

French aid group MSF says it dealt with 24 abuse cases last year

Tuesday 20 February 2018, by [CHRISAFIS Angelique](#) (Date first published: 14 February 2018).

Médecins Sans Frontières confirms 19 staff were fired over sexual harassment or abuse

International aid group Médecins Sans Frontières acted on 24 cases of sexual harassment or abuse last year and fired 19 employees, it has revealed, as the British charity Oxfam faces questions over its handling of a sexual misconduct scandal.

The Paris-based group, one of the world's largest aid organisations, issued a statement saying it had received 146 complaints or alerts last year. "After an internal investigation, 40 cases were found to be allegations of harassment or abuse," it said. "Of these, 24 were cases of harassment or sexual abuse."

After investigating two dozen cases, 19 workers were fired. MSF did not detail in what countries or departments the alleged abuse took place, or whether those fired were health professionals, logistics or administrative employees.

MSF, best known for its work offering medical aid in conflict zones, was set up in Paris in 1971 and received the Nobel peace prize in 1999. It has 40,000 permanent staff in more than 70 countries around the world. The NGO's mission statement is a commitment to "bring quality medical care to people caught in crisis, regardless of race, religion or political affiliation".

Its charter stresses that: "Members undertake to respect their professional code of ethics and maintain complete independence from all political, economic or religious powers."

One of its co-founders, Bernard Kouchner, a former doctor and French socialist, served as foreign minister under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy from 2007-10.

MSF's statement comes as Oxfam faces allegations that some of its staff used sex workers in Haiti after a devastating earthquake.

Oxfam has been accused of covering up an inquiry into whether its staff used sex workers during the 2011 post-earthquake relief effort in Haiti. It is alleged some of those who were paid by the aid workers may have been underage. An investigation by the Times found that Oxfam allowed three men to resign and sacked four others for gross misconduct after an inquiry into sexual exploitation, the downloading of photography, bullying and intimidation.

The scandal has led to the resignation of Oxfam's deputy chief executive and the British government has threatened to cut funds to the charity unless it shows "moral leadership".

Oxfam has denied covering up the scandal but admitted it should have been more transparent.

Over the weekend, the Sunday Times reported that more than 120 workers from Britain's leading

charities have been accused of sexual abuse in the past year.

Save the Children, which in 2016 secured multi-year contracts worth £91m with the government, had 31 cases, 10 of which were referred to the police. The British Red Cross, which admitted a “small number of cases of harassment reported in the UK”, received £16.3m in funding from the Department for International Development.

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P.S.

The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/14/french-aid-group-msf-medecins-sans-frontieres-abuse-cases-last-year>