Consistently across regions, stakeholders noted that two-year cycles were insufficient for	FCDO should align programme timeframes with transformation complexity, particularly for	Development programmes achieve better sustainability

#	Lesson Theme	Lesson Description	Evidence Base from Evaluation	Application for FCDO Programming	Broader Sector Relevance
	Deeper Transformation	allocated to development programmes. Two-year cycles (especially when the Hub operation is only 18 months) limit sustainability and depth of transformation, while longer cycles enable genuine embedding and handover processes. The programme duration should reflect the time required to complete an assessment and other pre-operational processes that are necessary as well as the minimum of a two-year operational phase.	creating sustainable impact. Eastern Europe specifically noted that 18-month programmes were inadequate for meaningful implementation given setup requirements.	institutional development, governance reform, and capacity-building programmes that require cultural and systemic change rather than just technical outputs.	outcomes when programme duration aligns with the complexity of institutional and cultural change being attempted.

11 Management

The ET was structured around two key Hubs: The Central Research Hub and the Regional Evaluator Leads Hub. The Central Research Hub comprises a multidisciplinary team, including the TL, DTL, Safeguarding Expert, VfM Expert, and two analysts, who collectively shape the technical and strategic direction of the Evaluation.

The Evaluation project was led by a multidisciplinary team, with the Team Leader providing overall strategic direction, ensuring quality and alignment with project goals, and acting as the main point of contact with key stakeholders. The Deputy Team Leader co-led the design and implementation of the Evaluation, contributing methodological expertise and ensuring analytical rigour. The Safeguarding Expert ensured all tools and outputs adhered to best safeguarding practices, while the VfM Expert integrated cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability considerations into the Evaluation framework. Analysts supported robust data management, statistical analysis, and thematic synthesis of findings.

The Central Research Hub worked closely with Regional Leads to deliver a contextually relevant and cohesive Evaluation. These Leads, based in Nigeria, Moldova, Jordan, and Pakistan, managed data collection in their respective regions, adapted methodologies to local contexts, engaged stakeholders, and ensured a strong focus on GEDSI.

The Evaluation Manager and Finance Manager oversaw operational delivery, budgeting, and risk management. Strategic oversight was provided by the QA Adviser and Project Director to maintain quality and alignment with project objectives. The Evaluation Manager also ensured adherence to timelines and maintained ongoing communication with FCDO and RSH.

11.1 Evaluation Timelines and Tasks

The timeline for the Evaluation is included below and was developed in consultation with FCDO. The project involved several key deliverables, including an Inception Report, three Country Case Studies, the final global report, an Evaluation digest, and three presentations. The Evaluation management team also met with FCDO on a monthly basis to discuss project updates, progress, and challenges to ensure FCDO was able to continuously input into the direction of the project. Moreover, to ensure that relevant stakeholders had the opportunity to provide feedback on draft findings, recommendations, and lessons learned, two initial findings presentations were held in May and June 2025 with FCDO and RSH colleagues. During these events, the client and RSH colleagues, who were commencing the inception phase of the next RSH, were able to review insights and offer comments and questions to help refine the report. As a result, the presentation was found to be extremely helpful for both sides. The RSH team found most feedback unsurprising but noted persistent challenges with translation quality and contextual relevance. They highlighted the importance of cross-hub learning, questioned how an accreditation model might be developed, and raised concerns about the cost and structure of the Eastern Europe hub. Differences in regional engagement preferences and the potential need for a stronger focus on Ukraine were also flagged, although it is worth noting that at present, the RSH2.0 does not include an Eastern Europe Hub.

The Evaluation Team documented the whole discussion, including all questions and feedback, and incorporated this input into the final report to ensure the findings were nuanced and reflected the issues raised during the conversations.

Table 12. Evaluation Timeline

Evaluation Phase	Dates
Inception and Preparation for Data Collection	November 2024-January 2025
Data Collection	February 2025- April 2025
Data Analysis	March 2025- May 2025
Preliminary Findings Presentation	May 2025
Draft Report and draft country case studies	June 2025
Final Report, Country Case Studies, Evaluation Digest	July 2025
Evaluation Findings Presentations and Dissemination	July 2025

11.2 Use and Influence Plan

In line with FCDO expectations, the ET developed a structured Use and Influence Plan to support the effective dissemination and application of the RSH Evaluation findings. The Plan outlines the key audience groups and their anticipated uses of the Evaluation; it also identifies the major challenges and enabling factors each group faces in using the Evaluation products.

To ensure that the lessons were thoroughly vetted with key stakeholders, including the RSH management team and both past and current implementers, we held two separate presentations to incorporate insights and suggestions into the final report. Their insights into the key challenges and opportunities in the first RSH helped them to identify some of the key learning they were keen to find out more about in this evaluation. The ET ensured the final product remained impartial of any influence from the funders and implementers, but endeavoured to produce a final product that is practical and relevant to the needs of interested parties. Moreover, our Safeguarding Expert, a respected figure in the safeguarding field, leveraged her extensive network and contextual knowledge to validate findings, gather additional perspectives, and ensure the report reflects both sector best practices and on-the-ground realities.

11.2.1 Purpose and Objectives

The Plan was developed by mapping out the key stakeholders and identifying their learning needs and evidence uptake challenges. This Plan aims to provide a clear and strategic approach to reaching these diverse audience groups with findings based on evidence, lessons learnt, and recommendations arising from the Evaluation. The strategy specifically seeks to:

1. Identify the key Evaluation users, their anticipated needs, and use of the Evaluation.
2. Outline the major challenges and enabling factors for each user group in this regard.
3. Present the products that will serve the needs of each user group.

11.2.2 Mapping Key Audiences and Uses

The communications strategy has been designed around the key Evaluation audience groups, their anticipated uses for the Evaluation, and their specific communications needs and constraints:

- Stakeholder: category of Evaluation user
- Evaluation use: anticipated use of the Evaluation.
- Needs and constraints: communication needs and constraints of the stakeholder group.

Table 13. Key Target Audiences and Evaluation Users

Level	Stakeholder	Need	Constraints	Enabling Factor	Product
Primary	FCDO	- Insights into lessons learned, successes, and challenges. - Build an evidence base on effective approaches for SEAH safeguarding. - Use evidence to guide future programming and ensure VfM.	-Competing priorities may limit deep engagement with findings. -Competing priorities may impact FCDO's ability to disseminate reports and learning products. -Available funding/time may impact the resources from being translated into other languages.	- Strong commitment from FCDO leadership to learn and apply Evaluation findings. - Accessibility to Evaluation findings via clear communication channels. - Established relationships between FCDO, Alinea, and RSH foster trust and openness to recommendations. -New RSH programme has already been awarded and started implementation.	Final report, learning product, and presentations. (FCDO could also use these products to design and disseminate other products.)
Primary	Implementing partners	- Practical, actionable recommendations to enhance safeguarding practices in field operations. - Guidance on adapting best practices to diverse local contexts and what respondents found most useful	- Time constraints due to recommendations arriving after the new contract is awarded. - Variability in partner capacity to adopt and implement changes.	- Findings can influence future programme delivery. - Commitment of implementing partners already engaged with RSH to build on the Evaluation outcomes.	Final report, Evaluation digest, and two presentations, importantly, the initial Findings Presentation conducted in June 2025 with the Implementing Partner for RSH2, to inform future design.

		when engaging with RSH.			
Secondary	Respondents to the Evaluation	- Validation of their input and demonstration that their feedback shaped findings and recommendations. - Transparency in how their contributions were used.	- Voluntary participation may wane if RSH regional/national Hubs close. - Respondents' availability and engagement depend on contextual pressures. -Language barriers and accessibility challenges.	- Recommendations reflect participant feedback and address region-specific challenges. - Evaluation findings align with the realities respondents face.	Final report and Evaluation digest.
Tertiary	Other institutional donors	- Insights into RSH's successes and challenges to guide similar programmes. - Lessons learned to strengthen safeguarding and capacity-building initiatives.	- Limited leadership engagement; findings may only be used by technical specialists. - Diverse donor priorities may conflict with uniform application of recommendations.	- Technical specialists can incorporate lessons into their efforts. - Donors' growing focus on safeguarding reinforces uptake of recommendations.	Final report, Evaluation digest.
Tertiary	Other SEAH and safeguarding initiatives and institutions (e.g. CHSA, ICVA, UN)	- Insights from RSH Evaluation will help to identify what works in different regional contexts to support organisations working against SEAH.	- Limited engagement with final report due to competing time and resources. -FCDO will need to continue to amplify and share findings across networks.	- RSH and FCDO existing relationships with other initiatives, forums, networks to facilitate report dissemination.	Final report, Evaluation digest.
Tertiary	Other non-involved CSOs/ NGOs	- Insights from Evaluation will provide further detail on the policies and processes to	- Language barriers and accessibility challenges for smaller organisations. - Limited capacity	- Tailored resources, tools, and templates adapted to local and organisational contexts. - Case studies	Final report, Evaluation digest.

		safeguard staff and beneficiaries.	to implement complex recommendations.	demonstrating successful safeguarding models.	

Table 14. Mapping Learning Products to Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Report	Digest and Learning Product	Presentation
FCDO	X	X	X
Implementing Partners	X	X	X
Evaluation Respondents	X	X	
Other Institutional Donors	X	X	
Other NGOS and CSOS	X	X	

11.2.3 Strategic Timing and Opportunity for Influence

This Evaluation comes at a highly opportunistic and timely moment, coinciding with the inception of RSH 2.0. The alignment between the finalisation of the external evaluation and the early design phase of RSH 2.0 creates a unique window for immediate and meaningful uptake of the findings. The Evaluation's evidence and recommendations can be directly integrated into the programme's inception phase, informing strategic decisions, operational design, and early implementation priorities. This seamless flow from evidence to design will help ensure that RSH 2.0 builds on the strengths and lessons of its predecessor, enhancing its relevance, effectiveness, and impact from the outset.

11.2.4 Alinea and FCDO Responsibilities and Dependencies:

Alinea International is responsible for conducting a rigorous and comprehensive Evaluation of the RSH, ensuring the collection, analysis, and synthesis of data that accurately captures stakeholder feedback and assesses the programme's impact. Alinea must also produce final outputs as per the TOR, such as a final report, three Country Case Studies, an Evaluation digest, and a presentation, to effectively communicate findings and recommendations.

FCDO holds the responsibility of providing strategic oversight, ensuring alignment of the Evaluation with broader safeguarding priorities and future programming needs. The FCDO must also commit to reviewing and applying the findings to improve its safeguarding policy and programming, leveraging the evidence to guide funding decisions and inform new capacity-building initiatives. Furthermore, FCDO is tasked with advocating for the dissemination of Evaluation insights within donor and policymaking communities to amplify their impact, as well as potentially translating findings to strengthen the reach of the findings.

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Evaluation Brief: The Evaluation of the Resource and Support Hub (RSH)

Introduction

The RSH was established to provide accessible safeguarding tools, guidance, training, and mentoring to less-resourced CSOs through a global platform and national Hubs. Regional and national Hubs were established in Africa, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South Asia, and Eastern Europe, tailored to local needs through contextualised resources and in-country expertise. These Hubs supported CSOs through mentoring, communities of practice, and multilingual resources, contributing to the strengthening of safeguarding practices across diverse operational settings.

Intended Outcome

The RSH Programme was designed around three outcomes: **Dialogue:** Improving dialogue on safeguarding against SEAH amongst organisations in the aid sector to facilitate shared learning and raise awareness; **Capacity:** Building the safeguarding capacity of less-resourced CSOs, including mainstreaming safeguarding within organisations and shifting organisational culture; and **Evidence:** Generating evidence on what works in safeguarding against SEAH in the aid sector and making it accessible and contextualised to less-resourced CSOs, contributing to the global evidence base, where there are currently particular evidence gaps. These outcome areas worked to reinforce, build, and accelerate progress towards the elimination of SEAH in the aid sector and the restoration of trust in the international aid sector.

Implementation

The RSH has been delivered by: Options (UK), Social Development Direct (UK), ICVA (Geneva), Terre des Hommes (TdH) (Innsbruck), Clear Global (Geneva), and Sightsavers (UK).

Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of this endline Evaluation is to evaluate the performance of the RSH programme to date at the outcome level, to determine how far it has achieved the expected results, analyse the Value for Money (VfM) of the programme, and identify and capture key lessons and recommendations.

Evaluation Methodology

The Evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The primary data consisted of 79 KIIs, 9 focus group discussions (FGDs), and a survey of 52 Consultants. Secondary sources included RSH user surveys (2022, 2024), cost data, programme documents, and relevant literature. Three in-depth Case Studies were developed as part of this Evaluation to explore key aspects of the RSH programme not fully captured in the broader analysis. Each Case Study draws on KIIs, FGDs, and RSH documentation, with targeted follow-up to fill data gaps.

What worked well

- **Improved Organisational Capacity**: RSH significantly strengthened CSO safeguarding systems through mentoring, training, and hands-on support, leading to policy development, staff training, and organisational culture change.
- **Effective Dialogue and Peer Learning**: The programme fostered dialogue on SEAH and enabled peer learning through informal networks and mentorship cohorts, particularly in Nigeria and Ethiopia.
- **Relevant, Contextualised Resources**: National and regional hubs adapted tools to local languages and contexts, making safeguarding more accessible, especially for small or marginalised CSOs.
- **Strong Inclusion and Equity Focus**: The programme prioritised support for less-resourced CSOs, women-led and disability-focused organisations, and worked to reach underserved populations through inclusive design.
- **Efficient Use of Resources**: RSH demonstrated strong value for money with high budget execution, lean delivery models, extensive use of local consultants, and adaptive online approaches post-COVID.
- **Contributions to the Global Evidence Base**: RSH developed high-quality learning products and sector-wide tools (e.g., CAPSEAH, regional evidence reviews), supporting global and local knowledge-building.

What didn't work so well

- **Limited Sustainability Planning**: Short hub cycles and unclear exit strategies led to confusion and weakened continuity. Many CSOs lacked resources to maintain safeguarding efforts post-programme.
- **Inconsistent Localisation of Tools**: Despite translation efforts, many resources were overly technical or poorly adapted to local languages and cultural contexts, limiting their usability for some CSOs.
- **Weak Integration with National Systems**: RSH operated largely in parallel to government frameworks and donor coordination structures, reducing policy influence and chances of long-term integration.
- **Digital Access Challenges**: Poor internet infrastructure in some regions hampered digital engagement and limited the reach of online tools and learning.
- **Dependency on Key Individuals**: Safeguarding systems in many smaller CSOs were dependent on individual staff; when trained staff left, knowledge and practice often dissolved.
- **High Costs in Specific Regions**: The Eastern Europe hub was less cost-efficient due to high personnel costs and limited operational time, contrasting with leaner hubs elsewhere.

Key Recommendations

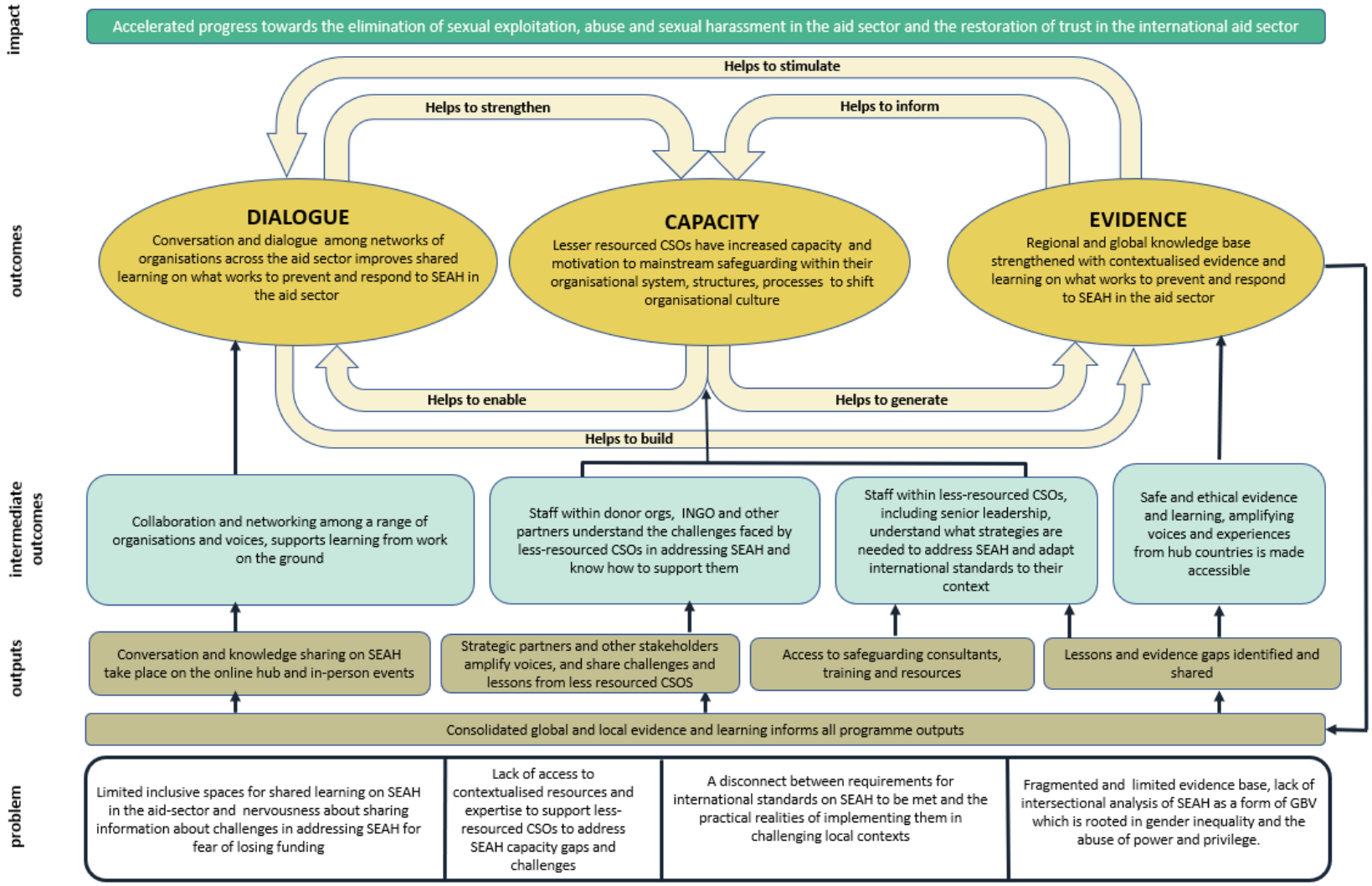
- **Strengthening organisational culture and leadership:** Promote safeguarding as a shared organisational value through leadership engagement and cultural change, moving beyond individual compliance.
- **Enhancing capacity building approaches:** Focus on mentorship-based learning and implement strategies to reduce the impact of staff turnover on safeguarding continuity.
- **Improving contextualisation and accessibility:** Ensure translation and adaptation processes reflect cultural and conceptual understanding, using plain language to enhance clarity.
- **addressing network access and structural barriers:** Support inclusive governance and enable CSO participation in safeguarding networks to address systemic exclusion.
- **Optimising digital learning and infrastructure:** Develop blended learning models that respond to connectivity challenges and strengthen both digital and in-person engagement.
- **Building sustainability from inception:** Integrate sustainability early by strengthening organisational capacity, ensuring continuity in safeguarding, and planning for local ownership.
- **Strengthening GEDSI integration:** Tailor GEDSI strategies to political contexts and invest in long-term, culturally sensitive accessibility infrastructure.
- **Enhancing programme coordination:** Align with existing safeguarding structures through formal coordination mechanisms, while recognising practical constraints.
- **Supporting CSO compliance and accreditation:** Create inclusive accreditation pathways that allow smaller CSOs to demonstrate safeguarding capacity without being excluded.
- **Strengthening networks and partnerships:** Expand partnerships to elevate smaller CSO voices and increase visibility in global safeguarding discussions.
- **Investing in evidence and learning systems:** Build adaptive systems that capture real-time feedback and contextual changes to inform programme improvements.
- **Improving exit strategy and transition communication:** Plan for programme transitions from the outset with clear communication and structured handover processes.

Key Lessons Learned

- **Leadership Visibility:** Lack of visible leadership from the start can result in safeguarding being perceived as externally imposed.
- **Local Relevance:** Superficial translation without cultural adaptation by local experts can render safeguarding materials ineffective and disengaging.
- **Capacity Building Models:** Digital-only training without relational, face-to-face mentorship may lead to weaker, less sustainable outcomes.
- **Inclusive Design:** Treating inclusion as an afterthought rather than integrating it through targeted design and partnerships may hinder equity and accessibility outcomes.
- **Peer Learning Sustainability:** Without structured facilitation and governance, peer networks may collapse when key champions leave, reducing their impact on organisational change.
- **Digital Access Equity:** Ignoring infrastructure disparities and relying solely on online delivery can exclude rural and under-resourced participants from meaningful engagement.
- **Systemic Barriers:** Focusing only on individual and organisational capacity without addressing systemic issues like funding and network exclusion limits sector-wide transformation.
- **Exit and Transition Planning:** Absence of early communication about programme duration and exit strategies can erode trust and compromise sustainability of programme outcomes.
- **Staff Turnover Risks:** Person-dependent systems without knowledge management and succession planning are vulnerable to staff turnover, risking loss of programme gains.
- **Coordination with Existing Systems:** Operating in isolation from government and donor frameworks reduces systemic impact and long-term sustainability.
- **Adaptive Implementation:** Failure to respond to political and cultural constraints through flexible approaches can undermine programme effectiveness and intended outcomes.
- **Programme Timeframes:** Short programme cycles without adequate pre-operational and operational phases limit the depth and sustainability of institutional transformation.

Download the full Evaluation Report here

Annex A. Theory of Change



Annex C. Full Comparative Analysis

						KEY:	Primary or one of main objectives or activities Variable or limited No or mostly no		
Initiative	Aims to improve safeguarding standards	Provides training to CSOs	Provides mentoring to CSOs	Has an explicit local-isation agenda	Resources are available to members	Resources are available to all	Operates at the global, regional or national levels	Free or paid for	Conducts advocacy or outreach
CAPSEAH (2024)	Across humanitarian, development & peacekeeping; Organisations are encouraged to 'endorse' CAPSEAH	NO	NO	NO	N/A	CAPSEAH summary, full document and tools available online	Global	Free	No. Can be used for advocacy and outreach.
RSH (2019)	Targets under-resourced CSOs	In target countries	In target countries	Yes	Yes, in some national languages & English	Yes, in some national languages and English	Regional and national with global reach	Free	Outreach to national governments. CSOs may conduct advocacy
UNOVRA (2018)	Geared towards UN entities & partners	Some	No	No	N/A	Yes, in official UN languages	Global	Free	Yes. Significant part of initiative
DIGNA (2019)	Focussed on Canadian organisations	Yes, for Canadian orgs	No	No	N/A	YES, in French & English	Global	Free	No advocacy
Keeping Children Safe (2001)	Focused on children	Yes – paid for	On request	Anti-colonial	Yes	Yes, in several languages, paid for	Global	Paid (discount form embers	Some advocacy and work with States
CHS Alliance (2022 (IQTS); 2021 (Harmonised Reporting Scheme)	Specific cross-sector initiatives (investigations;harmonised reporting).	No	No	No	Yes	Most	Global	Free	Some advocacy. Collaboration with Humentum.

IASC (2021 - PSEA)	Focused on humanitarian but cross-sector applicability	No (but materials are available)	No	No	Yes	Yes in various languages	Global	Free	Advocacy with UN system and governments
BOND NGO network (2018 – PSEAH)	Across UK-based NGOs	Through INTRAC (paid)	Not directly	Anti-colonial	Yes	Yes	Global (UK-based NGOs)	Mixed	Advocacy with UK & other donor governments
Safeguarding Leads Network (2018)	Mostly development sector, private sector organisations	Not a target audience	No	No	Yes (mostly channelling other organisations' work	Some	Global (mostly UK-based private sector)	Free	No
INTRAC (2022 – Safeguarding)	As part of core mandate.	Yes (paid)	No	Not explicitly	Yes	Paid	Global	Paid for	No
Disaster Ready (2022 – PSEAH)	As part of core mandate	Yes (core business)	No	No	Yes (membership open to all)	Yes (Paid)	Global	Mixed	No
For profit (2020)	As commercial venture	Yes (paid)	No	No	N/A	Paid	Global	Paid	No

Annex D. Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation Design and stakeholder engagement

Engagement with FCDO and RSH

The design and methodology for this Evaluation were formally approved by the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) following the submission and acceptance of the final Inception Report. The Evaluation approach had been developed in alignment with the Terms of Reference (ToR) and was refined through close collaboration with FCDO, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), and the Resource and Support Hub (RSH) implementing team from the Global Hub during and immediately after the Inception Period.

After Inception, the Evaluation Team finalised and presented the Evaluation Framework. This framework clearly defined the stakeholder groups to be engaged during data collection and clarified the intended learning objectives associated with each group. These insights directly informed the development of the Evaluation tools, as engagement with FCDO and RSH had provided context around stakeholder roles, likely areas of feedback, and existing data gaps, such as the need for deeper insight from the Consultants listed in the RSH database. The Evaluation Framework was updated to include the indicators for each stakeholder category, per Evaluation Question, as well as the data collection and analysis methods for each sub-question.

In particular, the Evaluation Regional Lead for Eastern Europe had engaged extensively with DEC to access available data relevant to that region. The Value for Money (VFM) expert had also been involved at this stage to ensure access to financial data relevant to the VFM analysis. However, this engagement had also highlighted limitations in the availability of stakeholder information in Eastern Europe. Due to the time that had passed since the closure of the Regional Hub and data protection constraints under GDPR, it became clear that complete stakeholder lists would not be obtained. DEC's limited connection to the Eastern Europe Hub, compared to FCDO's relationship with the Global Hub, had further constrained data availability. Although the Evaluation Team was able to secure some contacts through the RSH Global Hub, data from Eastern Europe remained significantly limited.

Ongoing engagement with both FCDO and the RSH implementation team had continued throughout the Evaluation process. The RSH team had been consistently responsive to requests for additional documentation and clarification. Likewise, FCDO had engaged constructively with the Evaluation Team to navigate emerging challenges, including the decision to exclude the South Sudan Hub due to the unavailability of stakeholder lists, and the difficulties encountered in Ethiopia and Eastern Europe related to stakeholder access.

Tool development, testing, and training

The Evaluation Team developed a comprehensive set of data collection tools tailored to the Evaluation's objectives and stakeholder groups. This included Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group

Discussions (FDGs) with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) who participated in the mentorship programme in each region, and KIIs only with the broader set of stakeholders. These tools were designed to capture both breadth and depth of perspectives across regions and were reviewed and validated by the Safeguarding Expert on the team to ensure alignment with safeguarding principles and ensure all languages, terminology, and contextual understandings were included.

Before data collection, the Safeguarding Expert led a focused training session for all team members involved in primary data collection. This session covered the technical use of the tools and best practices for conducting interviews and focus groups involving potentially sensitive safeguarding topics, especially those conducted online. To support accessibility and cultural relevance, the tools were translated into Romanian, Arabic, Urdu, and Bengali. This enabled the team to conduct interviews and focus groups in respondents' preferred languages and contributed to more inclusive and effective data collection across all regions.

Nigeria served as a valuable pilot for testing some of the tools, and the Africa Regional Lead attended an in-person event with the RSH and the National Expert Board (NEB) Members in Abuja. At this event, the Africa Lead was able to conduct several interviews and provided feedback to the Evaluation Team regarding their length, understanding, and relevance. Based on lessons learned during this trial, the Evaluation Team made a series of adjustments to enhance clarity, flow, and contextual relevance. In addition, the Evaluation Team ran through the data collection tools with each of the Regional Leads before data collection to ensure they were contextually relevant, as the Regional Leads are all experts familiar with the local operating contexts. Midway through data collection, the team held an internal workshop to review emerging findings and reflect on challenges encountered in the field. This allowed for real-time refinement to the tools and approach, ensuring that the Evaluation remained responsive and adaptive to on-the-ground realities.

Data collection

This section outlines the qualitative data collection methodology employed across five regions/countries — Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Asia, and Eastern Europe — as part of the Evaluation process. The Evaluation Team's Regional Leads were responsible for undertaking interviews and facilitating discussions to gather qualitative insights. In contrast, data collection involved global-level stakeholders, including representatives from the FCDO, the DEC, and the RSH Implementing Team, was conducted through specifically targeted interviews. These engagements were not based on a random sampling method but were purposefully selected to ensure input from key global actors.

Regional Stakeholder Engagement

Before commencing data collection, each Regional Lead worked to finalise a stakeholder list specific to their region. The stakeholder lists were provided to the Regional Leads by RSH Global, Regional, or National Teams. A key challenge the Evaluation Team encountered was the lack of a centralised knowledge management repository within the RSH to provide these lists. These lists were populated with a range of stakeholder types, with data subsequently gathered using both KIIs and FGDs. The size and composition of stakeholder lists varied significantly between regions. This variability can, in part, be attributed to the length of time that had passed between the closure of the RSH National Hubs and the start of this Evaluation. In

several instances, individuals from CSOs who had previously been involved with RSH in each region had since moved on to other roles or organisations, making it difficult to trace or re-establish contact with them.

In Eastern Europe, stringent data protection regulations under the GDPR had an additional impact. As a result of these regulations, all personal data about individuals previously engaged with the RSH had been deleted, significantly reducing the pool of potential respondents. In Ethiopia, it was due to the length of time since the RSH had been operational. From the list of potential respondents, the Evaluation Team received many emails, and phone numbers were no longer active; a significant number of RSH participants had left their roles, and there were no forwarding contact details, and many did not respond to our attempts to reach out. Conversely, in regions such as South Asia and MENA, many stakeholders remained accessible, and Regional Leads were able to assemble comprehensive and relatively robust sampling frames.

Due to the large number of interviews in South Asia and MENA, and the fact that many of these interviews were conducted in languages other than English, Regional Leads received support from locally based research assistants. These assistants played a crucial role in both conducting interviews and translating transcripts and audio recordings into English, thus ensuring the richness of the data could be retained and accurately analysed.

For the most part, in each region, the stakeholders included: CSOs who participated in the mentorship programme, CSOs who had some other in-country engagement with the RSH, members of the NEBs, Mentors (from the mentorship programme), Investigators (from the investigators training), and RSH Regional or National staff. There was some cross-regional variation due to the type of activities conducted, or the availability and accessibility of respondents.

Global Stakeholder Engagement

This Evaluation identified the Global Stakeholders as including the RSH implementation team from the Global Hub (SDDirect, Options, and Terre des Hommes), the DEC, the FCDO representatives involved in RSH, the FCDO Safeguarding Unit (SGU), and FCDO Safeguarding Representatives based in-country. Specific individuals from these organisations were selected in consultation with the RSH Global Hub team and the FCDO Senior Responsible Owner for RSH. KIIs were targeted toward these stakeholder groups to gain insight into the RSH programme's design, implementation, challenges encountered, and lessons learned. In addition to these KIIs, the VfM Expert conducted five focused interviews with representatives from the FCDO, DEC, and RSH Global Hub. All interviews were conducted online by the VFM Expert, Deputy Team Leader, or Team Leader.

Initially, the Inception Report proposed two additional FGDs: one with the FCDO SGU and one with the RSH implementing team. However, during stakeholder mapping with the FCDO, it became clear that many proposed FGD participants were already scheduled for KIIs. As a result, the FGDs were not conducted, as they were unlikely to provide additional value. This did not present a limitation for the Evaluation, as the KIIs offered sufficient depth and richness of data. Although a separate FGD was not held with the RSH Global Hub team, they remained consistently responsive and engaged, supporting the Evaluation Team in identifying and contacting relevant in-country respondents and providing any additional supporting documentation needed.

The Evaluation Team shared emerging findings from this Final Evaluation Report in a dedicated presentation to the RSH team, following an earlier presentation to the FCDO. This allowed the RSH team, currently in the Inception Phase of RSH 2.0, to ask clarification questions and highlight areas of particular interest.

Participant Selection Approach

The process of selecting participants for KIIs and FGDs was systematic and designed to ensure diversity and representativeness. Stakeholders listed in each region's sampling frame were first disaggregated by country (where applicable), gender, and stakeholder type using an Excel-based tracking tool.

Once disaggregated, a random sampling method was applied to ensure impartiality. A random number was assigned to each stakeholder, and the list was then sorted accordingly to guide the selection process. This method aimed to provide a balanced representation of perspectives across different demographics and stakeholder groups.

In conducting interviews and discussions, the Evaluation Team was particularly attentive to achieving gender and geographic balance, especially when engaging with individual stakeholders such as Mentees, Mentors, and Experts. For FDGs, involving CSOs, additional consideration was given to organisational capacity. CSOs with fewer employees (thus considered to be "less-resourced CSOs") were prioritised, under the assumption that the number of staff served as a proxy indicator for the level of resourcing. The intention was to capture the experiences of less-resourced organisations, which may offer distinct and valuable perspectives often underrepresented in such Evaluations.

Consultant Survey Process

In addition to interviews and focus groups, the Evaluation Team distributed an online survey to a targeted group of 133 consultants listed on the RSH Directory. Before distribution, the consultant list was reviewed to identify and remove any individuals with potential conflicts of interest.

The survey process included three follow-up emails over two weeks to encourage responses. By the close of the survey, a total of 52 responses had been received. Of these, 36 consultants indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up KII or FGD. The Evaluation Team then reviewed the responses to determine suitability for further engagement. Several consultants were excluded from follow-up interviews or discussions for one of three reasons: they had been involved in the RSH programme in other capacities (such as providing technical support); they reported no interaction with the RSH because of their listing on the directory; or they had not completed all relevant survey questions.

Following this screening, three consultants were initially selected for KIIs and eight for FGDs. However, due to low response rates among selected respondents, only four KIIs were ultimately conducted with consultants who had responded to the survey and met the inclusion criteria.

Total stakeholder samples achieved

The total number of KIIs and FGDs broken down by region is shown in Table 1. KII and FGD Stakeholder Breakdown

Table 1. KII and FGD Stakeholder Breakdown[1]

Region	KIIs	FGD
Global *	19	0
Consultants	4	0
MENA **	15	4
South Asia ***	13	4
Nigeria ****	13	1
Ethiopia *****	6	0
Eastern Europe	9	0
Totals	79	9

As previously noted, the Evaluation encountered significant challenges in Ethiopia and Eastern Europe in contacting potential respondents.

A gender disaggregation of the data collected indicates that we had significantly more KII respondents who identified as female than we did male; however, we did have slightly more male FGD members. A breakdown is found below in Table 12. Gender Disaggregation .

Table 2. Gender Disaggregation of Respondents

Data type	Key Informant Interview (KII)				Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	
Gender	Female	Male	Transgender	Prefer not to say	Female	Male
Totals	54	28	1	1	19	24

While the Evaluation did not apply to a formal disaggregation model (e.g., by age, gender, socioeconomic status, or disability status) during data analysis, efforts were made to capture the diversity of respondent perspectives. Rather than coding based on demographic categories, the analysis focused on understanding how respondents, such as CSO staff, consultants, or hub implementers, engaged with or supported marginalised or underrepresented groups.

This approach enabled the Evaluation Team to consider the relevance and reach of the RSH programme through a GEDSI lens without overextending the granularity of available data. Throughout the qualitative coding process, particular attention was paid to references involving work with women, people with disabilities, youth, LGBTQ+ groups, and other at-risk populations, allowing for meaningful insights into inclusion and equity even without formal respondent-level disaggregation. Section 7.8 of this report provides the GEDSI analysis of the RSH programme.

Case Studies

In line with the ToR for this evaluation, three Case Studies were developed to provide focused insights into specific aspects of the RSH programme that were not fully captured through the broader evaluation. These Case Studies aim to generate deeper learning on regionally relevant issues and offer standalone evidence on key areas of interest for FCDO and other interested stakeholders.

The Evaluation Team, in consultation with Regional Leads, identified emerging themes during primary data collection that merited further exploration. The Evaluation ToR specified that the case studies include examples from Ethiopia, South Asia, Eastern Europe, and MENA. Through collaboration with Regional Leads, the following Case Study topics were identified:

- South Asia (Pakistan): The uptake of safeguarding skills and knowledge by CSOs, with a particular focus on the mentorship model.
- Ethiopia: The transition to local ownership, highlighting the experience of national partner Hiwot and the sustainability of locally led approaches.
- Eastern Europe and MENA: The adaptability of the RSH model in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS). Given that this Case Study draws on evidence across both regions, it is longer than the country-specific Case Studies.

The Evaluation Team drafted ToRs for each Case Study, which were reviewed and quality assured by the QA Lead and Safeguarding Lead. These drafts were then further reviewed by the FCDO RSH Team and key members of the FCDO SGU. Following FCDO approval of the final ToRs, any necessary supplementary data collection was conducted.

The case studies in Pakistan and Ethiopia were primarily led by the respective Evaluation Regional Leads, with coordination and support from the Evaluation Team Project Management team. The initial evidence base for each study consisted of KIIs and FGDs previously conducted for the broader Evaluation. In addition, RSH-produced documentation—including Country Assessments, the Africa Legacy Study, and the Five-Year Results Report—was reviewed.

Following this preliminary analysis, the Regional Leads identified gaps in the available data. To address these, targeted follow-up interviews were conducted: three in Ethiopia and four in Pakistan. These brief interviews (approximately 30 minutes each) were designed to generate specific insights from strategically selected respondents. While the data from these interviews were not included in the main Evaluation data set or coding framework, the content was used to enrich the Case Study narratives and provide illustrative depth to the broader findings.

A similar approach was applied in developing the FCAS Case Study, which examined the potential for adapting the RSH model in contexts affected by conflict or instability. This Case Study drew on initial KIIs conducted by Regional Leads in MENA and Eastern Europe, complemented by relevant RSH documentation and literature reviews interviews that provided deeper context around adaptation challenges and opportunities.

Analysis

The below sections indicate the analytical approaches taken to the different components of the Evaluation, including the analysis of primary qualitative data, the desk-based comparative analysis between different programmes, the quantitative analysis of secondary data provided by the RSH, and the VfM programme cost analysis.

Qualitative data analysis

The Evaluation Management Team developed a comprehensive qualitative coding framework. This framework was grounded in the overarching Evaluation Framework, the research questions, and the interview guides, and was also informed by insights gathered during the internal emerging findings workshop with the Regional Leads. The framework was designed to ensure alignment with the core questions guiding the Evaluation and to support thematic consistency across diverse regional contexts.

The coding process was conducted using Dedoose qualitative analysis software by three internal analysts from Alinea, under the leadership of the Deputy Team Leader. Before the full-scale coding, a pilot exercise was undertaken using a subset of interview transcripts. This pilot phase allowed the team to test the initial coding structure, identify ambiguities, and refine the framework to improve clarity and ensure its ability to accurately capture relevant themes across a wide range of data.

Throughout the coding period, the Evaluation Team held regular coordination meetings to review emerging themes, troubleshoot challenges, and ensure coder consistency. Once the coding was completed, the data were organised by Evaluation question to facilitate structured analysis.

Analysis was conducted at two levels. First, data were analysed by region to identify context-specific insights and patterns. These regional findings were then compared across regions to identify similarities, differences, and broader trends. This comparative analysis informed the development of the cross-cutting conclusions and key findings presented in Section 7of this report.

The qualitative findings from KIIs and FGDs were further triangulated with secondary data sources, including RSH-generated reports, annual user survey results, and VFM analysis where applicable.

Comparative Analysis of Different Safeguarding Initiatives

Led by the Safeguarding Expert, the Evaluation Team conducted a comparative analysis of different initiatives regarding protection against SEAH, choosing to prioritise those which may be considered to have some overlap with the RSH. These included donor government initiatives such as DIGNA (Canada); the Office of the UN Victims' Rights Advocate; the IASC; the Bond and Safeguarding Leads Network, and training or capacity-building initiatives by other international organisations or networks. A small sample of training initiatives was also considered. These initiatives were chosen either because of their 'household name' status across safeguarding practitioners or because of their potential similarities with the RSH.

The comparison criteria clustered around initiatives that shared some of or all the objectives of the RSH. It was out with comparative analysis to evaluate whether the different initiatives were successful in meeting their objectives.

While the comparison relied heavily on the existing knowledge, networks and experience of the Safeguarding Expert, it involved extensive desk (documentary and online) research. The time available did not allow for interviews with leaders, organisers or beneficiaries of the different initiatives. While it would be interesting to find out from CSOs how (and if) they felt they had benefited from the other initiatives, it is relevant that some initiatives (e.g. the IASC) form the 'backdrop' of safeguarding initiatives and so may not be known by organisations without international exposure or who are new to considering PSEAH. Thus, the comparative analysis helps to contextualise and situate the RSH programme among other relevant and comparative initiatives, without directly comparing the impact of these initiatives against the RSH.

Annual User Survey

Quantitative analysis was conducted using data from the 2022 and 2024 Annual User Surveys. These surveys collected data on user skills and capacity, alongside feedback on key RSH services including the online hub, webinars, Resource Library, and Ask an Expert service. Each survey captured responses from approximately 315 respondents representing diverse stakeholder groups: CSOs, INGOs, private sector entities, donors, intergovernmental bodies, and individual practitioners.

Data Limitations and Evaluation Team Assessment: The Evaluation Team was not involved in the survey design or data collection process. Following independent review of the survey methodology and data quality, several critical limitations were identified that necessitate cautious interpretation of findings:

Analytical Approach: Survey questions were systematically mapped against key informant interview guides, the Evaluation coding framework, and sub-Evaluation questions to ensure methodological alignment and enable triangulation with qualitative findings. Data was imported into Microsoft Power BI for cleaning, transformation, and analysis. To maintain analytical focus on primary stakeholders, responses were filtered to include only NGO/CSO participants, who comprised the largest respondent group and represent the RSH's core constituency. Interactive dashboards were developed in Power BI to visualise data across five triangulated thematic areas:

- Organisational change
- Barriers and enablers
- Capacities and collaboration networks
- Relevance and practicality
- Service utilisation patterns

These dashboards provide aggregated trend analysis with disaggregation functionality by country and regional hub, enabling targeted insights across different operational contexts. Quantitative insights were systematically integrated with qualitative analysis using the shared coding framework and sub-Evaluation questions. This mixed-methods approach strengthens overall Evaluation validity by enabling cross-verification of findings and providing complementary perspectives on RSH effectiveness and impact.

Recommendations for RSHII: Future surveys would benefit from a design that focuses on learning and impact directly related to RSH's services and activities, such as mentorships and trainings, rather than a focus on web services, as well as clear delineation of demographic details, i.e. hub affiliations. It could also be advantageous to implement the survey on a quarterly or bi-annual basis or triangulate the survey with other surveys pre/post mentorship or training activities.

Programme Cost Analysis and VfM

To answer some of the efficiency and VfM questions, a quantitative cost analysis was carried out. This analysis used some of the financial data provided by FCDO and the RSH programme, additional data that was compiled by the Evaluation Team, as well as cost data requested by the team, and compiled by the RSH programme management. The Evaluation Team also included specific questions on delivery costs in the KIIs, which were also incorporated into the overall analysis. The methods included key cost categories

analysis, unit costs of routine inputs, budget execution and spend profile and cost efficiency analysis. These are the methods that were planned to be used in the Inception phase. The Evaluation Team had to introduce some adjustments, based on data availability. For example, outcome-level costs were not available or constructable from the financial reporting. The team investigated cost drivers and key categories instead, as well as compiling hub-level costs. The quantitative VfM methods were complemented by qualitative evidence obtained from specific VfM- KIIs, as well as the VfM questions in the broader KIIs and FGDs. Over 3,600 coded interview excerpts were reviewed to this end.

Data triangulation

The Evaluation adopted a triangulation approach to enhance the reliability and credibility of findings and to reduce the risk of bias. This approach involved validating data across multiple sources and methods, enabling the Evaluation Team to draw robust conclusions grounded in different forms of evidence, including both primary and secondary data collection.

Qualitative data from the KIIs and FGDs, across the five regional hubs, and the Global level KIIs with FCDO, RSH, and DEC formed the foundation of the analysis. These findings were triangulated with secondary data sources, including internal RSH, FCDO and DEC documentation, publicly available RSH resources, the 2022 and 2024 Annual User Surveys, and VfM data. Where secondary data has been used in this Evaluation, it is highlighted in the footnotes, and a full bibliography can be found at the end of the Report. This process allowed for the corroboration of key insights, identification of possible inconsistencies and similarities. The qualitative coding framework played a central role in supporting this triangulation process. Developed in alignment with the Evaluation Framework and research questions, and tested through a pilot coding exercise, the framework ensured consistency across analysts and regions. It also enabled a clear linkage between qualitative themes and comparable survey data. While the VfM Expert conducted separate VfM interviews, the data collected from all stakeholders, which included relevant data, was used to support other key findings.

To mitigate the risks of methodological or respondent bias, the Evaluation sought input from a wide range of stakeholders, including CSO staff, mentors, consultants, RSH personnel, and government and funders, with varying degrees of engagement in the programme. The Evaluation did not find any major inconsistencies in data or responses, and where there were any, these have been explored in the analysis sections of this report. The Evaluation Team aimed to ensure geographic balance in the analysis; however, due to uneven data availability across hubs, a fully comparative analysis was not possible. While care was taken to avoid over-representing any one country or region, the strength of evidence varied. Findings from South Asia, MENA, and Nigeria are supported by a larger sample size, while insights from regions with more limited data, such as Eastern Europe and Ethiopia, may not be considered with the same degree of generalisability.

Limitations and Quality Assurance

Data collection limitations – contacting respondents

While the Evaluation benefited from a wide range of qualitative inputs across the regions, several limitations in the data collection process are important to acknowledge.

The number of respondents in Ethiopia and Eastern Europe was significantly lower than anticipated, which limits the robustness of comparative analysis across regions. In Eastern Europe, data collection was constrained by GDPR, which prevented the sharing of contact information for individuals who had participated in the RSH programme. In Ethiopia, the challenges stemmed primarily from the length of time since RSH activities were active. Many contacts provided to the ET were outdated—email addresses and phone numbers were no longer operational, and a large proportion of former RSH participants had moved on from their roles without any forwarding information. Despite repeated outreach efforts, response rates remained low in both regions.

In addition, South Sudan was initially intended to be part of the Evaluation sample; however, the ET was unable to obtain an up-to-date or complete stakeholder list to be able to contact possible participants. As a result, as agreed with FCDO, primary data collection did not take place in South Sudan, and there is no evaluation of the South Sudan hub or the RSH activities there. However, the RSH 2022 and 2024 Annual User Survey does contain information about South Sudan, and this has been included in this evaluation as part of the wider data sets.

In some regions, challenges in respondent availability limit the Evaluation's ability to conduct gender-balanced FGDs with mentees. In Nigeria, the Evaluation was unable to hold an FGD with male mentees due to a low response rate, despite repeated outreach efforts. In South Asia, there was an insufficient sample of female mentees for a dedicated FGD; however, the Evaluation did conduct two FGDs with female respondents in Bangladesh, along with one male FGD in each South Asian country.

In the MENA region, the team successfully conducted both male and female FGDs in Jordan but was only able to conduct male FGDs in Syria and Yemen. To address these limitations and ensure female voices were included, the Evaluation Team conducted additional key informant KIIs with female mentees in these countries.

These limitations affect the generalisability of findings for these specific regions. Findings from Ethiopia and Eastern Europe should be interpreted with caution and are not considered fully representative or directly comparable to regions where data collection was more comprehensive.

Mitigating Post-Programme Evaluation Challenges Through Strategic Data Management and Methodological Adaptations

To address the significant challenges associated with conducting evaluations years after programme completion, several evidence-based mitigation strategies should be implemented from programme inception. Establishing robust participant tracking systems during programme implementation is essential, including the creation of secure, GDPR-compliant databases that maintain multiple contact methods and emergency contacts while adhering to data protection regulations.[2] In developing country contexts where mobile phone numbers frequently change due to SIM card switching, programmes should collect multiple forms of contact information, including email addresses, social media profiles, and connections to local organisations with which the participants are affiliated.[3] To overcome GDPR limitations in European contexts, programmes should obtain explicit consent for long-term contact retention specifically for evaluation purposes, clearly documenting the legal basis for data processing and establishing data sharing agreements that allow for anonymised contact facilitation through intermediary organisations.[4]

Implementing real-time data collection throughout programme implementation, rather than relying solely on post-completion evaluation, can capture participant experiences while memory is fresh and contact information remains valid.[5] Additionally, establishing partnerships with local implementing organisations, academic institutions, or professional networks can provide alternative pathways for reaching former participants through institutional channels that persist beyond individual contact changes.[6] When direct contact proves impossible, employing snowball sampling techniques through successfully contacted participants, utilising social media platforms for participant outreach, and conducting proxy interviews with organisational representatives can help triangulate findings and maintain evaluation rigour despite incomplete participant access.[7] These proactive measures, combined with flexible methodological approaches that acknowledge and work within data collection constraints, can significantly enhance the feasibility and credibility of post-programme evaluations.

Annual User Survey - limitations

Sample Representativeness: With 315 respondents per survey against an estimated 730,000+ global platform users, the sample represents approximately 0.04% of the total user base. This yields an estimated margin of error of ~5% per survey, assuming random sampling (this is not assumed). Additionally, potential respondent overlap between the 2022 and 2024 surveys is unknown, limiting longitudinal comparison capabilities.

Sampling Methodology: The survey sampling approach relies on a self-administered approach where respondents are self-selected, so may not fully represent the views of the full/broader audience. This leads to a selection bias and limits equal representation across different user segments and geographic regions.

Questionnaire Design Issues: Several structural concerns affect data quality and analytical utility. Demographic questions permitted multiple selections for countries of origin and hub affiliation, complicating respondent categorisation. The survey emphasised digital platform functionality (aesthetics, usability, content types) rather than outcome-focused measures aligned with Evaluation objectives around impact and results delivery. Furthermore, questions contained implicit assumptions about causal attribution between RSH services and reported improvements in safeguarding and SEAH knowledge.

Evaluation Quality Assurance

To ensure the credibility and reliability of the data collected and analysed throughout the Evaluation, a series of QA measures were embedded across all stages of the process.

Data collection tools, including KII and FGD guides, were reviewed by senior members of the Evaluation Team and by the Safeguarding Expert, as well as by the respective Regional Manager, to ensure clarity, contextual relevance, and alignment with the Evaluation Framework. All interviews and discussions were conducted by trained researchers, including Regional Leads, who received detailed briefings on ethical data collection and documentation procedures.

Following data collection, transcripts were reviewed for completeness and accuracy. Only verified transcripts were included in the coding and analysis process.

During qualitative analysis, intercoder reliability was strengthened through a structured piloting phase, regular team calibration meetings, and ongoing oversight by the Deputy Team Lead. The Evaluation QA

Lead and the Safeguarding Expert reviewed early outputs and final drafts of key deliverables to validate the integrity of findings and adherence to methodological standards.

Triangulation was also used to enhance data quality, comparing findings across different sources (KIIs, FGDs, RSH documentation, and user survey data) to confirm patterns and minimise bias.

Notes

[1]

*1 M and 1 F in the same transcript
** 1 F and 3 M FGDs
*** 3 FGDs in Bangladesh and 1 in Pakistan
**** 1 F and 2 M in the same transcript

[2] Bamberger, M., Vaessen, J., & Raimondo, E. (2016). *Dealing with complexity in development evaluation: A practical approach*. Sage Publications.

[3] Tweed, A., Wills, G., & Venter, I. M. (2021). Mobile phone usage patterns in developing countries: A case study approach. *Information Development*, 37(2), 234-248. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666920912345

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[5] Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage Publications.

[6] Stern, E., Stame, N., Mayne, J., Forss, K., Davies, R., & Befani, B. (2012). *Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluations*. Department for International Development.

[7] Balbach, E. D. (1999). Using case studies to do program evaluation. *California Department of Health Services*.

Annex F. Full Evaluation Questions with DAC Criteria

Evaluation Questions	Sub-Questions
OECD-DAC Criteria	Effectiveness
EQ1: To what extent has the Resource and Support Hub (RSH) programme achieved its intended outcomes and improved safeguarding practices in the aid sector?	How effectively has the programme fostered dialogue, built capacity, and generated contextualised evidence as per the Outcomes in the Theory of Change?
	To what extent are less-resourced Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other relevant actors across the sector better equipped to develop and implement contextualised strategies to safeguarding against SEAH?
	To what extent have the programme's resources (e.g., training materials, forums) been utilised by stakeholders?
	To what extent has RSH contributed to a strengthened and sustained enabling environment to support organisations to better safeguard against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH)?
	To what extent do CSOs demonstrate improved organisational safeguarding culture and capacity to safeguard against SEAH?
	What have been some of the key barriers and enablers to achieving outcomes?
OECD-DAC Criteria	Relevance
EQ2: To what extent do RSH users have access to SEAH-related, contextualised resources, guidance and services (including blended learning)?	To what extent is there evidence that the primary products of the RSH are contextualised and can be disaggregated by type and Hub country, and that the programme is well-positioned to address the specific needs and challenges of less-resourced CSOs?
	Have stakeholders identified any gaps in relevance during programme implementation?
	To what extent are CSOs able to apply international standards and better safeguard against SEAH in the local contexts in which they operate?
	How do the varying regional contexts of the Hubs (e.g., political, cultural, and operational) influence the relevance of their activities, i.e., have different settings affected the performance of different Hubs, and how?
OECD-DAC Criteria	Efficiency
EQ3: To what extent has the RSH programme effectively and efficiently used its resources to deliver intended outputs and outcomes?	How does the programme's cost-effectiveness compare to similar safeguarding initiatives?
	Were financial, human, and technical resources allocated and managed effectively across the Hubs, and if there were delays or bottlenecks in resource allocation, how were they resolved?
	Are there significant differences in efficiency between Hubs operating in different regions?
	To what extent have digital tools and innovations contributed to efficiency, and does this vary by Hub?

	What key lessons have been learned from the RSH experience about VfM that can inform the design and implementation of future programmes?
OECD-DAC Criteria	Impact
EQ4: To what extent is there evidence of significant long-term changes or contributions of the RSH programme toward eliminating SEAH in the aid sector?	What evidence exists of the programme's impact on organisational policies and practices in addressing SEAH? What can be attributed to the contribution of RSH activities?
	To what extent has the programme influenced sector-wide norms, trust, and collaboration?
	To what extent is there evidence that less-resourced CSOs have become more confident in holding partners accountable for SEAH?
	Are there differences in the impact achieved by different Hubs, and what contextual factors contribute to these differences?
OECD-DAC Criteria	Sustainability
EQ5: To what extent are the outcomes and benefits of the RSH programme likely to be sustained by CSOs, regional Hubs, and other stakeholders after the programme concludes?	To what extent is there evidence that the programme's tools and knowledge are integrated into CSOs' regular operations and practices?
	What issues positively and negatively affected the sustainability of activities, and as a result, the continuation of improved PSEA practices? What possible changes could have been made to make the model more effective and better sustain outcomes?
	What are the early indicators and reflections of the success of the localisation approach taking place in Ethiopia?
	What are the responsible exit strategies that have been identified for all national Hubs, and what learning has been shared back for future Hub exit strategies? For example, are there partnerships, networks or in place to sustain programme activities, or local or regional initiatives which could complement and sustain programme efforts?
	What sustainability challenges are unique to Hubs operating in specific regional or cultural contexts?
OECD-DAC Criteria	Coherence
EQ6: To what extent are the RSH programme activities consistent with the objectives and ToC and between RSH Global and hubs (vertically and horizontally)?	To what extent does the programme complement or collaborate with other SEAH initiatives in the sector? Are there overlaps, gaps, or synergies between the RSH programme and other initiatives?
	How consistent are the programme's activities with its stated objectives and the Theory of Change, and to what extent are the causal relationships and assumptions still valid (including an assessment of the causal pathways and whether the assumptions underpinning the Theory of Change are supported by evidence)?
	Are there differences in how coherence is achieved across Hubs, particularly in regions with varying levels of collaboration with other initiatives?

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Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH): Case Study on adapting the RSH Localisation Model in Ethiopia

2025

Overview

The Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH) [1], funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), was established to strengthen the safeguarding measures against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) of CSOs working in the aid sector, particularly those across the Global South. Along with a Global Hub, which provides globally usable resources and community of practice, several regional and national hubs were established in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), West Africa, East Africa, and Eastern Europe. As part of its strategy to encourage national ownership, sustainability and accountability upon the end of the programme, RSH transitioned leadership of the Ethiopia Hub to a national civil society organisation (CSO), Hiwot Ethiopia.

This case study provides supplementary evidence for the FCDO- funded independent evaluation of the RSH, which was conducted to determine the extent to which the RSH succeeded in improving the capabilities of CSOs in the aid sector [2]. This case study explores the implementation of the RSH localisation model in Ethiopia, highlighting how Hiwot Ethiopia has sustained, adapted, and scaled safeguarding services post-transition. It draws on programme documentation, a literature review, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with RSH National staff, Hiwot Ethiopia staff, and members of the RSH Ethiopia National Expert Board (NEB). Lessons learned are relevant for RSH's similar efforts in Nigeria, where the RSH is transitioning its activities to the Women's Rights and Health Project (WRHAP), and similar efforts in future rounds of RSH programming.

Ethiopia Country Context

Entrenched gender inequalities, legislative and policy gaps, and limited access to justice shape Ethiopia's SEAH landscape. There are high levels of sexual violence in Ethiopia, for example a systematic review in 2020 reported high levels of workplace sexual violence, particularly among female university staff and prostitutes. In urban centres such as Addis Ababa, domestic workers and housemaids are especially vulnerable due to the work inside of home. [3] In addition, ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crises exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls, particularly due to the breakdown of social support systems and loss of essential services during these crises, however, formal studies documenting the scope of the problem within the aid sector remain scarce [4]. While the prevalence of SEAH in Ethiopia, particularly among internally displaced persons (IDPs) is known, the lack of a clear and robust reporting mechanism within aid organizations further complicates accountability efforts [5]. While Ethiopia has ratified international instruments including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, national laws remain fragmented, under-resourced, and poorly enforced.[6] Moreover, sociocultural stigma, patriarchal norms, and systemic victim-blaming discourage reporting of any form of sexual violence, including SEAH.

Transition to Local Ownership

The RSH Hub in Ethiopia was established in November 2019, focusing on building the capacity of local CSOs to develop and implement safeguarding policies, respond effectively to SEAH incidents, and create safe environments within their communities. RSH also conducted a mentorship programme, in which local Ethiopian CSOs received more tailored and intensive training and support to improve their safeguarding practices, systems, and networks.

By 2022, the RSH Ethiopia Hub engaged nearly 14,000 users on the online hub, and provided mentorship to nine organisations, all of which reported improvements in their own safeguarding practices. As RSH ended, a structured localisation process was initiated, with the intention of the Hub to be nationally owned and operated by an affiliated partner. [7] Following due diligence, Hiwot Ethiopia [8] was selected as the local affiliate. Hiwot has a strong reputation for work in health, gender, and education. It previously served as a safeguarding mentor under the Civil Society Support Programme Phase II (CSSP2), positioning it well to assume leadership [9].The RSH National Team reported that Hiwot was not selected through an open call but via a strategic process focused on organisational capacity and safeguarding track record. As the Executive Director of Hiwot explained in an interview for the evaluation, "Our selection was not based solely on previous collaboration, but on our technical and organisational capacity, past performance, and safeguarding expertise." [10]

The handover involved a week of intensive training and three months of follow-up support. RSH trained safeguarding specialists, programme, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and communication staff to ensure broader institutional ownership. While short and resource-constrained, the transition helped embed safeguarding within Hiwot's core operations. As the RSH National Consultant emphasised, "The handover was successful because we trained a number of staff, not just the two safeguarding experts, but additional program staff, including the Executive Director. [11]" By the end of the training, Hiwot had strengthened its internal capacity, gaining the knowledge and skills to support other organisations on safeguarding against SEAH and to take on RSH leadership, complementing its role as a well-connected sector leader.

Continutity and adaptions

Since assuming leadership of the RSH in April 2024, Hiwot Ethiopia has preserved key elements of the RSH model. The Hiwot team reported they have trained over 70 CSOs, 400 staff, and 21 government representatives. Topics include safe programming, safeguarding policy development, complaint handling, and codes of conduct.

Hiwot also reported the translation of safeguarding resources into local languages continued. Where direct equivalents were unavailable, Hiwot used descriptive alternatives to ensure clarity. [12] Though the "Ask an Expert" feature was discontinued due to technical constraints, in-person mentorship filled the gap. Hiwot also introduced rapid assessment visits, addressing challenges such as lack of access to the resources on the spot and face to face.

Internally, Hiwot institutionalised safeguarding through revised Human Resources systems, job descriptions, and onboarding protocols. Staff are required to answer safeguarding questions during interviews and sign codes of conduct. This internal alignment has served as a model for partner CSOs and increased credibility with government actors.

Key adaptations implemented by Hiwot

- Field mentoring and site visits to address practical issues like poorly placed complaints boxes;
- Blended learning combining online modules with simplified in-person sessions and printouts for low-literacy audiences;
- Ongoing support via phone, email, and document reviews.

Sustainability Drivers

Strategic partnerships—especially with the PSEA Network and CHS Alliance—have bolstered visibility and aligned Hiwot with national safeguarding agendas. Engagements with UN Women, the EU, and Global Affairs Canada have created new opportunities for Hiwot to present its safeguarding work at national and international forums, but as yet, Hiwot has not been able to secure additional sustained funding from international donors.

Hiwot's operational experience and institutional credibility have supported sustainability. Its integration of safeguarding into HR, recruitment, and programme implementation - combined with its growing role in supporting national structures like the Civil Society Organization Council - reinforces its leadership. Despite this success, sustainability is still challenged by:

1. Financial constraints

Despite developing a resource mobilisation strategy, donor disengagement and funding volatility persist. For example, FCDO did not provide continued financial support to Hiwot after the transition period was complete in November 2022.

2. Interest and engagement from CSOs

Many CSOs view safeguarding as a donor-driven requirement rather than a core value, limiting internal investment.

3. Staff turnover

Personnel in CSOs are often funded by specific projects, meaning that trained personnel often leave when projects end. Embedding safeguarding knowledge and awareness into several job roles within the CSOs has helped mitigate this, but gaps remain.

4. Sociocultural barriers

Patriarchal norms, stigma, and low awareness undermine uptake of safeguarding guidance. Hiwot has addressed this by simplifying materials, promoting peer learning, and supporting leadership engagement.

5. Platform maintenance

Hiwot lacks the financial resources and technological access to update RSH's e-learning platform. While they continue to use and distribute existing resources, long-term maintenance depends on external partners.

6. Conflict and displacement

Regional instability has constrained outreach to high-risk areas, particularly in northern Ethiopia.

Emerging Challenges

Post-transition, several new challenges have emerged:

- Shrinking global funding environment. Although resource scarcity was identified as a risk, the extent of global funding shifts—particularly due to changes in U.S. political priorities—was unforeseen. These global developments have made resource mobilisation even more difficult despite proactive donor mapping and outreach.
- Safeguarding remains misunderstood among many CSOs and government institutions;
- Ensuring availability of contemporary and relevant safeguarding resources. While funded by FCDO, RSH built a strong repository of tools and resources accessible on its platform. Although Hiwot actively continues to promote the resources they have available, including secured hard copies of key documents at their office, the lack of dedicated staffing and technical access limited their ability to update or expand the platform after transition. This includes the updating of the e-learning platforms and terminology adaptation.
- Engaging government entities in meaningful safeguarding reform remains a long-term process, requiring sustained advocacy.

Despite these, Hiwot has continued engaging government actors and helped integrate safeguarding into the code of conduct of the Ethiopian Civil Society Organisation Council. It also supported several government bodies, and individual parliamentarians, with safeguarding guidance.

Lessons for future localisation

- Plan localisation from inception, not just during programme close-out. Ethiopia's transition was launched only one year before exit, limiting institutionalisation.
- Ensure phased funding and transition support to protect gains and maintain continuity.
- Embed safeguarding roles as core staff functions, not project-based hires, to reduce attrition.
- Promote organisational buy-in through leadership engagement, internal policy alignment, and simplified tools.
- Use peer learning models and blended delivery to accommodate diverse capacities.
- Invest in language adaptation and cultural relevance, especially for frontline implementers.
- Advocate for safeguarding to be embedded in national frameworks and backed by local accountability structures.
- Encourage donor flexibility and shared ownership, including early engagement in localisation planning.

Lessons for future Local Affiliate Partnership models

Following from the experience of the Ethiopia Hub, RSH adapted the localisation strategy for their second Local Affiliate Partner (LAP) in the Nigeria Hub. One key difference in the localisation model was to integrate localisation from an earlier stage, which included an open call and application process for the local affiliate partner. Thus, Nigeria's more structured transition model—featuring buddy systems and shadowing—suggesting demonstrated application of learning from the experience of Ethiopia. However, the RSH staff in Ethiopia and Hiwot offered their perspectives on further gaps that Nigeria and wider RSH LAP models can avoid by:

- Embedding safeguarding roles institutionally, not as temporary technical support;
- Prioritising early donor engagement and flexibility to avoid procedural delays
- Diversifying funding pathways to reduce dependence on single donors;
- Strengthening alignment between CSOs and national networks like PSEA [12];
- Planning for platform sustainability, knowledge production, and policy advocacy.

While Nigeria benefited from more direct donor involvement, regarding training, guidance, and support in transitioning to local ownership, Ethiopia's experience highlights the importance of national leadership, political engagement, and cultural adaptation. Both approaches offer complementary insights for strengthening safeguarding localisation across regions.

Reflections and Conclusions

Effectiveness of the localisation model in Ethiopia

The localisation of the RSH in Ethiopia through the transition of leadership to Hiwot Ethiopia presents a mixed picture of effectiveness—marked by commendable achievements in institutionalisation and capacity building, but tempered by persistent financial, structural, and contextual challenges. On balance, the transition can be considered a partial success: Hiwot Ethiopia has sustained core safeguarding activities and demonstrated leadership within Ethiopia's safeguarding ecosystem, but the model has not yet achieved full self-sufficiency or institutional embedding at scale.

Key weaknesses constrain the model's overall effectiveness; the lack of sustained funding has been the most significant, and the late introduction of the localisation approach into the programme design, hindered continuity and left gaps in knowledge transfer and system development and Hiwot's ability to institutionalise and scale safeguarding work fully.

Conclusions

The Ethiopian localisation model offers a valuable foundation for national safeguarding leadership and provides important lessons for other contexts such as Nigeria and WRHAP. The transition to Hiwot Ethiopia has maintained momentum, relevance, and credibility for safeguarding in Ethiopia, demonstrating that local leadership can sustain and adapt technical programmes when supported with appropriate resources, partnerships, and political will. However, effectiveness has been undermined by insufficient planning for sustainability, the absence of long-term financing, and systemic challenges beyond Hiwot's control. To enhance future effectiveness, localisation must be planned from the outset, be financially resourced over a phased period, and embedded institutionally across multiple layers —including donors, governments, and CSOs. Only then can localisation—as a means of transferring not just responsibility but power—be realised.

End Notes

[1] The RSH was implemented by a consortium led by Social Development Direct (SDDirect) as technical lead in collaboration with regional and local actors. The Hubs provided direct support to build the capability of less-resourced CSOs to enable them to support safeguarding measures to keep people safe through contextualised resources, training, mentorship, and services, thereby improving the safeguarding capacity of CSOs as well as national and international organisations.
[2] This case study is part of the broader FCDO-funded independent evaluation of the Resource and Support Hub (RSH). Data collection for the evaluation was conducted between February and March 2025 by the Africa Regional Lead, contracted through Alinea International. To supplement the data gathered during the main evaluation, three follow-up interviews were carried out to provide additional insights for this case study. It additionally draws on RSH-produced materials and a wider literature review. The development of this case study was a collaborative effort involving the Africa Regional Lead and members of the Evaluation Management Team.
[3] Kebede, S., et al. (2020). Prevalence and Determinants of Workplace Sexual Violence against Women in Ethiopia: A Systematic Review. BMC Public Health, 20(1), 1–10.
[4] Relief Web (2024) Moving towards the advancement of “zero tolerance” for Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment. Available at:https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/moving-towards-advancement-zero-tolerance-sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment
[5] World Bank (2024) Gender-based Violence (GBV) Response Services in Ethiopia: Empowering Women and Girls in Conflict-Affected Areas. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2024/10/11/gender-based-violence-services-in-afe-ethiopia-empowering-women-and-girls-in-conflict-affected-areas.
[6] African Child Policy Forum. (2021). The Status of Children’s Rights in Ethiopia: A Supplementary Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.
[7] RSH: The Ethiopia Hub Journey (2022).
[8] Hiwot Ethiopia, founded in 1995, focuses on Health, Education, Gender, and WASH. Operating out of Addis Ababa and North Shewa, it has integrated safeguarding across its HR systems and programmatic frameworks, supported by designated safeguarding focal points.
[9] Hiwot Ethiopia implemented the “Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk (SCAR)” project under the Civil Society Support Programme Phase II (CSSP 2), funded by the British Council. This initiative aimed to enhance the safeguarding capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ethiopia. Through training, mentoring, and coaching, the project impacted 56 CSO partners, 21 government partners, and the Ethiopian Civil Society Council (ECSOC), focusing on areas such as safeguarding policies, safe recruitment, programming, and case management. (Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub.
[10] Key informant interview, Hiwot Executive Director.
[11] Key informant interview, RSH National Consultant
[12] RSH Ethiopia Hub Learning Report (2023).
[13] The Nigeria Inter-Agency PSEA Network comprises of UN, INGO, National NGO/CSO PSEA Focal Points and key stakeholders, with an inter-agency coordination mechanism implementing an annual action plan. More information available here: https://response.reliefweb.int/nigeria/nigeria-inter-agency-psea-network

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Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH): Case Study on knowledge and skills uptake of CSOs in Pakistan

2025

Overview

The Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH) was established by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to strengthen the safeguarding capacity of organisations working in the international aid sector, particularly in the Global South. The RSH was implemented by a consortium led by Social Development Direct (SDDirect) as technical lead in collaboration with regional and local actors.

This case study provides supplementary evidence for the independent evaluation of the RSH [1]. It explores how less resourced [2] civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and networks of CSOs working in the Pakistan aid sector applied the learnings from the RSH mentorship programme, consisting of a six-month and a four-month mentoring cycle, to strengthen their policy and practice to protect against sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH). This case study looks at the wider, contextualised and tailored initiatives developed and deployed by the hub, which CSOs accessed and made use of to support marginalised groups. [3] The study aims to identify the extent to which the CSOs implemented changes, the challenges faced, and the impact of these changes on their work, including with the communities they serve.

Pakistan Country Context

Pakistan is predominantly a patriarchal society with entrenched feudal and tribal systems, in which land, wealth and power are concentrated in a small number of families, resulting in high levels of poverty, illiteracy and out-of-school children, and widespread and deep-rooted inequalities. These inequalities are more starkly experienced by women and girls, people with disabilities (PWDs), and people of diverse sexual and gender identities. [4] Safeguarding against SEAH in Pakistan's civil society is hindered by male-dominated hierarchies, limited resources and expertise, weak leadership support, and a lack of inclusive policies, local-language materials, and research on protection from SEAH (PSEAH). [5] In the past decade, the government has enacted numerous pro-women laws, aimed at protecting women's rights and combating gender-based violence, including protection against workplace harassment, forced marriage, acid attacks, and domestic violence, while strengthening the existing legal frameworks on gender crimes. [6] However, most CSOs have been unable to adopt key safeguarding practices, such as establishing harassment review committees or displaying a code of conduct as required by the anti-sexual harassment Act, due to a lack of understanding of the necessary concepts and regulations, and insufficient resources to implement the changes. [7]

The Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub Country Assessment: Pakistan

Between May and September 2022, RSH Pakistan conducted a country assessment of the safeguarding landscape in Pakistan to inform the design and operationalisation of the Pakistan National Hub. The key findings and recommendations of the assessment included [8]:

- Target groups: While women and children are often the focus of SEAH interventions, the Country Assessment also identified intersex persons, elderly, and people with disabilities as critical groups to consider when selecting the CSOs to participate in RSH.
- Safeguarding priority issues for capacity building: Safeguarding policy development or updates, organisational culture of safeguarding, safeguarding risks and standards, reporting and investigations.
- Different types of capacity building: The support CSOs desired included: in-person training, facilitated peer learning opportunities, a service provider directory, and access to tools and resources.

RSH Mentorship Programme

1. Target CSOs for the mentorship programme

To reach target CSOs the Pakistan Hub developed strategic partnerships with major CSO networks - the Regional and National PSEA Network [9], the National Humanitarian Network (representing over 200 NGOs), and the Indus Consortium (an umbrella of 64 CSOs). These enabled the RSH to identify CSOs active in implementing humanitarian or development projects and meeting the criteria of a 'less-resourced CSO' [10]. While RSH offered a host of activities, a central focus was the mentorship programme. The CSOs were selected in line with the priorities established in the Country Assessment. Of the 20 CSOs: 15 worked in rural areas with high levels of poverty, illiteracy, and restrictions on women, three of these CSOs also

(worked primarily on women's rights, while one was the coordinator of a network of over 200 CSOs, working with marginalised groups. Additionally, in line with the Country Assessment, three CSOs focused on PWD rights, and two focused on transgender rights. [11]

2. Mentorship Programme

In June 2023, the Pakistan Hub launched a six-month mentorship programme, with two cycles. Ten CSOs were selected per cycle, ensuring diversity in geography, language, and operational status. While most of the CSOs were less-resourced, a few large CSOs or CSO networks were also enrolled as mentees to update and enact their safeguarding policies. [12] Nine CSOs completed the first cycle (June–December 2023[13]), and ten completed the second cycle (June–October 2024). Though working directly with marginalised communities was not an explicit criterion for CSO selection, almost all the CSOs selected did. The mentorship programme entailed weekly, tailored online mentoring from international and national safeguarding experts, focusing on strengthening policies, systems, and integration of safeguarding into programming. In addition, one-two focal persons per CSO were trained to sustain learning and lead internal capacity building. [13]

Key results of RSH activities in Pakistan

Use of RSH Services and Products

An online survey conducted by RSH in 2024 of all their service users, which includes those involved in the mentorship programme as well as other online services, found that of the 67 Pakistani respondents, 90% were satisfied with RSH services, 81% reported improved knowledge of safeguarding, and 87% felt better equipped to implement safe programmes. Additionally, 74% found RSH products highly relevant to their work, and 73% considered them accessible and user-friendly. [14]

Application of mentorship learning

One of Pakistan's largest humanitarian networks, a participant in the mentorship programme, used the support to develop a safeguarding policy and risk register with input from female members. The policy was shared across the network, allowing member CSOs without their own to adapt it. Drawing on RSH materials, the network also hosted a two-day Training of Trainers (ToT) on PSEA and encouraged members to train their staff—many did. New members must now commit to the safeguarding policy, and one organization was recently removed for violating it. As the mentee explained: "In the past, if such cases occurred, the network would have said, 'What decision should we take? We don't have any such policy or legal backing.'"

Impact on CSO mentees

The RSH administered an Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) tool before and after the mentorship programme to assess the impact of the programme on the CSO's safeguarding processes and practices. The OCA allowed the CSOs to self-assess their own strengths and weaknesses in various areas related to safeguarding both staff and communities. he average scores of 19 CSOs increased by 86% from the baseline scores, [15] with all mentee CSOs experiencing an increase in OCA scores. [16] Mentee CSOs provided many examples of how RSH provided them with resources and tools to improve their safeguarding processes and practices [17]. For example, RSH:

- Offered a safeguarding policy template that allowed the CSO to customise its policy while ensuring alignment with international safeguarding standards.
- Provided training materials, resources and best practice guides that helped the CSO to develop an effective training curriculum, including real-world scenarios and role-playing exercises, enhancing staff understanding and preparedness.
- Shared best practices for crisis management, helping the CSO create effective response strategies and communication plans to support affected individuals.
- Provided examples of effective reporting systems and guidance on creating accessible channels, encouraging the CSO to adopt best practices and improve trust in its reporting processes.

- Offered strategies for community engagement, including conducting awareness sessions and involving communities in safeguarding discussions, helping foster a culture of safety and empowerment.
- Provided tools and templates for data collection and analysis, enabling the CSO to establish a systematic approach to reviewing safeguarding incidents and improving practices based on lessons learned.

Example of success in dealing with harassment

A large CSO in rural Punjab ensured the inclusion of PWDs in community meetings but initially lacked knowledge of safeguarding and complaint handling. After staff completed safeguarding training using RSH materials tailored to local needs, female community members were trained to share this knowledge with illiterate women, boosting female attendance in meetings from zero to 50%. When a female graduate reported harassment by a male staff member, the management swiftly handled the case, leading to his resignation. The affected female continues to work with the community, organising events, and also accompanied the CSO to government schools to distribute health and menstrual product kits. She is very happy working with the CSO.

Impact on CSO mentees

A number of CSOs reported raising awareness in their target communities about safeguarding issues and their rights and reporting options. In some cases, this led to increased reporting of harassment and investigation by committees, and, in a few cases, termination of male staff [19] or removal of perpetrators from training programmes. [20] One CSO reported implementing preventive measures, such as ensuring both male and female staff are present at the offices to help visiting stakeholders feel comfortable, ensuring safe access of females to relief distribution centres, and holding events for religious minority females in public spaces rather than private homes [21], one CSO also reported a significant increase in the participation of women in community meetings after the CSO informed them of their safeguarding rights and reporting mechanisms. [22]

Example of protecting refugee girls

A compelling example of how RSH mentees are applying their skills and knowledge within their communities comes from an interview with a mentee from a major civil society organization operating in Balochistan province. The CSO developed a safeguarding policy and risk register with RSH support, and held mandatory safeguarding awareness sessions for staff, requiring employees to read the material before signing contracts. During these sessions, female staff shared harassment experiences, including incidents with field staff. The organisation adapted RSH materials into a short awareness package in the local language, conducting refresher sessions in the field. In one session, many Afghan refugee girls spoke about harassment while staying in people's homes. Field staff referred them to a government shelter, leading to the filing of a case and secure housing for the girls.

Successes, Challenges, and Conclusions

Successes and Challenges

Most of the CSOs who participated in the mentorship programme in Pakistan reported they were able to develop or improve safeguarding processes and empower staff to implement these practices. However, RSH faced challenges in helping CSOs effectively disseminate safeguarding practices to marginalised communities, particularly in remote rural areas. This is due to a combination of the RSH being ambitious in identifying priority communities where people are hard to reach, both physically and in terms of the sensitive nature of the RSH content. Key obstacles included limited resources of CSOs to fully implement and sustain changes, accessibility issues, reluctance from marginalised women to report due to trust and confidentiality concerns, and the need for simpler, context-specific materials for communities with low literacy and exposure. The CSOs most closely engaged with the RSH through the mentorship programme improved their understanding of what SEAH means and how to address it within their organisations.

However, taking a cross-cutting lens to the impact of the RSH, existing cultural and gender power dynamics, and resource constraints of small CSOs may result in the more vulnerable populations still remaining unreached by the RSH.

Conclusion

In the Country Assessment RSH had proposed to work closely with key stakeholders in a catalytic way to access small organisations with less access to safeguarding resources, fewer opportunities to build organisational and staff capacity, few safeguarding funding commitments, and lack of dedicated, trained safeguarding personnel. RSH also proposed to consider the needs and rights of women and girls, PWDs and sexual and gender minorities and deploy an intersectional approach. RSH was partially successful in achieving these objectives. The strategic partnerships with major CSO networks helped the RSH to reach CSOs working with vulnerable groups, and work on building the safeguarding capacity of less-resourced CSOs, particularly CSOs working on the needs and rights of women and girls in impoverished communities. However, very few of these CSOs worked with PWDs and sexual and gender minorities, suggesting in the future, the RSH invests more resources in specifically targeting CSOs who work with the priority communities they identified in the Country Assessment to ensure those most in need of support are able to access it.

End Notes

[1] This case study is part of the broader FCDO-funded independent evaluation of the Resource and Support Hub (RSH). Data collection for the evaluation was conducted between February and March 2025 by the South Asia Regional Lead, contracted through Alinea International. To supplement the data gathered during the main evaluation, three follow-up interviews were carried out to provide additional insights for this case study. It additionally draws on RSH-produced materials and a wider literature review. The development of this case study was a collaborative effort involving the South Asia Regional Lead and members of the Evaluation Management Team.
[2] RSH defines a less-resourced CSO as one with less than 50 staff, lacking the capacity, resources, access to networks, and technical knowledge to develop and implement safeguarding policies
[3] RSH provided a comprehensive suite of resources to strengthen CSO safeguarding capacity. These included pre- and post-assessments, a multilingual resource website, and tailored weekly mentoring sessions led by safeguarding experts. Additional support came through the Ask an Expert service, webinars, podcasts, in-person workshops, newsletters, and a safeguarding consultants' directory.
[4] RSH Pakistan Country Assessment Report, December, 2022
[5] RSH Pakistan Country Assessment Report, December, 2022
[6] UNWomen (2023). National Report on the Status of Women in Pakistan, 2023: a Summary.
[7] Haris, M. Workplace Harassment in Pakistan: Legal Protections, Challenges, and the Need for Stronger Enforcement. The Friday Times, February 15, 2025
[8] RSH Pakistan Country Assessment Report, December, 2022
[9] The Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Network was established in 2015 under UNHCR leadership for inter-agency coordination on PSEA during a humanitarian emergency, developing and coordinating in-county networks of organisations working on PSEA, and ensuring cross-sectoral coordination for PSEA during an emergency.
[10] KII with RSH Advisor/ mentor, Pakistan.
[11] Stakeholder lists provided by RSH Advisor/ mentor, Pakistan
[12] KII with RSH Advisor/ mentor, Pakistan.
[13] One of the CSOs in the first mentoring cycle was unable to complete it due to internal resource constraints.
[14] KII, RSH Pakistan advisor/mentor
[15] RSH Year 5 Results and Learning. RSH Global Annual User Survey Summary Report. Activity period: December 2023 – November 2024. February, 2025
[16] RSH presentation at Pakistan Hub closing event, Karachi, 25 November, 2024
[17] RSH Year 5 Results and Learning. RSH Global Annual User Survey Summary Report. Activity period: December 2023 – November 2024. February, 2025
[18] Stories of Change from RSH Users. RSH Year 5 Results and Learning. RSH Global Annual User Survey Summary Report. Activity period: December 2023 – November 2024. February, 2025
[19] KII with mentee from an urban CSO working with minority women and PWDs in Punjab
[20] KII with mentee from an urban CSO working with minority women and PWDs in Punjab
[21] KII with mentee from a large CSO working in impoverished rural districts of Punjab province
[22] KII with mentee from a large CSO working in impoverished rural districts of Punjab province.

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Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH): Case Study on Adapting the Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub for Conflict-Affected and Fragile States (FCAS)

2025

Overview

The Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH), established by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), has demonstrated significant potential for strengthening safeguarding practices against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) across the international aid sector. However, its adaptation to fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) presents particular challenges that require fundamental shifts in approach, delivery modalities, and partnership strategies. This case study examines experiences from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Syria, Yemen, Jordan) and Eastern Europe (Romania, Poland, Moldova) to identify key adaptations necessary for effective RSH operations in FCAS contexts.

The updated Global Evidence Review of SEAH found that "the available evidence on SEAH in the aid sector is largely not focused on specific contexts, sectors and marginalised groups," with only "12 documents that focused specifically on humanitarian or fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCAS)" out of 52 studies mapped [1]. This highlights the critical need for context-specific approaches like the RSH's FCAS adaptation.

The analysis reveals that traditional RSH models require significant adaptation when operating in environments characterised by political instability, weak institutions, infrastructure constraints, cultural sensitivities, which are exacerbated further in FCAS situations and are highly correlated with an increase in SEAH. Key findings demonstrate the necessity for genuinely localised approaches, flexible delivery modalities, strengthened coordination mechanisms, and sustainable capacity-building strategies that can adapt to complex operational constraints.

The RSH primarily intended to support smaller, local NGOs in developing countries and those operating in high-risk environments which are least able to pay for this support themselves. According to the 2019 DFID Progress Report, the initial countries selected in which to establish the RSH's regional hubs were Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Sudan, all of which could be considered conflict affected states. As noted in the Terms of Reference, "conflict-affected and fragile states (FCAS) present unique challenges such as political instability, displacement, weak institutions, and humanitarian access constraints". [2]

The RSH occupies a distinctive position within the broader safeguarding ecosystem. An analysis of safeguarding initiatives demonstrates that while other initiatives such as United Nations Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (UNOVRA(, the Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (CAPSEAH), the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance, and Keeping Children Safe may share some objectives and characteristics with the RSH, the latter remains unique in terms of its ambition and modus operandi and the accessibility of its resources. Specifically, compared to initiatives like InterAgency Standing Committee (IASC) frameworks, CHS Alliance programmes, and DIGNA, the RSH remains the only initiative that has an explicit 'localisation' focus, in that it is primarily aimed at building the safeguarding capacity of CSOs in countries that are the target of development assistance. [3]

Eastern Europe Context: The repercussions of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered one of the largest displacement crises in European history, creating an environment in which safeguarding challenges were exacerbated. As noted in the WHO Report on SEAH Prevention Challenges in Ukrainian Refugee Crisis, this included "uncertain and precarious recruitment procedures (minimal or lack of background checks on staff and volunteers and inadequate criminal record screening processes", which potentially exposed vulnerable populations to greater risk. [4] By the end of 2023, over 6.33 million Ukrainian refugees were recorded worldwide, with 93% remaining in Europe. This crisis has reshaped the safeguarding landscape with neighbouring countries receiving over 575,000 unaccompanied minors and Romania implementing innovative accountability mechanisms for private citizen support.

MENA Region Context: The MENA region exemplifies the complex challenges of operating in protracted crises, often exacerbated by upsurges in conflict or other crises. The region has "faced extensive and complex humanitarian challenges over the past decade, with conflicts, economic crisis, and political instability displacing millions and putting substantial pressure on local communities and public services". [5] With approximately 36% of the region's 500 million population living in poverty, and significantly higher rates in conflict-affected areas like Yemen (71% poverty rate) and Syria, the intersection of displacement, socio - economic vulnerability, and traditional gender norms has created heightened SEAH risks, particularly for women and children

Case Study Objectives

This case study seeks to explore how the RSH model can be adapted to better address safeguarding needs in FCAS by examining operational experiences, identifying key challenges, and deriving practical recommendations for enhanced relevance and impact.

Contextual Challenges in FCAS Environments

Security and Access Constraints

FCAS environments present fundamental operational challenges that directly impact RSH delivery. In the MENA region, security constraints severely limited participation for vulnerable populations in safeguarding activities. As documented in the evaluation responses, "The security affected the implementation and affected the connectivity as well". [6] The immediate impact of ongoing conflict was starkly illustrated during the MENA Hub launch: "I do remember when we launched the MENA Hub, that was the 28th of January 2022. And on the same day there were strikes in Northern Yemen where 50% of local organisations couldn't attend". [7]

In Eastern Europe, the scale and rapidity of the Ukraine crisis created different but equally significant access challenges. The Evidence Review on Safeguarding in Ukraine, Moldova, Poland and Romania noted that "as the war in Ukraine continues to unfold, there is an increased need for safeguarding response and services, both within Ukraine and surrounding countries where Ukrainians are seeking refuge". [8]

Infrastructure and Connectivity Deficits

Infrastructure constraints in FCAS have the potential to significantly impede traditional RSH delivery models. Basic connectivity issues created barriers to online engagement, as evidenced in Gaza where "If you have a webinar after 3pm for West Bank, all people from Gaza... cannot join you after 3pm because there is no electricity". [9] In Syria, "the internet connection is quite bad" [10], necessitating RSH to provide financial support for connectivity: "We were supporting local organisations especially who joined the mentorship with the cost of Internet connectivity. We were giving them package of £200 at the end of the six months just as a cost to accommodate the cost of the Internet connectivity". [11]

Institutional and Political Barriers

Political resistance to safeguarding initiatives was documented across contexts. In Syria, "The biggest challenge was with the government... the Salvation Government... They would ask us why we were the ones trying to solve these problems!" [12] This political opposition extended to areas under different control structures, where "There were no mechanisms in place; any complaint had to go to the police." [13] In contrast, the Eastern Europe response demonstrated the potential for positive government engagement when political will exists. Romania's implementation of the "50/20 Programme" and establishment of inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms showed how government leadership could enhance safeguarding accountability. [14]

Cultural and Social Barriers

FCAS contexts often present complex cultural dynamics that require careful navigation. The MENA evaluation revealed significant cultural resistance to discussing SEAH-related topics: "In the early days, there were challenges... discussing sexual assault in northwestern Syria, particularly in 'camp/shelter areas,' with the authorities present there was taboo... They accused us of bringing ideas from outside our community." [15] Cultural stigma and victim-blaming attitudes further complicated safeguarding efforts: "Even if I want to say that there is harassment, some people respond to me: 'No, there is no harassment!' And if harassment happens to their daughter, they blame the girl: 'Why did she dress like that?'" [16]

Adaptation Strategies and Innovations

Localisation and Cultural Adaptation

Successful RSH adaptation in FCAS requires genuine localisation beyond simply employing local staff. The MENA experience demonstrated the importance of cultural adaptation: "the team that were engaged with, most of them were from the region, from the MENA region. So, the same mentality that we have made it easy for us to use the same language and the same terminology and simplify the resources that we use together." [17] However, surface-level localisation of the resources proved insufficient.

Organisations noted that "the examples provided in the resources were not relatable to our community... it would be more impactful when the example is close to the local reality." [18]

Flexible Delivery Modalities

FCAS environments require flexible, multi-modal delivery approaches. The Yemen Assessment recommended "using a blended learning approach by conducting online activities... as well as conducting some face-to-face activities such as bilateral meetings, a roundtable with applying necessary precaution measures." [19]Organisations adapted by developing offline materials and alternative engagement strategies: "We had put offline materials into use, and we called them back in follow-up; it took extra time, but it worked. "[20]

Technology-Enable Solutions

The Eastern Europe refugee response demonstrated innovative use of technology for safeguarding in crisis contexts. Romania implemented government led digital platforms, including "an online platform Humanitarian Support DSU–GOV to support the coordination of the more than 800 staff and volunteers from over 400 entities." [21] Communication technologies proved effective for information dissemination, with "Telegram being used to spread information within communities of Ukrainians in Romania." [22] Data management platforms like "UNICEF Romania collects data using Primero, a web-based platform developed to enhance the process used by humanitarian and development professionals to monitor incidents and manage cases related to child protection and SEAH" demonstrated the potential for technology-enabled case management. [23]

The MENA Region: Protracted Conflict and Systemic Collapse

The Syrian Crisis: An Example of Institutional and Infrastructure Breakdown

The Syrian conflict, now in its 14th year, represents one of the most devastating examples of state collapse and institutional breakdown in modern history. What began as civil unrest in 2011 has evolved into a protracted crisis that has fundamentally altered the region's humanitarian landscape and created unprecedented challenges for safeguarding programming. The conflict has resulted in nearly 618,000 deaths and 113,000 disappearances, with "almost six million Syrians (28% of the population), many of them children, [being] left with permanent disabilities." [24] Syria's economy has collapsed, with GDP per capita plummeting "from nearly US$3,000 per year in 2010 to around US$850 today, representing a staggering decline of 70%." [25] The physical destruction is equally severe: "by 2018, just seven years into the conflict, an estimated 4.4% of Syria's housing stock had been completely destroyed, with a further 16% partially damaged." [26]

SEAH Risks in Protracted Crisis Contexts

The prolonged nature of the Syrian crisis has created specific vulnerabilities that differ markedly from acute emergency responses. Early marriage rates have "surged among Syrian refugees, with an estimation of 40% of young Syrian refugee girls in Jordan and Lebanon married before adulthood." [27] The MENA evaluation documented how prolonged displacement and economic desperation have weakened traditional community protection mechanisms while simultaneously making SEAH discussions even more taboo than usual.

The Ukraine Crisis: Amplified Safeguarding Needs and Response Innovations

Scale and Nature of Safeguarding Risks

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 created unprecedented safeguarding challenges across Eastern Europe. The crisis displaced 3.7 million people within Ukraine and forced 6.9 million to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. The Poland country assessment documented specific SEAH risks emerging from the crisis: "Ukrainian refugees in Poland are experiencing safeguarding risks of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) at border crossings, in transit centres and while accessing accommodation and services in Poland. " [28]

Vulnerable Group-Specific Risks

The crisis revealed intersectional vulnerabilities that required targeted safeguarding responses. The assessment found that "women refugees are the largest group of newcomers due to the forced conscription of all men of fighting age in Ukraine... Those with caring responsibilities are not always able to take up employment, leaving them dependent on humanitarian assistance and vulnerable to safeguarding risks." [29]

Lessons Learned from Regional Experiences

MENA Region Insights

The MENA experience highlighted several critical lessons for FCAS adaptation that are particularly relevant for protracted crisis contexts. A major gap emerged post-programme closure, with organisations reporting: "No, I'm sorry, I don't have access. So as of now, I'm trying to open the access that I had, and all the files that I used to have access to are no longer available." [30] This emphasised the need for comprehensive sustainability planning.

Organisations also required more than technical training, needing capacity building and support for "increasing knowledge on safeguarding, strengthening leadership and culture on safeguarding, strengthening CSOs' knowledge and skills to integrate safeguarding within HR, specifically recruitment and volunteer management." [31]

Eastern Europe Innovation and Learning

The Eastern Europe refugee response provided valuable innovations applicable to other FCAS contexts. This included the demonstration of the potential for rapid hub establishment, though with important caveats: "The rapid establishment of emergency programmes without adequate safeguarding risk assessment and mitigations can result in programmes which are harmful or may fail to consider the multiple and complex vulnerabilities of affected populations." [32]

Enhanced Recommendations for FCAS Adaptation

Context-Specific and Enhanced Structural Adaptation

Protracted Crisis Programming: For contexts like Syria and Yemen, RSH programming should be designed with multi-year timeframes, recognising that "no scenario projects a recovery period shorter than the duration of the conflict itself." [33] This requires different funding models, partnership strategies, and sustainability approaches than those used in stable contexts or acute emergencies.

Acute Crisis Preparedness: The Eastern Europe experience demonstrates the need for pre-positioned safeguarding response capabilities. Future RSH programming should include rapid deployment protocols, pre-negotiated partnership agreements, and standardised rapid assessment tools that can be activated within days of crisis onset.

Genuine Localisation: Future FCAS hubs should be "genuinely locally-led, run by local entities—not just local staff—requiring a shift in power and resources" as recommended in the MENA evaluation. [34] This ncludes transferring decision-making authority, resource allocation, and programme design to local actors.

Multi-Modal Delivery: FCAS hubs should integrate online, offline, face-to-face, and remote delivery modalities from inception, with resources allocated for connectivity support and alternative access methods. The Eastern Europe experience demonstrated the value of diversified communication channels, including social media platforms, mobile applications, and traditional media.

Evidence-Based Programming: Given the Global Evidence Review's finding that "there is very limited evidence available that measures the effectiveness of existing approaches," FCAS programming should include embedded research components to build the evidence base for what works in different crisis contexts. [35]

End Notes

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This case study is part of the broader FCDO-funded independent evaluation of the Resource and Support Hub. Data collection for the evaluation was conducted between February and March 2025 by the MENA and Eastern Europe Regional Lead, contracted through Alinea International. To supplement the data gathered during the main evaluation, three follow-up interviews were carried out to provide additional insights for this case study. It additionally draws on RSH-produced materials and a wider literature review.

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