

CHILD SAFEGUARDING ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021

Child Care and Safeguarding Team
Programme Development International Competence
Centre



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**
A loving home for every child



Name of artist unknown, child's drawing of a house, Belarus.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Executive summary	3
2	Introduction	5
3	How to use this report	6
4	Progress and developments in 2020/21	8
4.1	Conclusion of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review	8
4.2	Response to ICSR and steps to strengthen safeguarding	9
4.3	From learnings and recommendations to action: the Safeguarding Action Plan	10
4.4	Immediate support for children and other persons affected by abuse	11
4.5	Ombudsperson system	12
4.6	Independent Special Commission	12
4.7	Support for member associations operating in high-risk contexts and with high risk profiles	13
4.8	The Global Programme Expert Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support	14
4.9	Safe Places, Thriving Children: trauma-informed practices	14
4.10	Applying Safe Behaviours: Preventing and Responding to Peer Violence	15
4.11	Protective Behaviours	16
4.12	Safeguarding in YouthCan!	17
4.13	Learning and development for child and youth care practitioners	17
4.14	Highlights from member associations and International Office Regions	18
5	Annual child safeguarding survey 2020	23
6	Child safeguarding incidents	24
6.1	Child safeguarding incidents analysis	26
6.1.1	Staff-to-child incidents of abusive behaviour	27
6.1.2	Sexual coercion and abuse involving staff as perpetrators	29
6.1.3	Child-to-child incidents of abusive behaviour	30
7	Conclusions and recommendations	32
8	Glossary	34
9	Appendices	34
	Appendix 1: Child safeguarding at SOS Children's Villages – how we work	34
	Appendix 2: 24-point Safeguarding Action Plan	37
	Appendix 3: Internal policy frameworks and guidance documents	38



1 Executive summary

The past year has included some significant developments for child safeguarding, including the conclusion of the **Independent Child Safeguarding Review (ICSR)**. The ICSR examined past cases of abuse and identified failures in the organizational response. The report included 46 recommendations for improvement in areas such as leadership and organizational culture; oversight, governance and accountability; care quality; and justice and support for victims, survivors, and whistle-blowers. The publication of the ICSR report on our [international website](#) was accompanied with the publication of our **Safeguarding Action Plan**, which includes 24 actions reflecting our commitment to take a more holistic approach and to create a safe environment everywhere we operate.

International projects and initiatives

The federation is undertaking numerous international projects and initiatives, including several that are also described in the Safeguarding Action Plan:

- Providing **immediate support** for children and other persons affected by abuse towards their healing, recovery, reconciliation and self-reliance
- Developing and rolling out an **ombudsperson** system to ensure that the organization fully meets the rights and needs of individuals who experienced abuse
- Establishing an **Independent Special Commission** to review past cases and recommend further investigation and governance improvements
- Providing extra support to member associations operating in **high-risk contexts** and with high risk profiles

Regional and member association highlights

Our programme and child safeguarding teams around the world continued to strengthen safeguarding through activities such as:

- Responding to the **COVID-19 pandemic** with specialized counselling for children and young people, as well as extra training for staff
- Developing channels through which children and young people can **report** any safeguarding concerns
- Providing additional training and materials to staff on **trauma-informed care** and positive parenting
- Increasing the participation of children and young people in **violence prevention** efforts, such as the Protective Behaviours programme, child rights training and safeguarding for online environments.

Incident analysis

We continue the practice of reporting the numbers of confirmed child safeguarding incidents across our global federation.

In 2020, a total of 1,311 child safeguarding incidents of **abusive behaviours** were confirmed across all SOS Children's Villages programmes, in which we provided alternative care for 65,500 children and young people, and supported 347,000 children, young people and adults in family strengthening programmes. Of those incidents, 590 were confirmed **adult-to-child** incidents, and 721 were confirmed **child-to-child** incidents. These confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours involved 1,862 children and young people in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages, representing approximately 3% of the total number of children and young people in SOS Children's Villages alternative care programmes.

During 2020, a total of 436 individual **staff** members (1.2% of our total staff) were involved in abusive behaviour incidents towards children, approximately half of which were physical abuse – mostly acts of corporal punishment.

In 2020, 19 staff were reported and confirmed as perpetrators of **child sexual coercion and abuse**, and 27 children were confirmed as victims in these incidents. Nine of those staff members were individuals working in administrative, maintenance, security and other support functions or at SOS Children's Villages schools and medical centres.

A total of 741 children and young people in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages displayed abusive behaviour towards other children or young people. Approximately 58% of those children and young people initiated incidents of physical abuse, which mostly involved acts of fighting and bullying, 27% initiated incidents of sexual coercion and abuse, and 15% initiated incidents of emotional abuse.

Recommendations

The Child Care and Safeguarding Team makes two general recommendations in this report:

1. Calling on the entire SOS Children's Villages federation to apply the organization's policies and procedures consistently and rigorously. Children everywhere have the same rights, requiring the organization to provide the same standards of quality care, protection and safety everywhere it operates.
2. Calling on the federation to fully implement the 24-point [Safeguarding Action Plan](#).

2 Introduction

Child safeguarding consists of the actions an organization takes to do no harm to children and to not expose them to the risk of harm, neglect or abuse. Every year, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team at SOS Children's Villages International presents the Child Safeguarding Annual Report to report on child safeguarding activities across the federation.

The past year has been marked by challenging growth. External factors like the COVID-19 pandemic continued to put increased pressure on children, care practitioners, and teams supporting them in SOS Children's Villages programmes across the world. The 2019/2020 Child Safeguarding Annual Report largely focused on our responses to COVID-19; this year we are sharing some more practical examples of how member associations around the world are responding to the crisis.

Internally, a crucial shift is occurring in the way we understand child safeguarding as interdependent with our broader organizational culture – the way we work, the way our values of courage, commitment, trust and accountability are actually applied and lived in real life, and what the safeguards need to be in place not only for children but also for staff and adult beneficiaries. In doing so, we are shifting our focus to a more holistic approach in creating a safe environment for children and young people. This shift will guide our approach to safeguarding as we move forward. Recognizing that safeguarding is about dynamic human behaviour and so is never "finished", we constantly draw learnings from our failures and achievements and work on making tangible improvements.

The report gives an overview of some of the successes, challenges and lessons learned from the period November 2020 – October 2021 and highlights some notable child safeguarding initiatives from member associations. It includes information on the organization's compliance with its minimum child safeguarding standards and procedures, as reported in the annual child safeguarding survey. As with previous years, the Child Safeguarding Annual Report also presents an analysis of the child safeguarding incidents that were reported and confirmed. Under-reporting and failure to detect child safeguarding concerns early continues to be a cause for concern. Nevertheless, the incident data provides a sound overview of the number of children and young people who are cared for or supported by SOS Children's Villages and who experienced different types of harm, neglect or abuse by staff members, and by other children.

The methodology used for the classification of child safeguarding incidents has changed to include only data on incidents of abusive behaviour to provide a better overview of the incidents where children and young people supported by the organization were harmed or where they were at serious risk of harm due to wilful harmful actions or lack of action.¹ In 2020, there was an increase in the overall numbers of reported child safeguarding incidents by approximately 10%. Considering only confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour, almost 50% of the confirmed incidents in 2020 were those of physical abuse. We believe that this is one the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which among other things led also to an increase in the prevalence of interpersonal violence, both adult-to-child and child-to-child.

SOS Children's Villages continues its journey to strengthen its child safeguarding work and mitigate the risks that put children in harm's way. The Child Safeguarding Annual Report is shared widely to raise awareness of issues that impact the safety and well-being of children and young people who come in contact with our programmes and operations. The report makes recommendations on how to create a safer environment for children and young people and how to address current challenges and gaps.

Both 2020 and 2021 have been turbulent years for SOS Children's Villages. The organization faced a number of serious challenges but also took a number of significant steps in strengthening child safeguarding work:

- The Independent Child Safeguarding Review was completed. The conclusions and recommendations from this review have helped us to identify specific areas for improvement and actions that can keep SOS Children's Villages safe for the children, young people and families we support.
- An investigation initiated by member associations brought additional serious safeguarding failures forward, further contributing to a critical examination of how well the organization delivers on its child safeguarding commitments.

¹ This change in the methodology makes it very difficult to compare the data on reported and later confirmed child safeguarding incidents in the past years and in 2020. Therefore, any interannual comparison needs to be made with caution. See our Child Protection Policy for detailed description of the different categories of abuse.

- On behalf of the federation, the CEO made an apology to each and every person affected by past abuse and made a pledge to meaningfully address organizational failures. Affected persons were invited to come forward with their experiences if they had not already done so. This open and transparent communication was beneficial and was followed by an increase in the number of incidents reported.² These reported incidents are currently being followed up to make sure that individuals who experienced abuse in the past are supported in a holistic way, and that justice is achieved when possible. This approach has also been positively received by partners and donors.
- The SOS Children's Villages General Assembly approved a Safeguarding Action Plan for the federation. The action plan identifies next steps that are crucial for the organization's further development in safeguarding (actions to be implemented in 2021–2024).
- The Safeguarding Action Plan includes, among other actions, the establishment of an Independent Special Commission, launched on 1 October 2021, to address past and contemporary cases of failings; an independent ombudsperson system; immediate support for persons affected by abuse; and targeted investments in 25 member associations operating in high-risk contexts and with high risk profiles.
- Two EU-co-funded projects started in 2020 and 2021, one focusing on introducing trauma-informed practices and the other, on preventing and responding to peer violence among children and young people without parental care or at risk of losing it.
- The successful Protective Behaviours programme entered its seventh year, reaching hundreds of child and youth care practitioners and thousands of children and young people in the past years.
- YouthCan!, a project to support young people as they transition from school to work, introduced a new safe virtual community platform and improved its safeguarding preparation of corporate volunteers and young people.
- A new learning and development framework for child and youth care practitioners was introduced. Since quality care is the best tool for lowering the risk of abuse, providing modern learning and development opportunities for care practitioners to strengthen their competencies is a significant milestone.
- Member associations across the federation continue to have child safeguarding high on their agendas, with a number of activities undertaken to strengthen safeguarding, such as peer-to-peer support among member associations, staff capacity building, trainings with children and young people, and improved reporting and responding procedures.

3 How to use this report

The Child Safeguarding Annual Report is a source of information for SOS Children's Villages staff and decision makers who focus their attention on recommendations for improvement. At the same time, we would like to inform our external stakeholders about where we currently stand in our child safeguarding efforts. We make the report publicly available not only as a matter of transparency but also in the hope that a wide range of our stakeholders outside the organization will also benefit. With this report, we would also like to contribute to the current discourse on what accountability, justice and equal application of child safeguarding standards across all programmes and geographies mean for organizations that provide services and advocate for children, families and communities in vulnerable circumstances.

It is unlikely that *all* of the report will be of interest to *all* stakeholders; therefore, this section guides you to the parts we think you will be most interested in.

Staff and decision makers, both within member associations and at SOS Children's Villages International, are particularly aware that we are on a continuous journey towards improved safeguarding. Their efforts are reflected in the progress we have made since last year (section 4) and the further recommendations for the future (section 7). Colleagues should note that the international data included in the incident analysis (section 6) can reflect broader trends and therefore inform national decisions as well.

Managers and board members should read the entire report – especially the incident analysis (section 6) and recommendations (section 7) – with an eye to ensuring that safeguarding measures and resources are fit for purpose in their area of responsibility.

² Please note that the incident data presented in section 6 does not yet reflect this increase, as it presents the incident data from 2020. Incident figures for 2021 will be presented in next year's child safeguarding annual report.

Alternative care providers and other experts in child safeguarding may find the entire report of interest, but especially section 4, which summarizes the major challenges, progress and achievements in safeguarding during the reporting year. Section 7 includes recommendations to the federation for the future, and the appendices include background information on our child safeguarding approach.

Other civil sector organizations (charities, non-governmental organizations, etc.) may be interested in how we have developed our child safeguarding approach (appendices) and the organization's child safeguarding journey during the last year, including planned actions to implement the recommendations of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review (section 4). There is a need for increased transparency and accountability in safeguarding across the sector, and the organization's steps towards this can be seen in that section as well as in the incident analysis (section 6).

Institutional and corporate partners will find section 4 on the organization's child safeguarding journey of the last year, highlighting the important next steps and actions needed to be taken, of particular interest. Particularly, the conclusions and recommendations of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review and strategic projects that strengthen child safeguarding may be of interest. Note that the entire report is oriented towards implementing an open approach in dealing with risks and incidents, and this is illustrated in the detailed incident analysis in section 6.

Individuals who donate to SOS Children's Villages (including child sponsors) may wish to focus on developments in 2021, described in section 4. Please note also that the appendices include background information on our child safeguarding approach that does not change from year to year, so they may be a useful reference point.

If you are ...	Have a look at these sections...
a member of staff or a decision maker in SOS Children's Villages	4, 6, 7
a manager or board member of an SOS Children's Villages member association	All
an alternative care provider or another expert in child safeguarding	All
another civil sector organization	4, 6, 9
an institutional donor or corporate partner	4, 9
an individual donor	4, 9

It should be noted that **children and young people** are our most important stakeholder group. They are the reason we exist, and they have the largest stake in there being strong and effective child safeguarding at SOS Children's Villages. Their voices and views on what the organization must do to make sure they are supported in a safe and protected environment is paramount. If children or young people have a question about child safeguarding or would like to report an incident, either past or present, they can reach out to the child safeguarding focal person of SOS Children's Villages in their country, write to childsafeguarding@sos-kd.org or make a report through the online whistleblower channel <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/report-a-child-safety-concern>.

One final piece of guidance is that we advise against using this report to compare the numbers of incidents provided in section 6 with those reported last year. In early 2020, new incident categories were introduced as a means to better document and report on serious cases of child abuse. The new categories are broader than the previous categories, thus lowering the threshold of what constitutes a serious child abuse incident. As part of its safeguarding journey, SOS Children's Villages is continuously improving its incident reporting and responding procedures. This includes fostering an environment in which more people feel willing and able to raise concerns and report incidents. An increase in the number of reported and even confirmed incidents can indicate an increase in the system's effectiveness and a heightened awareness of child safeguarding.

4 Progress and developments in 2020/21

The 2019/2020 Child Safeguarding Annual Report made several recommendations to decision makers within the SOS Children's Villages federation for 2021–2024. In the past year, these recommendations have been addressed in a number of ways. Covering a multi-year frame, they continue to be integral to our child safeguarding improvements.

In 2019/2020 the recommendations included the following:

- Refine approaches to dealing with problematic and inappropriate behaviours
- Improve consistency and implementation of programme quality standards
- Strengthen child safeguarding line management in member associations with higher risks
- Apply a victim/survivor-centred approach across all organizational levels
- Put a strong emphasis on workplace culture and value-based conduct across the federation
- Adopt a consistent approach to prevent and respond to all types of incidents including child safeguarding, corruption and fraud, governance, and sexual misconduct by and of staff and adult beneficiaries.

For safeguarding in SOS Children's Villages, 2020/21 was a big year. Some of the focus areas and activities are presented in the following sections. Where applicable, the sections include the related achievements, challenges and learnings.

4.1 Conclusion of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review

The *Independent Child Safeguarding Review (ICSR)* was concluded in 2021, some four and a half years after the International Senate, the supervisory body of SOS Children's Villages, had initiated it. The review was fully independent and carried out by [Keeping Children Safe](#). It focused on past cases of abuse that took place at or around SOS Children's Villages in four countries in different regions of the world and included the review of thousands of documents as well as interviews, group discussions and workshops with more than a hundred stakeholders from all parts and levels of the organization.³ Based on a thorough analysis of the factors that contributed to the occurrence of child abuse cases and the way the organization responded to them, the review provided SOS Children's Villages with recommendations for improvement.

The ICSR report, which SOS Children's Villages made publicly available after the General Assembly in June 2021, has helped the organization confront some uncomfortable and profound aspects of its past and, to a lesser extent, present safeguarding work.⁴ Findings from the ICSR report include the following:

- The review highlighted that as an alternative care service provider, SOS Children's Villages carries a particularly high child safeguarding risk profile, but in the reviewed cases it did not adequately consider and mitigate the risks, thus exposing children to abuse.
- Substantial gaps in the available case files meant that a great number of questions about the cases of abuse remained unanswered. These include the total number of victims and survivors, and the type of abuses they were subjected to. These gaps made it difficult to establish a complete picture of how the organization responded in each case.
- In addition to child abuse,⁵ the review found evidence of serious abuse of whistle-blowers and care practitioners who reported abuse. There was evidence of bullying, discrimination, abuses of power, and concerns of nepotism, which powerfully inhibited the reporting of safeguarding concerns.
- Many, although not all, of the reviewed incidents appeared to have occurred before the launch of the SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy in 2008 and the Code of Conduct in 2010. The review found that significant progress in child safeguarding has been made across the federation since then, including more targeted prevention efforts, increasing capacity of internal child safeguarding investigators, and improving reporting and responding procedures across the federation.

³ Travel and COVID-19 permitting, this was done on-site; in some cases Keeping Children Safe had to resort to virtual interviews and exchanges.

⁴ The ICSR report can be found on our international website: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/publications/icsr-global-report>. The report offers learnings from four cases where there have been historical failures in safeguarding. It cannot be regarded as a review of SOS Children's Villages as a whole, in terms of either the past or the current situation.

⁵ Including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, sexual exploitation, grooming, neglect, child-to-child abuse, and other rights violations.

The ICSR report commends SOS Children's Villages for its willingness to learn from past mistakes and adapt policies, procedures and practices accordingly. It makes **46 recommendations** for improvement in the following areas:

- Child safeguarding measures within SOS Children's Villages
- Leadership and organizational culture
- Oversight, governance and accountability
- Care quality and the role of primary caregivers
- Justice and support for victims, survivors, and whistle-blowers

4.2 Response to ICSR and steps to strengthen safeguarding

The Independent Child Safeguarding Review helped generate greater awareness across the federation about the importance of safeguarding, and the need to do more to prevent and respond to abuse and provide support and access to justice to affected persons.

Particularly during the first half of 2021, much effort was put into building capacity throughout the organization to understand and communicate openly about safeguarding with internal and external stakeholders. This has multiple benefits, such as encouraging those with knowledge of abuse to come forward if they haven't done so already, supporting the recovery process for those who have been affected by abuse, and sharing our learnings with strategic partners so that we can make the world a safer place for children together. A series of webinars on the ICSR and related safeguarding topics were offered. Reports and articles exploring various safeguarding-related issues were published on the organization's intranet, such as the need for all departments and offices to conduct child safeguarding risk assessments, and the dynamic between safeguarding and overall programme quality.⁶

In June 2021, the new CEO of SOS Children's Villages International, Ingrid Maria Johansen, who joined in January 2021, welcomed the ICSR report. In a statement, she announced that the organization will act on all ICSR recommendations. She offered an apology to every person affected and pledged to address past wrongs, listen to those who have experienced harm, investigate all allegations of wrongdoing, and hold those responsible accountable.⁷

Safeguarding featured prominently on a governance level. The International Senate held a special session on child safeguarding in February 2021, where the upcoming release of the ICSR report was discussed along with questions about organizational accountability and appropriate responses to past incidents of child abuse. Other topics included the need to further strengthen child safeguarding work, extend the provision of mental health and psychosocial support in member associations, and support children and young people affected by abuse on their healing and recovery journey. Important projects, which later became part of the Safeguarding Action Plan (see below), received initial approval.

In early 2021, an investigation initiated by member associations brought forward serious safeguarding, misconduct, governance and oversight failures on all levels of the organization. These allegations reinforced many of the findings of the ICSR report and contributed to the push for change, as articulated in the Safeguarding Action Plan.

In June 2021, the General Assembly, which is held every four years and brings together all member associations, took place. A new President, Vice President and International Senate were elected and the Safeguarding Action Plan was approved. In his acceptance speech, the new President of SOS Children's Villages International, Dr. Dereje Wordofa, vowed to always stand with those who are affected by abuse, seek their forgiveness, and accompany them in healing and rebuilding their future. He committed the organization to get to the bottom of the failures and draw lessons from them to improve the quality of childcare to the highest standard with transparency and accountability.⁸

There is evidence that this open and transparent communication is critical. For example, the number of reported incidents (particularly incidents that occurred in the past) has gone up as a result, and we have received positive feedback from donors and other partners as a result of our decision to proactively share our learnings with them and publish the ICSR report on our international website. Importantly, the federation's operational, programme-implementing and funding stakeholders have been mobilized to

⁶ See [here](https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/3670c595-a430-4ac0-84df-f7ec6d6000de/Child-Safeguarding-Journey.pdf) for articles, training materials and webinars (internal only); a report on our child safeguarding journey: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/3670c595-a430-4ac0-84df-f7ec6d6000de/Child-Safeguarding-Journey.pdf>

⁷ CEO statement: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/news/ceo-responds-to-icsr>

⁸ Press release on the new President and Vice President: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/news/sos-children%E2%80%99s-villages-elects-new-president>

develop and approve a comprehensive Safeguarding Action Plan, providing a blueprint that, when implemented, will translate words of commitment into action, leading to tangible change.⁹

The e-learning course *Child Safeguarding in SOS Children's Villages* was launched in June 2021. The course provides an overview of the child safeguarding approach applied in SOS Children's Villages, across member associations and the General Secretariat. The main aim of the course is to create a common understanding of the key child safeguarding principles applied by the organization and raise awareness of the policies and procedures by which we implement these child safeguarding principles. All staff are encouraged to take the course, which can be accessed here (for internal use only): <https://sosvirtual.aldeasinfantileessos.org/cursos-items/child-safeguarding-in-sos-childrens-villages/>.

4.3 From learnings and recommendations to action: the Safeguarding Action Plan

SOS Children's Villages owes it to the children and young people it supports to continually strengthen child safeguarding measures throughout the organization so that every child receives the same levels of care and protection. Every year, the Child Safeguarding Annual Report documents how the organization is able to meet this ambition, most notably in the prevention and incident reporting and responding areas. As outlined in the recent *Child Safeguarding Journey* report¹⁰, the developments of recent years have been positive steps in the right direction, but they are not enough. The Safeguarding Action Plan aims to address key lessons learned from our everyday child safeguarding work, workshops, audits, incident management, investigations, changes in regulatory and funding requirements, and the ICSR. These **learnings** for programme quality and child safeguarding cover the following focus areas:

- Holistic support, justice and incident management
- Children and youth for safeguarding action
- Child and youth care practitioners for safeguarding
- People, culture and HR practices for safeguarding
- Oversight, leadership, governance and accountability for safeguarding
- Investment for high-quality programmes across the federation

The Safeguarding Action Plan was developed to address these internal learning areas and implement the ICSR recommendations.¹¹ The plan prioritizes, in everything we do, support for the people who experienced abuse towards their healing, recovery, reconciliation, and self-reliance. Furthermore, the plan aims to improve overall programme quality, essential for prevention of abuse, and our policies and systems specifically related to child safeguarding. Finally, the plan addresses broader governance and organizational culture, since ensuring a safe environment for children and young people requires a safe environment for staff.

Accordingly, our **24-point Safeguarding Action Plan** aims to create a safer environment for children, young people, adult beneficiaries and staff across member associations and in SOS Children's Villages International (its General Secretariat and other bodies) by 2024. In 2021, SOS Children's Villages started work with a focus on eight of the actions with the highest potential for immediate impact in strengthening safeguarding throughout the federation. They will be implemented along with the remaining 16 actions through 2024. To track the progress of all 24 safeguarding actions, half-yearly monitoring of progress towards desired results by management at all levels will be implemented together with an annual progress report.

The **eight prioritized actions** are as follows:

1. Immediate support for those who have experienced abuse
2. Ombudsperson system
3. Incident management system
4. Child and youth empowerment
5. Code of Conduct and other human resource initiatives
6. Implementation of the regulation on the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse

⁹ Further information on the ICSR report, the CEO statement, a description of ICSR process, child safeguarding FAQs, lessons learned in child safeguarding (our child safeguarding journey), the Safeguarding Action Plan, and much more can be found on our international website: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/our-work/child-safeguarding-info-hub>

¹⁰ The *Child Safeguarding Journey* report: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/3670c595-a430-4ac0-84df-f7ec6d6000de/Child-Safeguarding-Journey.pdf>

¹¹ SOS Children's Villages has committed to implementing all 46 recommendations of the ICSR report.

7. Independent Special Commission
8. Support for high-risk countries

The next sections describe some of the prioritized actions that are *particularly* relevant from a child safeguarding perspective. These actions have been the focus of the Programme Development Competence Centre, the Global Programme Development Network, other functions where relevant and the Global Child Safeguarding Network. Significant progress has already been made to prepare for implementation since the Safeguarding Action Plan was approved in June 2021. The next sections also describe some other child safeguarding focus areas as well as safeguarding highlights from member associations and the International Office Regions (regional offices) from 2020/2021. While some actions and focus areas are quite advanced in their implementation, others are only just moving from conception to implementation. They are nevertheless described here to acknowledge their importance and relevance, and to reflect the considerable preparations that went into developing them.

4.4 Immediate support for children and other persons affected by abuse

The highest priority of our child safeguarding work is to ensure that children and young people supported through our programmes are safe and protected at all times. The findings of the ICSR and allegations of past misconduct have reminded us how necessary it is to respond swiftly and appropriately not only to new allegations and concerns but also to those that may have occurred in the past, even if they happened many years ago. The immediate support initiative is one of eight prioritized actions in the Safeguarding Action Plan. It addresses the ICSR report recommendations on prioritizing the best interest of victims and survivors of abuse, including historical abuse, and assuring appropriate and high-quality support and remedies.

To assist these efforts and deal with the increase in reports, funding from existing reserves has been made available to provide *immediate support to every child, young person and other person who has experienced abuse* in SOS Children's Villages programmes. This initiative aims to ensure the affected individuals are supported towards their healing, recovery, reconciliation and self-reliance. The support will be individualized, realistic and empowering. It may include medical, mental health, psychosocial and legal assistance as well as support to improve individual living situations. A system that can be monitored globally is being set up where every affected individual has a dedicated support person and plan, and every case is handled according to protocol. As of November 2021, six member associations have applied for and received approval for this additional international funding. More than 14 additional applications are in development. At the same time, member associations continue to manage past and present child safeguarding incidents within the regular protocols and frameworks.

A new user guide, *Listening and Responding to Individuals Experiences of Past Child Abuse*, was made available in June 2021. It guides member associations and the General Secretariat on how to deal with and appropriately respond to allegations of past abuse.¹² International Office Regions are supporting member associations to best manage this additional, hugely important task.

For example, in Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Middle East (the EUCM region), all member associations have been asked to develop national guides based on the new global user guide, outlining remediation actions for past abuse incidents. These national guides will take the national context and national legal requirements into account. A webinar for national management and boards across the region was held with representatives from Austria and Hungary to learn about their experiences in dealing with past abuse incidents. In Africa (both the ESAF and WCNA regions), member associations are being actively supported to develop concept notes that outline how they will be dealing with past abuse incidents. The concept notes are the first step towards securing funding and implementation. From the four concept notes already approved, one member association is already in the phase of implementation, receiving technical support for an effective response. Similarly, across the Asian region, member associations are being supported to develop concept notes and plans to deal with past abuse incidents as well as strengthen child abuse prevention. In Latin America and the Caribbean (the LAAM region), two concept notes are already approved and funded. A working group with member association representatives and regional office technical staff analysed the new user guide and defined recommendations on how it could be implemented. A regional document is now available, supporting member associations in responding to past abuse cases. Virtual sessions on how to use the new guide were provided. Member associations are carrying out a mapping of available

¹² The user guide can be found [here](#) (internal only).

mental health services in their countries and are being supported to develop concept notes on to how to respond to past incidents.

4.5 Ombudsperson system

There have sometimes been gaps in our child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures, where the organization did not always fully meet the rights and needs of individuals who experienced abuse. To close this gap and to complement existing safeguarding procedures, SOS Children's Villages is establishing a global *independent ombudsperson system*. The ombudsperson system is one of eight prioritized actions in the Safeguarding Action Plan. It will address the ICSR recommendations on prioritizing the best interest of victims and survivors of abuse and ensuring high-quality support and remedies for them, as well as recommendations related to strengthening reporting and responding procedures.

Building on ombudsperson approaches already practiced in some member associations, where SOS Children's Villages offers such services or works with statutory ombudsperson agencies, the global ombudsperson project aims to provide an external, independent view on safeguarding practices and procedures. The ombudsperson's major purpose is to provide checks and balances in existing safeguarding procedures. As such, the ombudsperson will support children, young people, adults, victims, survivors and whistle-blowers to resolve concerns and complaints and represent their rights, acting as a focal point between the complainant and the organization.

The ombudsperson system will be implemented on global, regional and national level, starting at national level. In partnership with the child protection consultancy [Proteknôn Foundation](#), the ombudsperson concept will be piloted in Benin, Sierra Leone and Uruguay. In-depth interviews with internal and external stakeholders will inform the set-up of the ombudsperson system and its roles and responsibilities, ensuring that the model follows global best practice and is tailored to the needs of individuals as well as the organizational structure. Member associations will shape the development of the concept and implementation plans through national advisory groups. Meaningful and strong child and youth participation is a central pillar of the project to make sure that the approach is relevant and responds to the actual needs and concerns of young people. Children and young people will co-create the design, delivery and monitoring of the ombudsperson's work. In September 2021, the first consultations with children and young people were held in the pilot countries. The experiences gained in the pilot will form the basis for a project scale-up in 2022 and further roll-out to more member associations as well as regional and global levels.

4.6 Independent Special Commission

In 2021, the International Senate of SOS Children's Villages International, the organization's highest supervisory body, took the decision to establish a global *Independent Special Commission*. The Independent Special Commission will examine cases of failings including child abuse, corruption and breaches of regulations. The commission is one of eight prioritized actions in the Safeguarding Action Plan. It will respond to the ICSR report recommendations on addressing wrongdoing and strengthening governance and accountability.

The Independent Special Commission started its work on 1 October 2021 and is comprised of four independent experts, Mr. Willy Mutunga, former Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya (chair), Ms. Mona Ali Khalil, former Senior Legal Officer of the UN, Ms. Justice Gita Mittal, former Chief Justice of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, and Mr. Andras Vamos-Goldman, founder and Director of Justice Rapid Response.

The **mandate** of the Special Commission is as follows:

- Assess, map and prioritize allegations and concerns that have been recently raised, and initiate further investigations as deemed necessary
- Based on the findings of the investigations, confirm whether or not misconduct has occurred, or whether or not the concerns are justified
- Assess in a broader sense the allegations and concerns regarding the areas of child safeguarding, safeguarding in general, use of funds, compliance, management and governance and other areas it deems important
- Recommend the appropriate measures to the International Senate

The commissioners will work fully independently and impartially and adopt their own terms of reference and work methodology based on the mandate. The commission will investigate why failures occurred, while in other instances the organization's policies and processes were appropriately followed through. It will review the current approaches towards ensuring accountability including investigation processes. It will recommend principles for improving the organization's ability to ensure individual and organizational responsibility and accountability, including practical actions, design and implementation processes.

The establishment of the Special Commission reflects the SOS Children's Villages commitment to improve child safety and wellbeing, ensure accountability and transparency, and develop the quality of our childcare services across the federation.

4.7 Support for member associations operating in high-risk contexts and with high risk profiles

In a nutshell, the SOS Children's Villages approach to child safeguarding can be described as creating a safe environment for children by (1) minimizing risks and (2) managing incidents.¹³

Children are at a higher risk of being harmed if any aspect of this approach is not implemented. Our experience shows that this may be the case when the existing child protection risks of a country, community or region are not sufficiently addressed — for example, weak child protection legislation, poor oversight and control by statutory authorities, or high levels of child vulnerability in the country, such as the prevalence of abuse, neglect and poverty. This may also be the case when there are internal factors at play — for example, when there are insufficient financial resources to promote child safeguarding actions in a sustained manner, few targeted prevention activities, no meaningful child participation, high staff-to-child ratios, high staff turnover (particularly of care practitioners), few training opportunities, few possibilities to safely report concerns, low incident numbers, high incident numbers with a slow response, insufficient reporting to authorities, or few consequences to child safeguarding failures.¹⁴

In 2021, the General Secretariat launched a project to strengthen the implementation of the overall child safeguarding approach in member associations that operate in high-risk contexts and with high-risk profiles. The project is providing comprehensive and targeted child safeguarding support and funding to at least 25 member associations over a total of four years. The project is one of eight prioritized actions in the Safeguarding Action Plan and will support implementation of the ICSR report recommendations on assessing and mitigating existing child safeguarding risks.

The project aims to boost member associations' child safeguarding work, reduce their risks and better protect children and young people from possible abuse or neglect. The project commenced in ten member associations from two of our regions (Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Middle East; and Eastern and Southern Africa) in 2021. It will continue with targeted support for another 15 member associations in three other regions (Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; and West and Central Africa) in 2022. Based on outcomes of a child safeguarding risk assessment, support for further member associations will be considered as part of this project 2023–2024.

The project covers the whole cycle of child safeguarding work at SOS Children's Villages. It starts with a thorough risk assessment, where each member association organizes a series of workshops with staff, including care practitioners, and children and young people. Based on the risk assessment findings, member associations put together a realistic yet ambitious action plan comprising specific actions that address the identified risks. This should include capacity building for staff, particularly of care practitioners, and children and young people on various child safeguarding topics. The plan may include actions related to strengthening abuse prevention, improving reporting and responding procedures, or mitigating the impact of the prevalence of corporal punishment, sexual abuse or child marriages in the country or community on member associations' programmes and operations.

The International Office is accompanying the project with a number of activities in close cooperation with the International Office Regions. It is facilitating knowledge sharing and exchange among member associations within the same region and cross-regionally via regional and global child safeguarding networks. Furthermore, child safeguarding training materials and e-learning courses for various

¹³ For more detailed description of our child safeguarding approach, see appendix 1.

¹⁴ **It is important to note that this is a generic list of possible child safeguarding risks** that do not necessarily apply to any one member association.

stakeholder groups such as board members, line managers, care practitioners, and other staff groups are being developed. The project to support high-risk member associations also includes the development of an early-warning system, which will automatically identify high-risk member associations, allowing the organization to intervene and support swiftly and proportionally.

4.8 The Global Programme Expert Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

The Global Programme Expert Group (GPEG) on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) is a global network of professionals hosted by the member association in Italy. The overall purpose of the expert group is to strengthen the MHPSS component across SOS Children's Villages programmes, the need for which has become particularly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic and the pressure it put on children, young people, staff and the organization's overall systems.

Children and youth who have lost or are at risk of losing parental care face greater psychosocial vulnerabilities compared to their peers. Often, the loss of parental care is accompanied by other types of adversity, such as abuse, neglect, extreme poverty, and conflict. These experiences harm a child's development and contribute to mental health disorders that may persist into adulthood. For this reason, it is imperative to focus on MHPSS to provide quality services to children, families and caregivers as well as communities in order to promote psychosocial wellbeing.

The vision of the expert group builds upon its pilot phase and an evaluation carried out in 2020–2021. In 2020–2021, it is planned to extend the project to 18–20 member associations in Latin America, West and Central Africa, and Asia. This will build on the work done in the first year of operations in Eastern and Southern Africa, specifically in Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Nigeria. Here the expert group offered support to strengthen the local capacity of staff and volunteers on MHPSS through technical and operational support and capacity building, knowledge consolidation and dissemination, and networking. The current and future actions of the expert group are all centred on these three pillars and the delivery of evidence-based interventions to children, caregivers and their communities with a tailor-made approach. This means that programmes and activities are adapted to the context of application, following comprehensive assessments of both the local MHPSS needs and resources, also on a staff level.

The project actions share the overall goal of increasing resilience among children and youth through the following three outcomes:

- Children and youth achieve increased wellbeing, decreased distress, and better protection from neglect, exploitation, violence, and abuse.
- Caregivers achieve increased well-being and decreased distress, and are able to prevent child neglect, exploitation, violence and abuse.
- Communities are able to prevent child neglect, exploitation, violence and abuse.

The project scope includes children in both development and emergency contexts who have lost, or are at risk of losing, parental care. It aims to protect children from developing psychosocial distress and mental health problems while also supporting those in need with adequate services. This increase in well-being and decrease in distress can play a consequential role in child safeguarding. Specifically, it can reduce the impact of risk factors and strengthen protective factors related to child abuse, maltreatment, neglect and violence for children and youth as well as care practitioners.

4.9 Safe Places, Thriving Children: trauma-informed practices

Children and young people in alternative care are highly vulnerable to adverse childhood experiences. Some studies suggest that 75% of children in alternative care have experienced trauma prior to their alternative care placement, 50% experienced violence on a daily basis in their families of origin and some 62% entered alternative care due to physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect, exploitation, or any combination of these.¹⁵

¹⁵ Jaritz, C., Wiesinger, D., & Schmid, M. (2008). Traumatische Lebensereignisse bei Kindern und Jugendlichen in der stationären Jugendhilfe: Ergebnisse einer epidemiologischen Untersuchung. *Trauma & Gewalt*, 2(4), 266–277; Schmid, M., Kölich, M., Fegert, J. M., Schmeck, K. (2009). Zusammenfassung der wichtigsten Ergebnisse des Modellversuches Abklärung und Zielerreichung in stationären Massnahmen (MAZ.). Unpublished report, retrieved from <https://www.bj.admin.ch/dam/>

However, many child and youth care practitioners are not adequately trained in how to care for children and young people who have experienced trauma. Therefore, they may not have the skills necessary to help them develop to their full potential. These children need care professionals with skills, knowledge and experience regarding psychosocial and mental health to build trust and strong, caring relationships.

The *Safe Places, Thriving Children: Embedding Trauma-Informed Practices into Alternative Care Settings* is a project that aims to give child and youth care practitioners the tools and knowledge to understand trauma, and aims to address the needs of children and young people affected by adverse childhood experiences through trauma-informed care practices. The project is being implemented in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Serbia. The main characteristics of trauma-informed care are:

- Awareness: care practitioners are aware of the processes that affect children and young people who have experienced trauma.
- Structural change: the organizational structure and care framework involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of trauma.
- Safety: physical, psychological and emotional safety for both children and care practitioners is ensured.
- Empowerment: the care is set up in a way that helps children rebuild a sense of control and empowers them to be active in their recovery process.

The project targets child and youth care practitioners working with children and young people without parental care in six European countries. It started in 2020 and is delivering the following over a 24-month period:

1. An e-learning programme that aims to reach around 1,000 professionals from the social, educational, health and justice sectors. It was developed to equip them to better understand and identify adverse childhood experiences and their impact on the development of children.
2. Face-to-face trainings to equip 400 to 500 child care professionals in the target countries with the skills to implement a trauma-informed approach in their work with children and young people in alternative care who are affected by adverse childhood experiences.
3. Workshops to embed trauma-informed care practices in around 18 selected programmes and organizations providing alternative care. This will help those organizations make a sustainable systemic change, reaching approximately 1,000 children.
4. Policy recommendations to encourage the commitment of public authorities to support and implement trauma-informed care practices on a national level. The adoption of these policy recommendations has the potential to positively impact the well-being of 40,000 children living in alternative care.

The project is co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union, covering up to 80% of the total costs. Project partners are SOS Children's Villages International, six member associations of the countries mentioned above, and the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS) of the University of Strathclyde. There are plans to use the outputs and learnings from this project for child safeguarding improvements in other countries and regions.

4.10 Applying Safe Behaviours: Preventing and Responding to Peer Violence

Children and young people without parental care and those whose families are in vulnerable circumstances often have a history of abuse, neglect or toxic stress and emotional, social or behavioural challenges many have witnessed or experienced violence in the family. As a result of these adverse experiences, children and young people without parental care are more vulnerable to being the target of violence from their peers, or initiating violence towards their peers.¹⁶

Peer-on-peer violence is one of the most common ways that children and young people experience violence, and children in care have consistently raised the issue of peer violence and bullying as a

[data/bj/sicherheit/smv/modellversuche/evaluationsberichte/zusammenfass-maz-d.pdf](https://data.bj/sicherheit/smv/modellversuche/evaluationsberichte/zusammenfass-maz-d.pdf); McAuley, C., Davis, T.(2009). Emotional well-being and mental health of looked after children in England. *Child & Family Social Work*, 14, 147-155.

¹⁶ Brodie, I. and Pearce, J. (2017). Violence and alternative care: A rapid review of the evidence. *Psychology, Health and Medicine*, 22 (Special Issue), 254–265. Retrieved from <https://uobrep.openrepository.com/handle/10547/624726>.

significant problem affecting their lives.¹⁷ Research in Italy found that six out of ten young people have experienced peer violence in the form of bullying and/or cyberbullying.¹⁸ Peer-on-peer violence among children can be complex and often includes physical, sexual and emotional aspects. Despite its prevalence, child and youth care practitioners often experience challenges in responding effectively. It is crucial that children and young people who are affected by peer-on-peer violence as well as practitioners caring for them are equipped and empowered to respond to such situations.

The *Applying Safe Behaviours: Preventing and Responding to Peer Violence Amongst Children without or at Risk of Losing Parental Care* project aims to support children and young people as active agents in creating a safe environment for themselves and their peers, and to enable child and youth care practitioners to respond appropriately to peer-on-peer violence among children in Belgium, France, Italy, Romania, and Spain. The project aims to provide them with the knowledge and tools needed to understand the issue and act against it. Applying the Safe Behaviours approach in children's and young people's lives can result in a safer environment for them. It can improve the capacity of child and youth care practitioners to prevent, identify and respond appropriately to violence among children.

The project targets children and young people in alternative care settings in five European countries. It started in May 2021 and is delivering the following over a 24-month period:

1. Face-to-face peer trainings to build the capacity of 455 children and young people to apply the Safe Behaviours approach and empower and equip them to recognize and speak about peer violence
2. Face-to-face training of 572 child and youth care professionals to prevent, identify and respond to peer violence among children in a balanced, safe and caring manner, ensuring the best interest of every child
3. Two sets of online awareness-raising modules on the prevention of peer violence among children: one set for children and young people and a second set for child and youth care professionals and adults from the local communities
4. Evidence-based policy recommendations to advocate for systematic changes to improve outcomes for children affected by peer violence.

The Applying Safe Behaviours project is co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union, covering up to 80% of the total costs. Project partners are SOS Children's Villages International and five member associations of the countries mentioned above.¹⁹ There are plans to use the outputs and learnings from this project for child safeguarding improvements in other countries and regions.

4.11 Protective Behaviours

Protective Behaviours is an internationally recognized personal safety programme that empowers children, young people and adults with strategies to promote safety and resilience. It teaches concepts of emotional literacy, empowerment, assertiveness, problem-solving and an understanding of safety. In teaching these concepts and strategies, the training aims to prevent abuse, increase safety, and reduce violence. It strengthens children and adults around two main themes:

1. We all have the right to feel safe at all times: this theme includes understanding feelings, early warning signs (the physical sensations we experience in our body when feeling unsafe or excited) and the safety continuum (ranging from feeling safe or fun to feeling scared to taking risks on purpose to feeling unsafe).
2. We can talk with someone about anything, no matter what it is: this theme includes safe and unsafe secrets, networks (identifying adults we can talk with and ask for help if we feel unsafe or scared), persistence expectation (persisting until you feel safe again), and body awareness and ownership.

The Protective Behaviours programme has been taught to thousands of children, young people and child and youth care practitioners in member associations in Africa, Europe, Central Asia and the Middle

¹⁷ Kendrick, A. (2011). Peer violence in provision of children in care. In C. Barter & D. Berridge (Eds.). *Children behaving badly: Peer violence between children and young people*, 71–84. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell; Włodarczyk, J., and Makaruk, K. (2013). National survey of child and youth victimisation in Poland: Research report. Warsaw: Nobody's Child Foundation.

¹⁸ Terre des Hommes (2020). Osservatorio Indifesa. Dati 2019. Retrieved from <https://terredeshommes.it/pdf/osservatorio-indifesa-2019.pdf>.

¹⁹ More details on the project can be found here: www.sos-childrensvillages.org/applying-safe-behaviours.

East since 2016. Due to high staff turnover in some regions, the training will have to be repeated in many member associations.

In 2020/21, the programme was further rolled out with the financial support of our corporate partner Johnson & Johnson in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia. Over a hundred Protective Behaviours practitioners were trained to in turn train children and young people in their programmes and communities. A further 14 Protective Behaviours master trainers were trained, who can now train other Protective Behaviours practitioners. Care practitioners, children and young people received further training in Laos, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Nepal, Mongolia and the Philippines, with a total of almost 900 staff and almost 2,200 children and young people trained since 2018.

Twenty member associations in Latin America and the Caribbean have been working on protective behaviours and creating a protective and safe environment for children. Using a four-tier approach, where the first tier addresses the physical environment, the second, the emotional environment, the third, the role of care practitioners and other staff, and finally the fourth, participation of children and young people in creating a safe and protected environment. Other protective approaches such as positive parenting and conscious affection have been promoted with care practitioners, children and young people across the region.

4.12 Safeguarding in YouthCan!

YouthCan! is a global multi-stakeholder partnership that supports young people in alternative care or at risk of losing parental care to successfully transition from school to work. The project combines mentoring, first work experience, and soft and technical skills training. YouthCan! has provided holistic support to 6,500 young people across 37 countries in 2020, working with 1,473 volunteers from 232 partners worldwide. The objective is to reach 56 countries by 2024.

With the project entering its fourth year, the specific safeguarding risks at the *global level* of the project were assessed and mitigating actions defined. These included strengthening awareness and knowledge on safeguarding and mentorship among participating member associations, ensuring a safe virtual platform, and improving the preparation of corporate volunteers and young people. Guiding materials for YouthCan! risk assessments at *national level* are currently being developed and will be distributed to participating member associations in 2022.

A new safe virtual platform called the YouthLinks Community Platform will be piloted in eight member associations in 2021, with global roll-out planned to start in the first quarter of 2022. Safeguarding considerations were at the centre of all decisions in finding suitable software and setting up the new platform prototype.

An e-learning course for corporate volunteers is currently in development with strong involvement from young people on the SOS Children's Villages Youth Advisory Board. The course will be launched in April 2022 and aims to prepare volunteers to live by the highest safeguarding standards in their engagement with young people and improve how they train and support young people. A 45-minute module on safe and healthy relations is mandatory and ends with a quiz that volunteers need to pass to be able to download and sign the Code of Conduct. The course will be available in three languages and all regions. Interactive YouthCan! preparation materials are being developed in youth-friendly language in consultation with young people. A youth-friendly video will be launched by the end of 2021.

4.13 Learning and development for child and youth care practitioners

SOS Children's Villages strives for children and young people to experience love, a sense of belonging, respect and security. Child and youth care practitioners – family strengthening field workers, SOS parents, family assistants, foster parents and youth workers – play an essential role in achieving such positive outcomes for children and young people.

The purpose of the *learning and development framework* is to support member associations to provide modern learning and development opportunities for child and youth care practitioners. It will help member associations build the capacity these practitioners, so they can develop the competencies that are required to provide quality care. The framework builds on SOS Children's Villages principles and care commitments and is based on our external frameworks, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

The **key characteristics** of the new learning and development approach are the following:

- Every child and youth care practitioner needs to continuously grow and develop in their job.
- The focus is on **doing**, rather than simply learning and knowing.
- There is a **defined set of competencies** that is developed based on in a **competency portfolio**.
- There is a different competency portfolio for caregivers, for care support staff and for family strengthening staff.
- The autonomy of the learner is key. Every practitioner takes responsibility for their own learning and development.
- The role of the organization is to provide as much support as the individual requires to thrive. Good leadership, as well as human resources and organizational development processes and practices, needs to be in place.
- It incorporates a highly reflective approach helping individuals build self-awareness, which leads to self-development and growth.

The learning and development framework for SOS parents was piloted in eight member associations in Africa from April to September 2021.

This pilot phase brought several achievements: 12 learning and development facilitators and 14 learning and development coaches from eight member associations were trained, and an initial training workshop was provided to SOS parents and family assistants. Feedback from learning and development facilitators and SOS parents is very positive. For example, caregivers in Mauritius said they wanted all caregivers to receive the training.

Implementing this new approach does not go without challenges. The learning and development of child and youth care practitioners need to become a priority on all levels of the organization, which is currently not yet the case. This will require a mindset shift, where an approach is promoted that is competency based and learner centric. Furthermore, for the programme to be impactful, it will be essential to invest in and update the IT infrastructure of child and youth care practitioners and develop digital literacy. It must also be noted that learning and development take time. Child and youth care practitioners and the staff who support them need line manager backup and support to have the required time to seize the learning opportunities and reflect on their care practices.

The learnings from the pilot have been incorporated into the documents and training for the roll-outs planned in 2022. These will again focus on member associations in Africa. In addition, an online version of the initial training workshop is being developed to also offer flexible training across programmes and member associations. It will be piloted in 2022.

4.14 Highlights from member associations and International Office Regions

Child safeguarding was high on the agenda of member associations across the world. The following section highlights some of the diverse child safeguarding activities that member associations and International Office Regions carried out. The list is by no means complete and should rather be seen as a selection of examples worth highlighting on the SOS Children's Villages child safeguarding journey in different parts of the world.

Eastern and Southern Africa

Responses to COVID-19

- The regional child safeguarding team has established virtual monthly child safeguarding networking meetings that allow national child safeguarding focal persons to share and discuss their achievements, challenges, next strategies and issues relating to incident management. The regional child safeguarding team provides guidance and support and regularly sends materials and articles on risks and strategies to protect children from pandemic-associated risks.

Child safeguarding country clusters for better collaboration

- The 26 member associations in the region have been grouped into four clusters to be able to address concerns and promote capacity building in a more targeted way. The member associations in each cluster have quarterly meetings, where child safeguarding issues are discussed, concerns addressed together and findings shared across the region.

Strengthening child safeguarding evaluations

- A child safeguarding evaluation team is being developed, composed of individuals from different functions across the region. They will be an independent team that come together every year to evaluate member associations' child safeguarding incident management and provide recommendations.

Capacity building for staff and board members

- The regional child safeguarding team conducted child safeguarding capacity building in Somaliland, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Rwanda using the newly developed child safeguarding training materials for board members, management and care practitioners. It was possible to hold all but one training sessions in person.
- Further trainings are planned in Burundi, Ghana, Mozambique and Somalia before the end of the year. The regional child safeguarding team has furthermore introduced updates to the global reporting and responding procedures across the region.

Cross-functional risk assessments

- A thorough and participatory risk assessment was conducted in several member associations across the region, where participants from different functional areas identified possible child safeguarding risks related to their departments and areas of work. The assessment greatly supported identifying pragmatic remedial actions to effectively mitigate specific child safeguarding concerns, which will be implemented in 2022 and the following years.

Asia

Responses to COVID-19

- Member associations in the region organized trainings for children on how to report child abuse during COVID-19. Incidents have been on the rise because of children's and young people's increased levels of anxiety and other pandemic-related restrictions.
- Increased access to psychosocial counselling was provided for children and young people as well as care practitioners and other staff.

Child safeguarding and child rights workshops for children

- Workshops on child rights and child safeguarding were held across the region where children learned about their right to feel safe at all times. For example, a total of 220 young people at six locations were reached in Laos.
- In Bangladesh, children and young people learned about how to stay safe online and deal with cyber-bullying and the risks of unknown websites, apps and social media.

Child safeguarding hotline

- Child safeguarding focal persons in India held workshops with children on how they can report concerns through a toll-free child protection hotline. Children not comfortable with English or Hindi can report concerns in a voice message that the team translates on their end.
- A child protection hotline for children supported through family strengthening and kinship support programmes was launched in Nepal. Trainings were provided to staff and mechanisms set up to record and report the received concerns to local authorities.

Capacity building on child safeguarding policies and procedures

- Child safeguarding focal persons at location level across member associations received orientation on the available child safeguarding tools and templates, for example on how to conduct risk assessments and fill out initial incident reporting forms and an incident register.
- A child safeguarding corner has been set up in Bangladesh with resources to inform staff, teachers and parents about specific roles and responsibilities in reporting and responding to child safeguarding concerns.

Child protection advocacy

- The SOS Children's Villages member association in Vietnam took part in meetings on the implementation of children's right to participation as per a government decision issued by the prime minister. In another meeting on the child protection and alternative care system in the country, the member association presented its concerns about the situation of children deprived of a family environment and the limited availability of quality alternative care arrangements in the country.

West, Central and North Africa

Child safeguarding country clusters for better collaboration

- Utilizing support provided across countries, recurring cluster discussions on child safeguarding took place, involving SOS Children's Villages International representatives, child safeguarding teams, SOS mothers' representatives, programme directors and the national care coordinators. These discussions provided an opportunity for the member associations to raise concerns and to propose solutions together, also providing feedback to the regional office on areas needing support.

New online reporting forms

- During the COVID-19 travel restrictions, the member association in Benin developed a Microsoft form that allowed any person to anonymously report a child safeguarding concern from a smartphone or computer. When a form is submitted, the national child safeguarding focal person receives an immediate notification, allowing for a fast and direct response.

Partnerships for sex education

- The member association in Guinea signed a partnership protocol with the non-governmental organization AGBEF, which is responsible for providing sex education to young people in order to promote self-protection and prevent sexual abuse.

Child-friendly material

- The association in Guinea developed a child-friendly version of the Child Protection Policy in cartoon format.

Child safeguarding staffing

- Two new child safeguarding coordinator positions were filled in two programme locations in Mali to further reinforce the implementation of the Child Protection Policy in the member association. The positions were filled with the financial support of the SOS Children's Villages association in France.

Child safeguarding audits

- The member associations in Benin, Mali and Guinea carried out child safeguarding audits in order to assess their compliance with the minimum requirements of the Child Protection Policy. Following the audit, action plans to strengthen the implementation of the Child Protection Policy were developed and are now being carried out.

Western Europe and North America**Responses to COVID-19**

- The member association in France provided psychosocial support to children, young people and caregivers across all programmes, focusing on individualized needs and household relationships. It has also adopted an ambitious Safeguarding Action Plan for France for 2021–2024.
- In Germany, SOS Children's Villages carried out a survey across all programme locations to identify how young people assess their daily lives during this challenging time. Based on the findings, measures such as access to digital resources for education, help for young people to connect with loved ones, and psychosocial support were put in place.
- Family counsellors in the Netherlands shifted to video calls and digital media to maintain contact between the children in out-of-home placements and their biological parents in order to keep the family ties strong.

New child safeguarding trainings

- SOS Children's Villages in Germany developed a new web-based training on child safeguarding, which all current and new staff must complete. The training builds awareness of the importance of child safeguarding and informs staff about mandatory child safeguarding procedures.
- In Finland, guidelines for all employees and foster parents on how to recognize and act on abuse allegations was updated to provide more detailed instructions, for example on employees' specific responsibilities. Online trainings are in development.
- In the Netherlands, the online child safeguarding course offered by SOS Children's Villages International has been added as an essential element to the on-boarding programme of new staff.

Child safeguarding in quality assurance

- In Finland, there is a quality standard system that includes criteria on safeguarding. Performance is measured once a year in every programme. The system to detect changes in quality has been

improved, with every employee required to report if they notice any kind of neglect. The executive team follows up on all allegations on a monthly basis.

- The member association in Austria has carried out a survey using an innovative peer evaluation approach to gather authentic feedback from children and youth for quality development, empowerment and participation in general. In total, 320 children and adolescents participated. A report presenting results will be published by the end of 2021.

Integrity and safeguarding

- The member association in the Netherlands has established an integrity team to promote justice for the children, young people and families we work with. The team advises on ethics, integrity systems and protocols, monitors the effectiveness of reporting and assesses whether the integrity systems are in line with relevant standards.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Responses to COVID-19

- With the support of the partner NGO Espirales, emotional and technical support is being provided to child and youth care practitioners, technical teams, national office staff, and families in the communities across the region.
- Informational videos and webinars on self-care, psychosocial first aid, positive discipline and working with children, young people and families in emergency contexts have been developed.
- At the regional level, child safeguarding risk assessments have been promoted in all member associations, considering the context of the pandemic.
- All 20 member associations have promoted innovative actions in the context of COVID-19 to promote the resilience of care practitioners, provide them with emotional support, carry out risk assessments and promote protective environments. Practice examples were developed for Argentina, Venezuela, Haití, Ecuador, Chile and Bolivia.

Strengthening strategic child safeguarding work

- Member associations have been encouraged to design and implement a national child safeguarding strategy, which has allowed them to achieve a long-term vision and have a strong focus in the prevention field. Currently 95% of member associations have a national child safeguarding strategy in place.
- The online course *Care, Protection and Safety Management Systems with a Risk Approach* regarding problematic and sexually abusive practices between peers was provided to all member associations with the support of an external partner.
- Three new regional guides on trauma in childhood and adolescence were developed, including the *Guide to Trauma for Families and Care Professionals*, the *Guide to Facilitating Trainings on Trauma in Childhood and Adolescence*, and the *Guide on a Trauma-Informed Approach in Case Management*.²⁰ Trauma-informed care trainings were carried out in Jamaica, Uruguay, Colombia and Costa Rica.
- Child and youth participation in violence prevention actions has been promoted in member associations including those in Brasil, Colombia, Paraguay, Uruguay, El Salvador and Nicaragua.
- All 20 member associations have been implementing the regional guideline *Protective and Safe Environments*. Additional material was created in Perú and in the Dominican Republic.
- Positive parenting and positive discipline trainings have been adapted to a virtual training approach. Some of the member associations that have carried out these trainings include those in Colombia, Panamá, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru.

Reporting and responding systems

- A regional digital reporting and response system has been designed for the registration and follow-up of child safeguarding incidents. The system allows for better management and faster response and follow-up.

Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Middle East

Responses to COVID-19

²⁰ [Guide on Trauma for Families and Professionals](#); [Guide on Facilitating Trainings on Trauma in Childhood and Adolescence](#); [Guide on a Trauma-Informed Approach in Case Management](#) (internal and Spanish only).

- Member associations assessed child abuse risks during the pandemic. Access to virtual psychosocial counselling for children and young people as well as care practitioners and other staff was rapidly increased, and additional focus was put on additional trainings on cyberabuse and cyberbullying.
- The member association in Bosnia and Herzegovina developed and rolled out a new protocol to protect children from physical aggression to address an increase in physical abuse during the pandemic.
- The member association in North Macedonia developed an online child safeguarding course for children.

Local mapping, risk assessments and risk mitigation activities

- Local mapping and risk assessment exercises were increasingly carried out across the region. Representatives from various functions were actively involved in identifying child safeguarding risks in their areas of work and planning relevant mitigation actions.
- A review of the national child protection and alternative care systems was conducted by an external expert in five member associations across the Middle East, providing an important input to the member associations' local stakeholder mapping exercises.
- Unicef assessed the implementation of the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in Kosovo and provided a low risk rating.
- Based on an analysis of the child safeguarding incidents in their programmes, the member associations in Lithuania and Poland organized trainings for care practitioners on human trafficking and the use of psychoactive substances among young people.
- In Palestine, SOS Children's Villages carried out Protective Behaviours trainings with children and staff, encouraging children to recognize and express their feelings and focusing on their right to be safe at all times and on their personal space and boundaries.

Reporting and responding procedures

- All member associations put measures in place to diversify reporting channels and increase awareness of the new channels among children and young people as well as care practitioners and other staff.
- The member association in Croatia created a new digital platform for reporting incidents. The platform allows for clearer and more efficient progress monitoring. Immediate updates are shared when progress has been recorded. The member association in Macedonia developed a Microsoft form that allows any person to anonymously report a child safeguarding concern through the organization's website.

Capacity-building activities

- The national child safeguarding focal person in Poland develops a child safeguarding newsletter for the members of the local and national child safeguarding teams. A total of 14 newsletters were sent in 2020.
- Members of the national child safeguarding teams from 19 member associations took part in capacity-building trainings on child safeguarding in SOS Children's Villages; reporting and responding procedures; child safeguarding investigations; and planning, monitoring and evaluation of child safeguarding in programmes.
- Internal investigators from Bosnia and Herzegovina received child safeguarding investigation training. Further child safeguarding investigation trainings were provided to Russian-speaking internal investigators from across the region.

5 Annual child safeguarding survey 2020

Carried out since 2009, the annual child safeguarding survey is a self-assessment conducted to monitor the compliance of member associations with the SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy, related procedures and the International Child Safeguarding Standards developed by Keeping Children Safe. It covers the following areas:

Putting policy into practice	Organizing staff	Planning	Implementing	Monitoring and review
A safe environment is created for children and young people in SOS Children's Villages programmes	Capacity building is carried out, and roles and responsibilities of staff are clear for child safeguarding.	Local mapping and risk assessments are done and child safeguarding measures planned.	Resources are available for child safeguarding activities, and reporting and responding procedures.	Day-to-day child safeguarding work and incidents are monitored and learned from, and oversight is ensured.

A total of 135 member associations completed the 2020 annual child safeguarding survey. Of the 135 associations, 69 reported an overall compliance rate above 90%, and only 24 member associations reported an overall compliance rate below 80%. In 2020, the rate of participation in the survey was above 97%, with only four member associations (China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) not taking part.²¹ The survey therefore provides a representative insight into achievements but also challenges in the child safeguarding work across the federation.

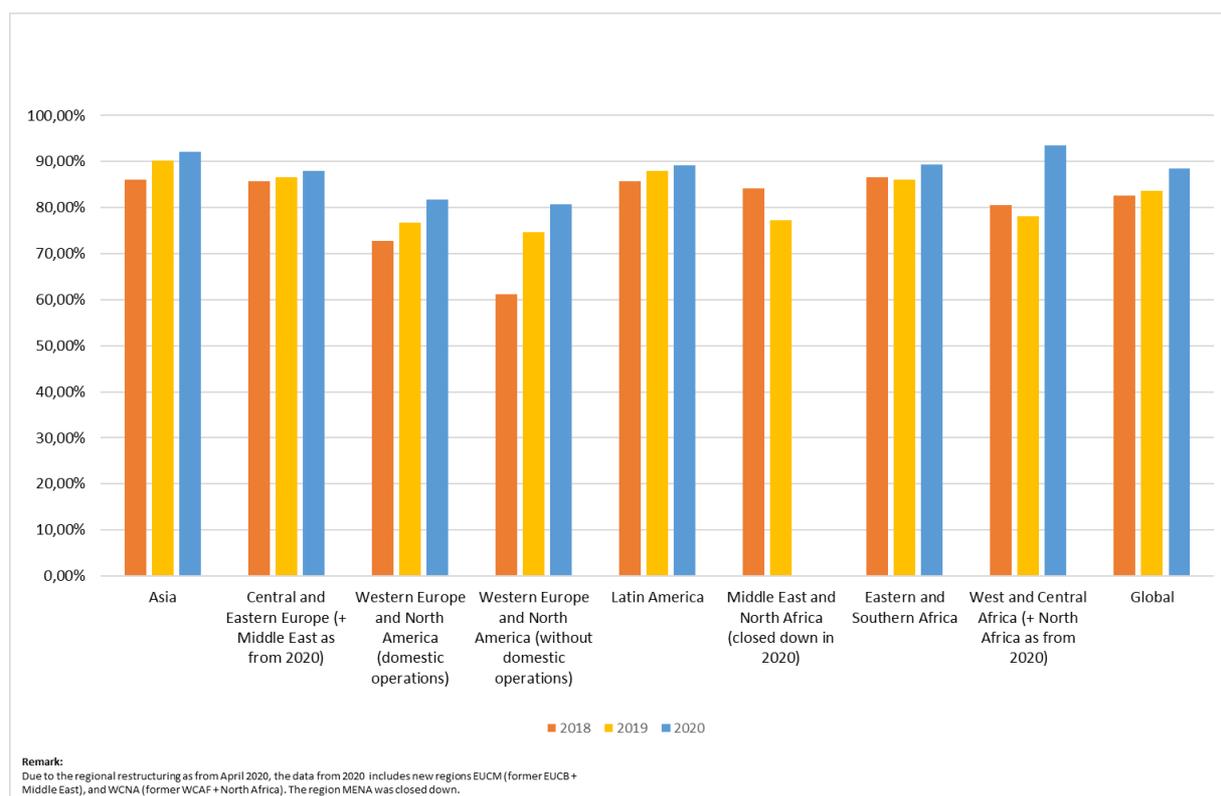
As seen in chart 1, in 2020 the global compliance rate with the minimum child safeguarding requirements was reported at 88.56%. This was a notable increase from the global compliance rate of 83.57% in 2019. Thirteen member associations reported full compliance: Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kyrgyzstan, Alsace (France), Germany,²² Canada, El Salvador, Gambia, and Morocco.²³

Chart 1: Child safeguarding compliance of member associations by region (2018 – 2020)

²¹ In addition, four member associations that are registered as members of the federation but are not active did not respond to the survey (Australia, FR Aide Vietnam, Gulf Area, and UK Hong Kong), as well as three partner organizations which are supported by the federation but are not full members (Shreyas Balgram, TCV Dharamsala, and Tibetan Homes Foundation).

²² SOS Kinderdorf e.V.

²³ In 2018, five member associations reported full compliance. In 2019, eleven member associations reported full compliance.



The data from 2020 shows an increase in the overall compliance with the minimum child safeguarding requirements in all regions and globally. Additionally, there has been positive progress in Western Europe and North America, where the overall compliance among member associations without domestic operations increased from approximately 75% in 2019 to more than 80% in 2020. The region of West, Central and North Africa also reported significant positive progress, with an increase in the overall compliance from approximately 78% in 2019 to more than 93% in 2020.²⁴

Among the five focus areas of the annual child safeguarding survey, the highest global compliance was observed in the focus area of *implementing* (92%), while challenges remain in the area of *planning* (82%). However, it is important to note the tremendous improvement in this area, with the compliance rate increasing by 10%, from 71% compliance in 2019 to 82% compliance in 2020.

It is important to keep in mind that the results of the annual child safeguarding survey are outcomes of a self-assessment, and may thus include a bias. To complement data collected through the annual safeguarding survey, it is important that independent child safeguarding audits are conducted regularly.

6 Child safeguarding incidents

A child safeguarding incident is a situation when a child is harmed as a result of action (or lack of action) by staff, other children, associates or operations. A child safeguarding incident may involve multiple perpetrators and/or multiple victims. It may relate to one or several forms of violence against children:

- **Emotional abuse** may involve behaviour, speech and actions such as bullying, intimidating, threatening, taunting, ridiculing, degrading, humiliating or creating a hostile or fearful environment that has a negative impact on a child's self-perception and development.
- **Neglect or negligent treatment** may involve inattention or omission to provide adequate supervision, nutrition, clothing or shelter, or to meet a child's health, education and safety needs.
- **Physical abuse** may involve hitting, shaking, biting, hair or ear pulling, acts of corporal punishment or other actions that cause physical harm. Corporal punishment is not outlawed in some countries, but it is specifically forbidden in the SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy.
- **Sexual harassment, coercion, exploitation and abuse** includes sexual assault or rape, sexualized touching or exposure, pressuring, forcing or coercing a child to take part in sexual

²⁴ In 2020, North African member associations joined the West and Central Africa region, and member associations from the Middle East joined the CEE/CIS region.

acts, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, sexualized remarks about clothes and appearances, name-calling, or use of inappropriate sexual language.

- **Violation of right to privacy** – sharing children’s personal information about their life or their history, producing or publishing photos or videos of or about them, or revealing their identity without consent, authorisation or a need to know.

Children and young people who enter alternative care or who live in other vulnerable circumstances often have gone through trauma and adversity that involve boundary violations. Boundary violations happen when an individual behaves in a way that violates or compromises a child’s sense of safety, dignity or privacy. Boundary violations cover a broad range of possible interactions, particularly between a child or young person and a care practitioner or between children or young people, and can occur in many different contexts. To ensure quality care and serve the best interest of each child, in 2020 SOS Children’s Villages introduced a guide to distinguish between less and more serious boundary violations and to help identify the most appropriate response to them.²⁵

The categories of *inappropriate* and *abusive* behaviour for adult-to-child incidents and *problematic* and *abusive* behaviour for child-to-child incidents were thus introduced in incident management.

Adult-to-child incidents

Staff members’ actions or interactions are considered to be **inappropriate behaviour** if they are not as expected or in line with the scope of practice, work plan or job description. Inappropriate behaviour could refer to a situation when a child and youth care practitioner responds to a challenging situation or to a young person’s behaviour emotionally, for example with anger, or with an inappropriate punishment, rule or demand. Another example could be an isolated, one-time incident in an otherwise stable care relationship of pushing or pulling a child or issuing a minor threat. The underlying interactions between care practitioners and children may include a range of minor and major boundary violations. Inappropriate behaviours are potentially harmful. The organizational response to inappropriate behaviour incidents may be to assess and address the care practitioners’ training and support needs, qualifications or working conditions to change behaviours and to prevent escalation and harm.

Staff members’ actions or interactions are classified as **abusive behaviour** if they represent major boundary violations or repeated minor boundary violations and are harmful and abusive as per the Child Protection Policy definitions of physical, sexual, emotional abuse, negligent behaviour or exploitation. The underlying interactions between care practitioners and children may include major boundary violations as well as inappropriate behaviours that are no longer a one-time occurrence but continue despite interventions. The organizational response to an abusive behaviour incident is to follow any mandatory reporting to relevant authorities as required by law, and if national law allows, to initiate an internal investigation that is carried out by qualified child safeguarding investigators and in accordance with the child safeguarding policy framework. If the misconduct is substantiated, the organization carries out a disciplinary hearing that determines appropriate action ranging from training to termination. Throughout the process, the best interest of the child and adequate support are the primary guiding considerations.

Child-to-child incidents

The actions or interactions of a child or young person are considered to be **problematic behaviour** when they require care practitioners’ intervention to stop the behaviour and ensure everyone’s needs for safety, dignity and privacy are addressed. Problematic behaviour may be self-focused and may therefore only create risk for the child engaging in the behaviour, for example self-harm, cutting or compulsive masturbation. Problematic behaviour may also be interpersonal in that it creates risks for others as well. While problematic behaviour may at times involve an intention to do harm, for example a physical fight during an anger outburst, it is usually *single events* where there is *no power imbalance or intention to do harm*. It may involve isolated acts of aggressive behaviour, intimidation, fighting, hitting, pushing or damaging other children’s belongings.

The actions or interactions of a child or young person are classified as **abusive behaviour** when they are harmful and abusive and so require additional professional support. Abusive behaviour includes an intention to cause harm and is characterized by a *power imbalance* where the actions are initiated by a more dominant child (for example, an older, bigger, stronger or more experienced child or one that has greater intellectual capacity or better social skills) towards a more vulnerable child. The child or young person initiating abusive behaviour may not always fully understand or recognize the harmful nature of

²⁵ [Differentiating between Adult-to-Child Expected, Inappropriate and Abusive Behaviours: How-to Guide](#) and [Differentiating between Child-to-Child Normal, Problematic and Abusive Behaviours: How-to Guide](#) (internal only).

their behaviour. An incident of abusive behaviour may involve *intentional* and/or *repetitive* acts of aggression or intimidation, bullying, fighting, hitting, pushing or damaging another child's belongings.

The physical and emotional safety of all children or young people involved, whether they initiated or were targeted by problematic or abusive behaviour, must be the primary consideration of every response. Responses include intervening and immediately stopping the behaviour, addressing safety concerns, providing medical attention and psychosocial support, ensuring that affected and involved children participate in finding solutions, and providing adequate care and support to all affected and involved children throughout and beyond the process. Depending on the nature of the incident and applicable law, mandatory reporting to relevant authorities may be required. Incidents where boundary violations occurred must follow the reporting and responding procedures outlined in the child safeguarding policy framework.

6.1 Child safeguarding incidents analysis

This incident analysis provides an overview of confirmed incidents of abusive staff-to-child behaviour and incidents of abusive child-to-child behaviour. The analysis does *not* include inappropriate (adult-to-child) or problematic (child-to-child) incidents, or allegations that were not later confirmed. It is important to note that a significant change to the methodology for collecting information on reported and later confirmed child safeguarding incidents was introduced at the beginning of 2020.

In the past, the annual child safeguarding survey included a category of critical incidents, which were incidents of a criminal nature or incidents where the organization took disciplinary measures against a perpetrator. However, analysis of the incident data in the past years showed that the category of critical incidents did not provide a complete overview of serious cases of child abuse. This applied in particular to child-to-child incidents where many incidents are not of a criminal nature, for example due to the age of the young person who initiated the abuse. The new categories of incidents of inappropriate, problematic and abusive behaviour, as defined above, were therefore introduced at the beginning of 2020. The survey data presented in this analysis includes the new categories for the first time.

Due to the change in the methodology, it is very difficult to compare the data on reported and later confirmed child safeguarding incidents in the past years and in 2020. Therefore, any inter-annual comparison needs to be made with caution. To provide at least a basic comparison, the report includes a comparison of the overall number of reported child safeguarding incidents.

We also need to consider the COVID-19 pandemic as another element that influenced the number of child safeguarding incidents that were reported and later confirmed in 2020. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is difficult to estimate and varies across the regions. It is assumed that the consequences of the pandemic, such as social isolation during lockdowns, led to an increase in the prevalence of interpersonal violence, both adult-to-child and child-to-child.

As part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many member associations paid even more attention to child safeguarding, in terms of both prevention and incident management. It is likely that this further contributed to the overall number of reported and later confirmed incidents.

In 2020, a total of 2,747 child safeguarding incidents of inappropriate, problematic and abusive behaviour were **reported** in SOS Children's Villages programmes. Of those, 1,158 were reported adult-to-child incidents,²⁶ and 1,589 were reported child-to-child incidents.²⁷ The total represented a global increase of nearly 10% compared to 2019, with significant regional variance. It should be noted that our experience – as well as the experience of other child care organizations – shows that there is a risk of under-reporting.

In 2020, a total of 1,311 child safeguarding incidents of abusive behaviours were **confirmed** in SOS Children's Villages programmes. Of those, 590 were **confirmed** adult-to-child incidents, and 721 were **confirmed** child-to-child incidents. Confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours involved 1,862 children

²⁶ Of these 1,158 **reported** adult-to-child incidents, 419 were incidents of inappropriate behaviour and 739 were incidents of abusive behaviour.

²⁷ Of these 1589 **reported** child-to-child incidents, 772 were incidents of problematic behaviour and 817 were incidents of abusive behaviour.

and young people in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages, which is approximately 3% of the total number of children and young people in SOS Children's Villages alternative care programmes.²⁸

6.1.1 Staff-to-child incidents of abusive behaviour

In 2020, a total of 464 staff members, 1.2% of the SOS Children's Villages staff worldwide, were reported and later confirmed as perpetrators of incidents of abusive behaviour, including emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual coercion and abuse, neglect and negligent treatment, and violation of privacy.²⁹

As table 1 illustrates, approximately half of these incidents were physical abuse, which mostly involved acts of corporal punishment by child and youth care practitioners. The next largest group were incidents of neglect and negligent treatment, which mostly involved acts of failing to provide adequate supervision, nutrition, clothing or meeting a child's education and safety needs. This was followed by emotional abuse, which mostly involved behaviour, speech and actions that had a negative impact on a child's emotional state and development. Sexual coercion and abuse by staff accounted for approximately 4% of the reported and later confirmed incidents in 2020. Finally, there were two staff involved in incidents of abusive behaviours where a child's privacy was violated.

Table 1: Number of staff perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours

Type of abuse	No. of perpetrators				
	SOS parents, family assistants	Youth care staff	Other staff	Total	% of total
Physical abuse	174	31	26	231	50%
Sexual coercion and abuse	9	1	9	19	4%
Emotional abuse	90	5	8	103	22%
Neglect and negligent treatment	88	10	11	109	24%
Violation of privacy	1	0	1	2	<1%
Total	362	47	55	464	100%
GRAND TOTAL	464				

Table 1 illustrates that out of the 464 staff involved as perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours, 78%, or 362 perpetrators, were SOS parents and family assistants. The most common form of abuse committed by SOS parents was physical abuse (48%, or 174 perpetrators), followed by emotional abuse (25%, or 90 perpetrators), neglect and negligent treatment (24%, or 88 perpetrators), and sexual coercion and abuse (2.5%, or 9 perpetrators).

In 2020, 47 youth care staff members were perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours. In comparison with SOS parents, we can see a significantly higher ratio of incidents of physical abuse (66%, or 31 perpetrators) in the category "youth care staff".

The category "other staff" includes individuals working in administrative, maintenance, security and other support functions, as well as staff at SOS Children's Villages schools and medical centres. In 2020, 55 of these staff members were involved as perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours.

A total of 121 staff members were dismissed as a result of being confirmed as perpetrators of abusive behaviour. As a direct consequence of the situation in some countries with weak child protection legislation, the number of dismissed staff was higher by approximately 50% than the number of staff reported to law enforcement authorities for all types of abuse. A total of 436 individual staff members were involved in abusive behaviour incidents towards children. However, as some staff members were

²⁸ As of 31 December 2020, there were 65,500 children and young people in various alternative care programmes/services of SOS Children's Villages.

²⁹ As of 31 December 2020, 39,600 programme staff members were employed in SOS Children's Villages (average full-time equivalents).

involved in multiple incidents and some incidents involved more than one perpetrator, we recorded a total of 464 staff perpetrators.

Table 2: Number of staff perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours according to programme setting

Programme setting	No. of perpetrators				
	SOS parents, family assistants	Youth care staff	Other staff	Total	% of total
SOS families or other alternative care settings	362	3	34	399	86%
Youth programmes	0	43	5	48	10.3%
Family strengthening	0	0	1	1	<1%
Education	0	1	13	14	3%
Health	0	0	2	2	<1%
Emergency response	0	0	0	0	0%
Total	362	47	55	464	100%
GRAND TOTAL	464				

As Table 2 illustrates, disaggregating the total number of incidents of abusive behaviours involving staff as perpetrators by programme setting shows that the majority of reported and confirmed incidents in 2020 occurred in alternative care settings.³⁰ Alternative care programmes in general carry a higher child safeguarding risk profile, so we devote significant resources to ensuring that abuse is detected and reported. Furthermore, in those alternative care environments, we have a higher degree of certainty that incidents will be detected and reported. In contrast, in family strengthening or emergency response programmes, we have fewer means at our disposal to ensure that incidents are detected and reported. We believe that there is significant under-reporting in family strengthening, education, health, emergency response and youth programmes.

Table 3: Number of children abused by staff in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour³¹

Type of perpetrator / Type of abuse	SOS parents, family assistants	Youth care staff	Other staff	Total	% of total
Physical abuse	260	26	50	336	37%
Sexual coercion and abuse	12	1	14	27	3%
Emotional abuse	164	8	8	180	20%
Neglect and negligent treatment	211	28	130	369	40%
Violation of privacy	1	0	1	2	<1%
Total	648	63	203	914	100%
GRAND TOTAL	914				

SOS Children's Villages reaches a total of 1,178,200 people through all its programmes. In 2020, a total of 914 children were exposed to abusive behaviour by staff.³² Table 3 illustrates a notable shift in the number of staff perpetrators compared to the number of children and young people abused by these

³⁰ Alternative care activities in general carry a higher child safeguarding risk profile. Alternative care makes up more than half of SOS Children's Villages overall programme activities and receives 64% of the available funding.

³¹ This includes 893 children in direct SOS Children's Villages care and 21 children not in direct SOS Children's Villages care. The staff falling into the category "other staff" abused all these 21 children who are not in direct SOS Children's Villages care.

³² A total of 65,500 children and young people were in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages in 2020, and a total of 347,000 children and adults were supported by SOS Children's Villages family strengthening programmes in 2020.

staff members. While half (50%) of the staff perpetrators were involved in incidents of physical abuse (see table 1), for the child and youth victims abused by staff the rate of physical abuse dropped to approximately a third (37%). Another category where we can see equally notable but opposite difference is neglect and negligent treatment. Approximately a quarter (24%) of the staff perpetrators were involved in incidents of neglect and negligent treatment (see table 1), whereas in the case of child and youth victims the rate increases to 40%. Statistically, incidents of neglect and negligent treatment involved approximately 3.4 children per staff perpetrator, while in cases of physical abuse the number decreases to 1.45 children per staff perpetrator.

As explained above, incidents of physical abuse are mainly related to different forms of physical punishment. Neglect and negligent treatment can be mainly interpreted as incidents where children and young people were left unsupervised or where their health issues did not receive the necessary attention from their SOS parents and family assistants.

SOS parents and family assistants were confirmed to have sexually coerced and abused 12 children. "Other staff", which includes drivers or maintenance staff, were confirmed to have coerced and abused 14 children.

Comparing the numbers of children affected by all types of abuse from perpetrators in these two categories (648 children by "SOS parents, family assistants" and 203 children by "other staff", such as drivers or maintenance staff) with the numbers of children who were sexually coerced and abused by these two perpetrator categories allows for an important observation. Sexual coercion and abuse represent a substantially larger percentage of all types of abuses that *other staff* exposed children to, namely 6.9% (or 14 of 203 children), than of all types of abuses that *SOS parents and family assistants* exposed children to, namely 1.8% (or 12 of 648 children). In other words, the relative prevalence of sexual coercion and abuse incidents is more than triple within the "other staff" perpetrator category compared to that among SOS parents and family assistants. This confirms just how important it is to pay strong attention to preventive measures such as thorough background checks and reference checks during the recruitment process, as well as trainings for *all staff*, including drivers and maintenance staff, and not only to those staff members who have direct and close contact with children as per their job description.

6.1.2 Sexual coercion and abuse involving staff as perpetrators

The following section provides more detail on one type of abusive behaviour by staff, namely sexual coercion and abuse. In 2020, 19 staff were reported and confirmed as perpetrators of child sexual coercion and abuse and 27 children were confirmed as victims in these incidents. As a direct consequence, 15 staff members were dismissed.³³ One staff member was no longer working for SOS Children's Villages when the incident became known, another staff member resigned immediately after an internal investigation was concluded, and a further staff member was suspended and the disciplinary process is currently underway. In another case, the staff member was transferred to a training centre for further capacity building after taking an inappropriate picture of a child in her care.

Fifteen of the allegations were defined as criminal acts in the respective countries. Of these, eight were reported to police or prosecuting authorities. The father/guardian of one victim requested SOS Children's Villages not to report the matter due to fear of media attention. In another case, the member association was not able to submit the incident complaint to the court due to the current political crisis in the country; as soon as the judicial authorities resume work, the complaint will be submitted to the court. In two further cases, the national legislation on childhood and adolescence requires means of verification or evidence that the facts occurred before a complaint can be made through legal channels. In three cases, the victims requested for the incident not to be reported to the authorities. This included an incident where the affected person was of legal age and requested the member association not to file a case against the perpetrator. In another incident, the affected person was also of legal age but was not ready to report the incident to the authorities, as she did not want it to become a matter of public knowledge. In the third incident, the affected person was below the legal age but refused to participate in the legal complaint.

Table 4 further breaks down the type of sexual coercion and abuse incidents involving staff perpetrators that were reported and confirmed in 2020.

³³ In addition, three staff members were dismissed due to their involvement in past incidents of sexual abuse that happened prior to 2020.

Table 4: The number of staff perpetrators and the number of child victims according to the type of sexual coercion and abuse

Type of sexual coercion and abuse incident	No. staff perpetrators	No. child victims
Indecent exposure	1	1
Recording of inappropriate and/or sexually degrading imagery of children / young people	1	1
Exposing children/youth to pornography	1	3
Attempted rape	0	0
Rape	0	0
Harassment / inappropriate touching	12	17
Child / young person manipulated and/or coerced into sexual acts ³⁴	4	5
Total	19	27

Some important learnings can be drawn from these incidents:

1. Child and youth care practitioners (SOS parents, family assistants, youth care staff) were the perpetrators in ten incidents.
2. There were nine staff members who worked in non-care services and were involved as perpetrators. They held social worker, teacher, security staff, maintenance or driver positions.
3. In total, ten men (two child and youth care practitioners, one social worker, three teachers, two security guards, one driver and one gardener), and nine women (eight child and youth care practitioners and one nursing assistant) were involved as perpetrators.

It must be noted that – as is the case with child safeguarding, corruption or other misconduct incidents in any organization, country or context – there is a risk of under-reporting. Under-reporting is a real problem in terms of sexual exploitation and abuse, as a result of various interrelated barriers ranging from victims' dependence on the abuser to fear of stigma and the social consequences should the abuse become known.³⁵

6.1.3 Child-to-child incidents of abusive behaviour

In 2020, a total of 741 children and young people in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages were confirmed to have displayed abusive behaviour towards other children or young people.

Table 5 illustrates that approximately 58% of these, or 429 children and young people, were involved in incidents of physical abuse, which mostly involved acts of fighting and bullying. It must also be noted that 201 children and young people in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages programmes displayed abusive behaviours in incidents of sexual coercion and abuse.

Table 5: Number of children and young people who displayed abusive behaviour in 2020 (confirmed incidents)

Type of abuse	Children and young people in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages who initiated abusive behaviours	% of total
Physical abuse	429	58%
Sexual coercion and abuse	201	27%

³⁴ Sexual coercion is the use of verbal or physical means (including administering drugs or alcohol, either with or without consent) to obtain sexual activity without freely given consent. This includes wearing down an individual with repeated requests or persuasion through psychological/emotional pressure. Sexual coercion includes sexual grooming, which is the process of establishing a relationship with a child or a young person over a period of time with the objective of sexual abuse at a later stage (SOS Children's Villages Sexual Misconduct Regulation: Prevention and Protection against Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse, 2020).

³⁵ International Development Committee. (2018). Sexual abuse and exploitation in the aid sector. 33.

Emotional abuse	108	15%
Violation of privacy	3	<1%
Total	741	100%

In 2020, a total of 831 children and young people were confirmed to have been affected by abuse from other children and young people who were in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages. Of the 831 children and young people, a large majority, 794 children and young people, were in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages themselves. The remaining 37 children and young people affected by this type of child-to-child abuse were not in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

The years 2020 and 2021 have been important for the SOS Children's Villages child safeguarding journey. We concluded the Independent Child Safeguarding Review, and our federation was confronted with cases of serious safeguarding failings. Following a lot of learning, reflection and discussion, 2021 also stands out as a defining year in stepping up our collective efforts around the common goal to ensure a safe environment for every child. The tireless work of staff to strengthen child safeguarding throughout the federation must be acknowledged, particularly the work of child safeguarding focal persons in member associations and the General Secretariat.

How the Child Protection Policy, child safeguarding standards and related procedures are implemented (i.e. what methodologies, messages, etc. are used) may vary according to local context and circumstances. However, it is paramount that the policy, standards and procedures are implemented *everywhere and to an equal and full extent*. Children everywhere have the same rights, requiring the organization to provide the same standards of quality care, protection and safety everywhere it operates.

In this context, we call upon the federation's legal bodies, member associations, functions, teams, leaders, decision makers, staff and associates to:

- 1) **Protect and invest in the integrity of our federation-wide approach to child safeguarding.** A federation-wide approach to child safeguarding is the best chance we have to make sure that the same standards are applied to assess every allegation brought forward and that every child who is affected by abuse effectively receives the needed level of support. A child safeguarding incident that occurs in one country potentially has implications for the whole federation. Any unilateral or bilateral action by member associations that takes place outside of our child safeguarding approach risks undermining oversight and accountability for member associations and legal bodies of the federation. For example, every member association must be able to meet its reporting requirements to national authorities and must be able to adequately follow up on investigations to support to individual abuse victims or survivors. Similarly, the General Secretariat has to make sure that reporting obligations to third parties such as institutional funding partners are not violated, and that it is involved in the monitoring or the management of incidents when this is necessary.
- 2) Take responsibility by contributing to fully implementing the 24-point Safeguarding Action Plan by 2024 and promoting regional and national strategies to achieve this.. In doing so:
 - **Focus on persons affected by abuse.** Make sure all individuals (past, present, future) receive the support they need as well as access to justice. Implement the ombudsperson approach across all parts of the federation to ensure an independent voice and appropriate response to all allegations and complaints.
 - **Focus on governance and accountability.** Fully support the work of the Independent Special Commission to ensure accountability in past and contemporary cases of child safeguarding and other failures. Invest in improved and accountable internal governance structures in member associations (national boards) and with SOS Children's Villages International (Senate).
 - **Focus on child and youth participation.** Introduce meaningful participation across all new safeguarding activities to ensure their effectiveness and to empower children and young people to be active agents of all aspects of their lives. This includes each programme putting a participation mechanism in place that gives children and young people a voice in safeguarding as per the Child Protection Policy.
 - **Focus on programme quality.** Implement the SOS Care Promise priorities and invest in actions to improve programme quality and prevention. This includes mental health services and development opportunities and working conditions for child and youth care practitioners, including adequate compensation packages and steps to address the reasons that lead to high turnover in some countries. These actions and responsibilities are anchored across relevant teams and functions.
 - **Focus on safeguarding capacity.** Ensure member associations, particularly those operating in countries with high child safeguarding risks, are supported to be able to strengthen their prevention of, response to, and reporting of incidents.
 - **Focus on safeguarding policy and procedure.** Update the Child Safeguarding Policy to make sure important learnings and developments are reflected on the policy level. Increase the effectiveness of reporting and responding mechanisms by aligning the procedures across the different safeguarding areas to improve protections for all.

- **Focus on safeguarding staffing.** Ensure adequate child safeguarding staff levels (at a minimum one focal person and team) at every programme location and member association as well as International Office Regions and the International Office. Pay careful consideration to their time resources, capacities and workload to effectively support implementation of the child safeguarding approach and the Safeguarding Action Plan.
- **Focus on a culture of safeguarding.** Close critical human resource gaps, including safe recruitment, disciplinary procedures for serious misconduct, and whistleblower protection, and introduce value-based conduct.

8 Glossary

General Secretariat – the international entity that is responsible for implementing strategic decisions taken by the SOS Children’s Villages General Assembly and the International Senate; developing and monitoring federation quality standards and representing the federation in international communications and forums. It consists of the International Office, based in Austria, and five regional offices.

Member association – an autonomous entity of the SOS Children’s Villages federation, usually operating on a national level. Such member associations deliver programmes in their respective country and raise money for their own operations. Member associations also include promoting and supporting associations.

Reporter, whistleblower – an individual who reports a child safeguarding concern through any channel.

9 Appendices

Appendix 1: Child safeguarding at SOS Children’s Villages – how we work

SOS Children’s Villages cares for and supports children and young people who have lost or are at risk of losing parental care. In all our programmes, we put significant effort into ensuring that children and young people in contact with the organization are safe and protected against any form of violence and abuse. In doing so, we work to have strong measures in place for child safeguarding and child protection in all member associations and at all levels of the organization. Our activities undertaken in both child safeguarding and child protection are crucial to providing safe care and support to our target group.

“CHILD SAFEGUARDING”

All activities SOS Children’s Villages undertakes to ensure the following:

- Staff, operations and programmes do no harm to children and do not expose them to the risk of harm and abuse.
- Appropriate response and effective management of child safeguarding concerns are in place.
- We report all concerns for children’s safety in our programmes and in the communities we work in to the appropriate authorities.

“CHILD PROTECTION”

All activities that individuals, organizations (including SOS Children’s Villages), countries, and communities undertake:

- To protect all children from the risk of harm in programmes, communities and other environments due to the situation they live in.
- To prevent and respond to maltreatment (abuse, neglect and exploitation) of all children, such as domestic violence, commercial and sexual exploitation, physical violence, child labour or trafficking.

It is essential that children in our programmes are safe and protected against any form of violence and abuse at all times. This obligation is reflected in commitment 4 of the SOS Care Promise:

We commit to create a safe environment for children in all our programmes at all times by implementing child safeguarding measures and procedures in line with our child protection policy, international standards and best practices.

We implement this through our policies, communication and coordination in our safeguarding and care networks, safeguarding risk management and oversight, reporting and responding measures, and prevention and awareness.



Policies

To guide and standardize our organization's safeguarding work, we follow several external and internal frameworks. The Child Safeguarding Standards by Keeping Children Safe is an external guideline that shapes our child safeguarding standards and policies. The central policies that guide our safeguarding work across the organization are the SOS Care Promise, the Child Protection Policy and the Code of Conduct. The Child Protection Policy is further accompanied by several policy support documents that detail our child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures, including investigation protocols. All these documents are binding for all member associations and the General Secretariat. All member associations are required to follow the relevant national and local law and the Child Protection Policy. If the national law is less strict than our internal Child Protection Policy, then the member associations need to comply with the Child Protection Policy, as it is in line with international law.

Communication and coordination through our child safeguarding networks

The role of the global and regional child safeguarding networks is to: coordinate, support and monitor the implementation of the Child Protection Policy and related policy support documents; develop guidance and tools; promote practice sharing and exchange between member associations and across regions; and to facilitate and coordinate relevant child safeguarding trainings for member associations.

Specific child safeguarding roles and responsibilities

Stakeholders across the federation have varying child safeguarding responsibilities. Board members, line managers and child safeguarding focal persons all have specific roles to help ensure minimum child safeguarding standards are adhered to across the federation.

- The board is the legal representative of the member association. Therefore, board members have specific oversight and legal responsibilities over their association and hold their management to account, including in matters of child safeguarding. The child safeguarding responsibilities of board members include: oversight over preventative child safeguarding actions in the member association and organizational response to reported child safeguarding incidents; compliance with applicable law (national or other) when it comes to reporting obligations to authorities (national or other); and managing possible conflicts of interest.
- Line managers are role models and drive child safeguarding processes and actions, both in preventative work and when responding to incidents. Child safeguarding responsibilities of line managers include ensuring compliance with existing child safeguarding procedures so that child safeguarding incidents are managed and followed up appropriately (at the programmatic, national, regional and/or international level); ensuring compliance with existing child safeguarding procedures; supervising the teams responding to and managing incidents and carrying out follow-up actions; and closely cooperating with the child safeguarding focal persons.

- Child safeguarding focal persons are present at national, regional and international level, overseeing that the Child Protection Policy and other minimum safeguarding requirements are implemented. Every member association is required to assign a child safeguarding focal person who is responsible for coordinating the implementation of child safeguarding activities, managing and assessing incidents, reporting to national authorities, setting up safeguarding investigations, and supporting other teams in monitoring and identifying child safeguarding gaps and appropriate responses.

Safeguarding risk management and oversight

As children and young people in our target group have often had difficult and traumatic experiences before coming into our care, we must be aware of the added risk factors as a consequence of these experiences. An additional and unfortunate consequence of these early experiences is that children in our target group are more vulnerable to experiencing further violence or abuse. In our safeguarding work, we identify and address these risk factors through prevention and support measures. We manage our child safeguarding risks through child safeguarding risk assessments and mitigation actions including awareness raising and prevention.

Reporting and responding measures

When child safeguarding incidents occur in our programmes, we manage and respond to these through clearly defined reporting and responding procedures. Every staff member has to report any child safeguarding suspicion, concern, allegation or incident immediately. These can be reported directly to the Child Care and Safeguarding Team at the International Office using the email address **childsafeguarding@sos-kd.org** or anonymously using the online reporting system found on our international website. Through these whistle-blowing mechanisms, we encourage and promote a safe and confidential reporting and responding environment in which individuals feel that they can speak out and raise concerns. Member associations are responsible for responding to child safeguarding incidents within the framework of the Child Protection Policy, their national laws, and relevant policy support documents. The organization has two policy support documents outlining the binding reporting and responding requirements for both member associations and the General Secretariat.

The Child Care and Safeguarding Team at the International Office, the global and regional care networks and child safeguarding networks, and other teams in the General Secretariat work closely together to strengthen member associations in their efforts to manage child safeguarding risks and incidents when they occur. We develop guiding documents and tools; promote exchange, practice sharing and learning; facilitate trainings through the global and regional networks; and ensure that SOS Children's Villages complies with and develops its child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures. We also provide technical support and guidance to departments and teams in the General Secretariat so they can manage and mitigate the child safeguarding risks in their work.

Investigations

A child safeguarding investigation is commissioned to look into a reported concern or incident and to determine whether the reported allegation is substantiated. Based on the findings of the investigation, further actions can be taken to mitigate existing risks and to avoid any further harm to the children in our programmes. The SOS Children's Villages child safeguarding investigations policy support document provides guidance for all member associations. In line with our policy and procedures, all reported incidents of a criminal nature are forwarded to the relevant statutory authorities for their follow-up. In some cases authorities are not willing or able to conduct the investigation, and in these situations SOS Children's Villages must step in to fill the gap. There are also incidents which are not of a criminal nature, but they still represent a breach of the organizational child safeguarding policies. For example, an incident of corporal punishment is a breach of our safeguarding policies, but in some countries it is not categorized as a criminal act. In such situations, depending on the outcomes of the initial assessment, it may be necessary to launch an internal investigation to find out what really happened and determine appropriate remediation actions. For this reason, it is important to build and continuously improve organizational capacities on child safeguarding investigations.

Appendix 2: 24-point Safeguarding Action Plan

The 24 actions have been categorized according to six different learning areas, which reflect the organization's ongoing commitment to the children and young people we support, as well as to care practitioners and other staff; the plan is not just about policies and systems.

Learning areas and actions

Learning area A

Holistic support, justice and incident management

1. **Immediate support for children and others that have experienced abuse** - to ensure those affected are supported towards healing, reconciliation, and becoming self-reliant
2. **Ombudsperson system** - to represent the rights of children, young people and others affected by abuse
3. **Incident management for persons that have experienced abuse** - consistently implemented across the entire federation

Learning area B

Participation of children and young people in shaping safeguarding measures and understanding their rights

4. **Child and youth empowerment** - to ensure children and young people are involved in decisions regarding their care, prevent peer-to-peer violence and abuse, and give them a stronger voice in safeguarding
5. **Youth development and participation** - to ensure that young people are empowered to participate in decisions affecting their care and development, and are supported in the leaving care process

Learning area C

Child and youth care practitioner working conditions, role, well-being, learning and development

6. **Working conditions for child and youth care practitioners** - to improve the working conditions and strengthen the learning and development of child and youth care practitioners
7. **Research on gender equality** - to improve understanding of attitudes and beliefs around gender and women's rights, experiences of discrimination, differentials in pay and conditions, and gender balance in leadership
8. **Learning and development for child and youth care practitioners** - to provide opportunities for individual, face-to-face and digital training

Learning area D

People, culture and human resources practices for safeguarding

9. **Federation culture development** - to build a safeguarding environment through practical, targeted initiatives
10. **Code of Conduct and values-based conduct** - to ensure the mandatory global code is fully embedded across the federation; it will address bullying, power imbalances, and gender disparities
11. **Human resources competency framework** - to demonstrate how staff can live our organizational values in their day-to-day work and how the organization can integrate them into the recruitment, the performance management, and staff development
12. **Review of all human resources policies** - to ensure safeguarding is reflected and mandatory
13. **Safe recruitment regulation** - to ensure consistent and mandatory steps are taken in the recruitment process
14. **Strategy for safeguarding capacity building** - to ensure we have the right learning and development systems to support all our people, including child and youth care practitioners, support staff, managers and leaders
15. **New global human resources policy with binding standards** - an umbrella policy to ensure clarity and consistency across the entire federation

16. **Implementation of the Sexual Misconduct Regulation** - to promote awareness, and to implement prevention activities and reporting and responding processes for sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse of children, young people, staff and adults

Learning area E

Oversight, leadership, governance and accountability for safeguarding

17. **Independent Special Commission** - to take up past and contemporary cases of failings, including child abuse, corruption, and breaches of regulations
18. **Alignment of integrity, compliance and safeguarding**- to ensure our processes and procedures are working together effectively, including improved and integrated reporting and responding procedures
19. **Child safeguarding policy update** - to ensure ICSR recommendations and current best practice is reflected
20. **High-risk country support** - to provide extra financial and management support to 25 member associations with a high-risk profile
21. **Early warning system** - to ensure safeguarding risks are monitored and escalated appropriately
22. **Safeguarding resources in institutional donor projects** - to ensure appropriate resources are in budgets

Learning area F

Investment for high quality programmes across the federation

23. **Increased investment in more than 70 programmes to fix quality gaps** - including monitoring, ensuring the necessary financial investment is made to improve quality in 70-100 programme locations
24. **Increased support for member associations to implement the SOS Care Promise** - including regular self-assessment and continuous improvement in areas such as programme admission standards and mental health support for programme participants

Appendix 3: Internal policy frameworks and guidance documents

Child safeguarding policy frameworks	
SOS Care Promise	Policy that articulates both what we do and how we do it through the principles and values that are the foundation of our work, the care solutions through which we implement our mission, and the commitments to quality care. Child safeguarding is addressed in commitment 4: <i>"We create a safe environment for children in all our programmes."</i>
Child Protection Policy	Informs all child protection and child safeguarding work carried out at SOS Children's Villages, focusing on four key principles: awareness, prevention, reporting and responding.

Code of Conduct	Outlines the organization's expectations and standards regarding staff management and defines appropriate and expected standards of behaviour for every SOS Children's Villages employee.
Child Safeguarding Reporting and Responding Procedures in Member Associations	Outlines step by step what should be done when a reported concern is received.
Roles and Responsibilities of the GSC in the Reporting and Responding Process	Outlines step by step what should be done when a reported concern is received in incidents in which the General Secretariat gets involved. The document also includes references to the child safeguarding local mapping, risk assessment and child safeguarding audits. These specific processes are described in separate guiding documents.
SOS Children's Villages Child Safeguarding Investigations	Outlines minimum requirements, guidelines and procedures for a child safeguarding investigation and the investigation team.
How-to guide on conducting safeguarding investigations	Describes the necessary steps to complete each phase of the investigation process.
How-to guide on conducting virtual investigative interviews	Guidance structured in the form of questions and answers regarding virtual investigations and virtual investigative interviews.
Listening and Responding to Individuals Experiences of Past Child Abuse	Guidance on how to deal with and appropriately respond to allegations of past abuse. Outlines what should be done when an allegation of past abuse is reported and describes the steps to provide individualized and holistic support.

This report has been produced by the Child Care and Safeguarding team at SOS Children's Villages International. For any queries, please contact us at childsafeguarding@sos-kd.org.