



Child Safeguarding Annual Report 2021/22

Global Child
Safeguarding Network



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES

Child safeguarding:

In everything we do, we work towards an environment where children and young people are safe, they are treated with dignity, and their rights are respected.

Child safeguarding is what we do so that children and young people are not harmed or exposed to any risk of harm by any person or through our operations or programmes.

SOS Children's Villages:

We are a federation of independent member associations, operating under one legal framework of policies and procedures that are adopted by the federation's governing bodies.

The work of SOS Children's Villages is focused on ensuring that children and young people grow up with the care, relationships and support they need to become their strongest selves.

The Global Child Safeguarding Network:

Child safeguarding staff from the international and regional offices of SOS Children's Villages International. Together with our colleagues in member associations, we focus on increasing child safeguarding awareness, preventing harm and strengthening reporting and responding capabilities.

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Executive summary

The Child Safeguarding Annual Report 2021/22 provides an overview of child safeguarding work in SOS Children's Villages from September 2021 through August 2022.¹ The report informs decision-making on key child safeguarding areas within the SOS Children's Villages federation. It also serves to provide learnings to the child protection sector and other child-focused organizations looking to strengthen safeguarding.

This is the fifth annual child safeguarding report to be published on our [international website](#). We make this information available as a matter of transparency and accountability towards our programme participants, donors, staff, strategic partners, other civil society organizations and the public at large.

For a detailed discussion of specific initiatives under our Safeguarding Action Plan, see our progress reports, also available on our [international website](#). Other relevant information on child safeguarding can be found on the [Safeguarding Info Hub](#).

The report and its recommendations have been developed by the Global Child Safeguarding Network, which is comprised of child safeguarding experts in the General Secretariat working at the international and regional level.

The recommendations are based on the yearly analysis of incident data and member association compliance, along with learnings from initiatives currently under way as part of the Safeguarding Action Plan and other promising practices. A brief overview of all recommendations is available at the end of this executive summary, and a detailed version is available in the last chapter of the full report.

Since the conclusion of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review, in April 2021, SOS Children's Villages has been intently working to improve its child safeguarding. Governing bodies and senior leadership have prioritized and re-committed to this essential work.

Our projects to strengthen child safeguarding in recent years have yielded very promising results. We now need to build on these achievements and increase the scale and speed at which they are implemented globally. To do so, some of activities currently carried out through projects need to become part of the core activities. This requires responsive budgeting mechanisms that will help allocate sustainable funding and match the challenges member associations may be facing in meeting minimum child safeguarding requirements, such as applying a risk management approach in their ongoing work and having appropriate staffing levels in place. Similarly, efforts to improve awareness, prevention and monitoring must be extended equally to all types of programming. This calls for additional investment into safeguarding in youth care, education, health, emergency response and family strengthening programmes.

There is great momentum now to improve our child safeguarding practices. Considerable work has been done, but considerable work lies ahead of us. At all levels, SOS Children's Villages must maintain focus and continue to prioritize child safeguarding in order to fully mainstream and securely embed better policies and practices across all functional areas.

Incident analysis

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

The numbers of child safeguarding incidents serve as an important measure of whether child safeguarding policies and procedures are being implemented. Tracking these numbers helps flag gaps and risks. For example, low numbers of reported incidents may be a sign of under-reporting. While interpreting incident data, it is important to understand that the number of reported incidents in and of itself is not a reliable

¹ Please note that incident figures are from January to December 2021.

indicator of how well the child safeguarding system is functioning. The numbers must be always considered in combination with qualitative data.

In 2021, a total of 2,643 child safeguarding incidents were reported in SOS Children's Villages. This includes:

- 1,147 reported adult-to-child incidents (11 fewer than in 2020)
- 1,496 reported peer-on-peer incidents (93 fewer than in 2020)

As context, in 2021 we provided alternative care for 68,000 children and young people, and supported 455,400 children, young people and adults in family strengthening programmes.

For the past two years, child safeguarding incidents have been differentiated according to their severity as inappropriate behaviour, problematic behaviour and abusive behaviour.²

Of the 1,504 incidents that were registered as abusive behaviour incidents, 1,230 were confirmed. This includes:

- 628 confirmed adult-to-child incidents of abusive behaviour
- 602 confirmed peer-on-peer incidents of abusive behaviour

These confirmed abusive behaviour incidents impacted 2,566 children and young people. This number does not include inappropriate or problematic behaviour incidents.

- 1,152 children and young people were targeted by an adult-to-child incident of abusive behaviour
- 701 children and young people were targeted by a peer-on-peer incident of abusive behaviour
- 713 children and young people initiated peer-on-peer abusive behaviour against other children or young people

It is important to note that our duty of care obligation extends equally to all children and young people in our care. SOS Children's Villages has the obligation to respond appropriately and provide adequate remediation and care not only to children and young people who were targeted by abuse, but also to children and young people who initiated abuse.

In the confirmed adult-to-child incidents where staff members initiated the abusive behaviour, 422 children and young people were affected by neglect or negligent treatment; 303 by physical abuse; 216 by emotional abuse; and 16 by sexual coercion and abuse.

In the incidents of sexual coercion and abuse that affected 16 children and young people, 13 staff were confirmed as perpetrators. Of those, 10 staff members were dismissed, 2 resigned before they could be dismissed, and a further staff member was suspended and the disciplinary process is currently under way.

Finally, 39 member associations reported no or almost no reported incidents (5 or less) in any category, i.e. incidents of inappropriate behaviour, problematic behaviour and abusive behaviour. This may be an indication of under-reporting, requiring action to strengthen available reporting channels and improve data accuracy.

Compliance with child safeguarding requirements

Global child safeguarding compliance levels continued to gradually increase in 2021, with the highest child safeguarding compliance levels reported in the area of implementing measures (92%) and the lowest in the area of planning (86%). There were significant regional differences.

Increased compliance numbers can, in many cases, be attributed to member associations improving their structures and taking action to better meet minimum requirements. On the other hand, the high reported compliance numbers should be approached with caution due to several factors. As the data is based on self-reporting, data quality can be affected by undervaluation as well as overvaluation as a result of misunderstandings, mistakes, or in some cases failures in reporting channels or stigma against reporting child safeguarding concerns.

² For more information on the distinctions between these different types of behaviour, see page 12.

The General Secretariat must support member associations to continuously improve annual survey data quality and take action to meet minimum requirements in child safeguarding.

A snapshot of some of the data collected in the annual survey shows us:

- A large majority of member associations (92%) reported that their annual plans include specific child safeguarding measures with detailed timelines and responsibilities.
- Slightly less than two-thirds of member associations (63%) reported that the inputs from children and young people are taken into account in annual planning. 28% of associations meet this requirement only to some extent, while eight member associations reported that they don't consider children and young people's inputs at all.
- 75% of all member associations reported that they carry out child safeguarding risk assessments on a regular basis and use the outcomes as input for the annual planning process.
- 80% of member associations indicated that they conduct a legal and stakeholder mapping.
- All but three associations reported having a national child safeguarding focal person in place and all but five associations reported that there are child safeguarding teams at programme locations.
- 77% of associations monitor their child safeguarding progress including the response to reported incidents. 28 associations reported that this monitoring requirement is only partially met; two associations reported that they do not meet it at all and one association reported that it is not applicable to them.

Further information contextualizing this data is included in the chapter on compliance with child safeguarding requirements in member associations.

Project updates

The federation has continued international projects and initiatives under the Safeguarding Action Plan. These include:

- **Child safeguarding policy framework** – in 2022 the General Secretariat developed incident management procedures that are consistent across child safeguarding, adult safeguarding and asset protection. It began the process of updating the Child Protection Policy.
- **Incident management** – the General Secretariat started the development of a Safeguarding Information Management System. This online system will collect and maintain information on safeguarding incidents across the whole federation.
- **Global ombuds system** – a global approach was developed and piloted in three countries. The Global Child Safeguarding Network cautions the federation to ensure the ombuds system works alongside the existing safeguarding procedures.
- **Independent Special Commission (ISC)** – we reported last year on the establishment of an independent special commission of experts who would assess allegations and concerns as well as the broader policy framework. The ISC's interim report issued in June 2022 provided valuable guidance for our work on strengthening the child safeguarding system.
- **Research on child and youth participation in safeguarding** – internal research we conducted showed that a strong majority of the children who participated in the research feel safe and tell someone if they are hurt. However, it also suggests children and young people's knowledge and confidence in safeguarding and children's rights needs to increase. The findings are providing the basis for participatory action planning with children, young people and staff members for implementation in 2023.
- **Immediate support for those who have experienced abuse in the past** – this project enables member associations who need additional funding to provide immediate support to individuals who experienced abuse, whether in an SOS Children's Villages programme or prior to entering our care. As of August 2022, the project encompassed support for 545 individuals in 16 countries.
- **Preventing and responding to peer violence** – we continued the Applying Safe Behaviours programme, part-funded by the European Union, which delivers training and workshops to equip children and young people with the understanding, tools, and practical strategies to prevent and speak out about peer violence.

- **Strengthening child safeguarding in high-risk environments** – the General Secretariat has supported 25 member associations, focusing on assessing specific child safeguarding risks in consultation with different groups of staff, children and young people, and external experts, and putting targeted risk mitigating measures in place to increase preventive activities and strengthen incident management.

Other projects and promising practices

Our programme and child safeguarding teams in member associations around the world continue to strengthen safeguarding through activities such as the following:

- **ConectadaSOS** – a campaign to promote the importance of safe digital environments for children and adolescents in Peru.
- **“Child Hearing Sessions”** – using community rituals to provide children in Mozambique with a platform to participate and share their child safeguarding concerns.
- **Empowering children to create safe spaces** – a project in Laos that focuses on establishing children’s clubs that are responsible for raising awareness, reporting concerns and representing their peers in child safeguarding meetings.
- **Speaking to children about their rights** – the development of a child-friendly storybook to build the capacity of children in Jordan on child safeguarding and reporting procedures.
- **A multi-sectoral approach to child safeguarding** – creating, in collaboration with other organizations and public authorities in Greece, a holistic approach to children’s needs assessments and programming in the best interest of the child.
- **Staff training and testing on child safeguarding in Benin** – training and assessments for new staff to ensure that they are familiar with safeguarding policies and procedures before they are allowed to engage with children and young people.

Recommendations

The Global Child Safeguarding Network urges decision makers at all levels of the federation to incorporate the following actions into their plans and strategies:

Oversight and accountability

1. Monitor the quality of the overall safeguarding systems, instead of focusing on incident numbers and immediate response steps alone
 - Prioritize independent audits in child safeguarding for 2023 to improve the collection of qualitative data and inform organizational learning and improvement
 - Streamline safeguarding information management
2. Increase accountability for misconduct
 - Develop a formal framework for dealing with specific types of misconduct, so that those found responsible for misconduct face proportionate and appropriate consequences
3. Invest more attention, time and resources into child safeguarding in youth, education, health, emergency and family strengthening programmes

Prevention, planning and risk management

4. Ensure implementation of thorough background and reference checks for all staff, not only those providing direct care
5. Ensure that all non-care staff receive basic child safeguarding training and that all care staff receive specialized child safeguarding training
6. Review all job descriptions and include each staff member’s child safeguarding responsibilities
7. Improve training and development of care staff

8. Increase trainings on preventing and responding to peer-on-peer violence, such as the Applying Safe Behaviours programme
9. Explicitly clarify that the child safeguarding framework fully applies to young people over the age of 18 who entered SOS Children's Villages programmes as children and continue as programme participants after they have become adults
10. Ensure compliance with risk management requirements in every member association, especially risk assessment and analysis of the child protection context
11. Increase child and youth participation in safeguarding measures, especially in risk assessments
12. Increase focus on mental health for children, young people and adults, including trauma recovery and trauma-informed care

Staffing

13. Allocate resources for adequate staffing
 - Although additional staffing has been provided to manage child safeguarding at various federation levels, much of it is funded temporarily through project budgets, so a long-term staffing solution is needed.
14. Strengthen child safeguarding investigative capacity

Introduction

The Child Safeguarding Annual Report 2021/22 is compiled by the **Global Child Safeguarding Network**, which is made up of General Secretariat's child safeguarding experts working at the international and regional level. The report is produced to inform internal decision makers of the state of child safeguarding in the federation.

The activities discussed are from September 2021 through August 2022, whereas incident figures cover January – December 2021.

It is the fifth year that we've made this annual report publicly available on our international website, including child safeguarding incident data. We are committed to transparency and accountability towards the children and young people participating in our programmes, donors, staff members, and the public at large. Other relevant information on child safeguarding can be found on our [Safeguarding Info Hub](#).

New commitment to child safeguarding

In 2021, in response to the findings of external assessments and lessons learned over the past several years, SOS Children's Villages **declared safeguarding a top priority** and set out to implement systemic, organization-wide improvements in safeguarding according to its [Safeguarding Action Plan](#). The leadership of SOS Children's Villages International and many member associations publicly acknowledged and apologized for failures in safeguarding and governance. As part of the Safeguarding Action Plan, additional projects with specific child safeguarding objectives were established and are now being implemented over a four-year period. Some of these projects as well as other promising practices are presented in the "Project updates and promising practices" chapter later in this report.

Coping with the COVID-19 pandemic

Despite the optimism shared by many people in summer 2021 that the **COVID-19 global pandemic** would be soon over, the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022 brought further waves, more lockdowns and strict regulations on social contact. Children and young people have been one of the most affected groups, with schools and extracurricular activities such as sport clubs and hobbies often being the first to close. Children and young people had to stay at home with limited physical contact with their friends. While many classrooms went online, children and young people in many more countries lost access to education during this time. We learned how lockdowns increased the prevalence of domestic violence, especially corporal punishment and emotional abuse,³ as well as cyber bullying and other forms of online abuse, since children and young people spent much more time online. Reports also show that lockdowns increased children's connections to their families and had positive effects on their well-being due to the absence of in-school bullying.⁴ Building on the learnings from 2020, SOS Children's Villages associations put preventive measures and specific activities in place to address the risks associated with the continuing pandemic. Some examples are shared in the promising practices chapter.

Holistic safeguarding

2021 and 2022 have also seen SOS Children's Villages move toward a **more holistic approach to safeguarding**, recognizing that not only children and young people, but also adult programme participants and staff members have a right to be safe at all times. The rollout of the Sexual Misconduct Regulation and several other HR procedures has started, with the ambition of making SOS Children's Villages a safer organization for all. The General Secretariat is planning to introduce a new unit that will be in charge of child, youth and adult safeguarding, as well as asset protection. Our experience has shown that financial mismanagement and poor HR practices often go hand in hand with child safeguarding concerns. The Global

³ Karbasi, Z., Safdari, R., & Eslami, P. (2022). The silent crisis of child abuse in the COVID-19 pandemic: a scoping review, *Health Science Reports*, 5:e790.

⁴ Sharma, M., Idele, P., Manzini, A., Aladro, CP., Ipince, A., Olsson, G., Banati, P., & Anthony, D. (2021). Life in Lockdown: Child and adolescent mental health and well-being in the time of COVID-19, *UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti*, Florence, Italy. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Life-in-Lockdown.pdf>

Child Safeguarding Network therefore welcomes this new unit, while cautioning the federation not to lose sight of the continued focus needed in the child safeguarding area. We expect that this restructuring will strengthen and expand the safeguarding investigations unit and improve the speed of decision-making in response to investigation findings.

Improving governance and accountability

The Global Child Safeguarding Network remains fully committed to supporting ongoing processes such as the work of the Independent Special Commission to **improve governance and accountability** in child safeguarding, including in relation to past and recent child safeguarding incidents. Addressing accountability and governance gaps will remove bottlenecks and free up vital child safeguarding resources.

Updating the child safeguarding policy framework

The child safeguarding team at the international office has started the long-overdue process of **updating the child safeguarding policy**, which was introduced more than 13 years ago. The development of this policy is being led by child safeguarding experts from different countries, with extensive child and youth participation, and will include all relevant functional areas and management lines, reflecting that child safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

In 2022, new reporting and responding procedures aligning adult safeguarding and asset protection with our child safeguarding procedures were developed. The development of a new Safeguarding Information Management System also started in 2022 (see "Compliance with child safeguarding requirements" chapter for details).

Global ombuds system

A **global ombuds approach** was developed and piloted in three countries in 2022. The Global Child Safeguarding Network strongly supports there being an independent complaints mechanism and focal point for children and young people who are dissatisfied with how SOS Children's Villages has responded to their cases and concerns. At the same time, the network has raised concerns of how child safeguarding risks connected to the introduction of the ombuds approach will be addressed. The most effective approach must be found between complementing internal systems with independent structures and investing in historically underfunded internal child safeguarding structures and systems, for example for monitoring and follow-up actions.

Annual reflection

Compiling the annual child safeguarding survey data and preparing the annual report provides an important **opportunity for member associations and the General Secretariat to reflect** on the past year. What are the successes and improvements? What are the gaps and challenges? What are the risks? Where are the support needs? What can we learn from the reported child safeguarding incidents?

At the centre of this stands, firstly, making sure adequate child safeguarding measures are taken to listen to children and young people, raise awareness, prevent harm, mitigate risks, encourage safe reporting and respond appropriately to each concern. Secondly, ensuring that child safeguarding teams are adequately staffed in proportion to the child safeguarding risks in SOS Children's Villages programmes. Third, making certain that staff are empowered and well trained, with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills further. Fourth, addressing known governance and accountability gaps so that resources can be redirected to other areas in need of improvement. Finally, making sure that responsibilities and structures related to following up on investigation reports, and taking action to realize the needed changes, are clear and functioning.

Child safeguarding incidents

Mitigating child safeguarding risks, raising awareness and taking preventative measures are central to our child safeguarding practice. When there are specific child safeguarding concerns or incidents, our objectives are very clear. Firstly, children and adults should feel confident and safe to report any child safeguarding concerns they may have and any incident that has occurred. Secondly, SOS Children's Villages must respond appropriately to each reported concern or incident, in line with national law and our policies and procedures.

Child safeguarding incident: a situation when a child is harmed as a result of action or inaction by SOS Children's Villages staff, associates and/or operations. This definition includes:

- situations when children affected by abuse and neglect do not receive necessary support and remain vulnerable to further abuse or replicate abusive behaviour towards their peers
- situations when peer violence among children and/or young people is not addressed by appropriate actions by SOS Children's Villages
- situations when SOS Children's Villages staff members fail to meet their duty of care obligations, for example by failing to respond appropriately to reported child safeguarding concerns

A child safeguarding incident may relate to one or several forms of violence against children:

- **Emotional abuse** – 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** – inattention or omission to provide adequate supervision, nutrition, clothing or shelter, or to meet a child's health, education and safety needs.
- **Physical abuse** – hitting, shaking, biting, hair or ear pulling, acts of corporal punishment or other actions that cause physical harm. Some countries do not outlaw corporal punishment, but the SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy specifically forbids it.
- **Sexual harassment, coercion, exploitation and abuse** – sexual assault or rape, sexualized touching or exposure, pressuring, forcing or coercing a child to take part in sexual 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 the 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.

Reported incidents

In 2021, 2,643 child safeguarding incidents were reported to SOS Children's Villages associations and General Secretariat offices – 104 incidents (4%) fewer than in 2020. There are huge regional and national differences, however. Some regions and associations recorded 9–12% fewer reported incidents, while others saw an increase of up to 19%.

Of the reported incidents, 43% (1,147 incidents, 11 fewer than in 2020) were adult-to-child incidents and the remaining 57% (1,496 incidents, 93 fewer than in 2020) involved peer-on-peer abuse among children or young people.

For the past two years, child safeguarding incidents have been registered by their severity, frequency and the power dynamics involved according to the following categories:

- **Inappropriate behaviour incidents** – an isolated, one-time incident in an otherwise stable care relationship where an adult such as a child or youth care practitioner responds to a challenging situation with anger, pulling or pushing a child or issuing a minor threat.
- **Problematic behaviour incidents** – a single event of aggressive behaviour such as fighting, hitting or pushing among children or young people of similar age or status, i.e. with no power imbalance.
- **Abusive behaviour incidents** – either inappropriate or problematic behaviour that occurs repeatedly or situations where a child is harmed or abused as per the Child Protection Policy definitions of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, negligent behaviour, exploitation or violation of privacy. The person initiating the abusive behaviour can be an adult or another child or young person.

Of the 1,147 reported adult-to-child incidents:

- 812 were registered as incidents of abusive behaviour (10% more than in 2020)
- 335 were registered as incidents of inappropriate behaviour (20% fewer than in 2020)

Of the 1,496 peer-on-peer incidents:

- 692 were registered as incidents of abusive behaviour (15% fewer than in 2020)
- 804 were registered as incidents of problematic behaviour (4% more than in 2020)

Incidents involving abusive behaviour represent 43% of the total number of incidents reported in 2021.

Categorization of incidents into abusive vs inappropriate and problematic behaviours

The distinction was introduced to help practitioners identify the most appropriate response to an incident, reduce paperwork for the less severe incidents that do not require a full-fledged investigation, and provide a more nuanced picture of the incidents occurring in SOS Children's Villages programmes.

Experience on the ground has shown that it is often very difficult to draw the line between these categories. This can lead to an inconsistent use of the different categories within and across associations, which in turn may make it more difficult to monitor and compare incident data across programme locations and countries. It may also make it challenging to ensure that there is an appropriate response to each situation and that incidents that are categorized as inappropriate or problematic receive the needed attention. Experience has also shown that there are incidents that might initially be categorized as inappropriate or problematic but after more information about them is obtained might turn out to be part of a more systemic problem and an abusive environment that requires a more substantial response.

While it is clear that these categories remain useful, **it is important to not apply them prematurely in the initial assessment phase.** Each reported incident must be thoroughly looked into and investigated as necessary. Only once the extent of an incident is fully understood should it be categorized as inappropriate, problematic or abusive and the appropriate response determined.

The Global Child Safeguarding Network will review the application these categories as part of the ongoing child safeguarding policy and procedure update.

Confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour

Of the 1,504 reported incidents that were registered in 2021 as abusive behaviour incidents, **1,230 (82%) were confirmed**:

- 628 were confirmed adult-to-child incidents of abusive behaviour
- 602 were confirmed peer-on-peer incidents of abusive behaviour

As noted above, these numbers do not include adult-to-child inappropriate behaviour incidents or peer-on-peer problematic behaviour incidents. The figures discussed in the sections below refer only to abusive behaviour incidents and do not concern inappropriate or problematic behaviour incidents.

Children and young people impacted by incidents of abusive behaviour

Confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours impacted 2,566 children and young people participating in an SOS Children’s Villages programme in 2021 (see table 1).⁵ The total figure of 2,566 includes not only children and young people who were targeted by adult-to-child abuse, but also those who were targeted by peer-on-peer violence and children and young people who initiated peer-on-peer violence.

Table 1. Number of children and young people targeted by abuse and peer-on-peer violence and those who initiated peer-on-peer violence, according to programme setting⁶

Programme setting	Children and young people in direct care of SOS Children’s Villages ⁷	Children and young people not in direct care of SOS Children’s Villages
Alternative care settings	1,572 (targeted by adult-to-child abuse and peer-on-peer violence)	16 (targeted by adult-to-child abuse and peer-on-peer violence)
	589 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)	20 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)
Youth programmes	131	10
	52 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)	11 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)
Family strengthening	21	22
	11 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)	2 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)
Education	47	29
	17 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)	11 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)
Health	0	1
	0 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)	0 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)
Emergency response	1	3
	0 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)	0 (initiated peer-on-peer violence)
Total	2,441	125
Grand total	2,566	

⁵ In 2021, we provided alternative care for 68,000 children and young people and supported 455,400 children, young people and adults in family strengthening programmes.

⁶ Includes confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour. Does not include confirmed incidents of inappropriate or problematic behaviour.

⁷ The number of children and young people affected by adult-to-child abuse in the “direct care of SOS Children’s Villages” category refers to all incidents, regardless of whether the adult is a staff member, an associate or an adult completely unconnected to SOS Children’s Villages.

SOS Children's Villages has the obligation to respond appropriately and provide adequate remediation and care not only to children and young people who were targeted by abuse but also to children and young people who initiated abuse. Our duty of care extends to all children and young people in our programmes, regardless of their actions. Our experience and research show that children and young people who initiate harmful behaviour towards other children or young people may have had prior experiences of abuse themselves, which makes the need to provide adequate care and support to them all the more important.

Recommendations

- Increase trainings on preventing and responding to peer-on-peer violence, such as the Applying Safe Behaviours programme
- Increase focus on mental health for children, young people and caregivers, especially on trauma recovery and trauma-informed care

Table 1 illustrates that **the overwhelming majority of confirmed incidents of abuse affected children and young people in alternative care settings**. SOS Children's Villages carries a heightened duty of care obligation when it provides direct care, i.e. in alternative care programmes. For this reason, the number of children and young people affected by adult-to-child abuse in the "direct care of SOS Children's Villages" category refers to all incidents, regardless of whether the adult is a staff member, an associate or an adult completely unconnected to SOS Children's Villages.

Incidents of abuse towards children and young people who participate in SOS Children's Villages programmes but are not in direct SOS Children's Villages care are only counted when the abuse is perpetrated by a staff member or an associate. For example, if an SOS Children's Villages staff member abuses a child participating in a family strengthening programme, the abuse incident is counted. If their biological parent or another member of their family or community abuses the child, it is not counted in our child safeguarding incident statistics. Nevertheless, when such incidents occur, SOS Children's Villages staff members are required to work together with the responsible authorities and to continue to provide support to the affected child and their family.

Even when allowing for these limitations, **the extremely low number of children and young people reported to be affected by abuse while participating in a programme other than alternative care is likely a sign of under-reporting**.

Recommendation

- Invest more attention, time and resources into child safeguarding in SOS Children's Villages youth, education, health, emergency and family strengthening programmes

Table 2. Number of children and young people impacted by abuse according to type of abuse and type of staff perpetrator⁸

Type of perpetrator Type of abuse	SOS parents, family assistants	Youth care staff	Other staff	Total	% of total
Physical abuse	250	22	31	303	32%
Sexual coercion and abuse	4	0	12	16	2%
Emotional abuse	193	4	19	216	22%
Neglect and negligent treatment	167	73	182	422	44%
Violation of privacy	1	0	0	1	>1%
Total	615	99	244	958	100%

Out of the total figure of 2,566 children and young people impacted by abuse while participating in SOS Children’s Villages programmes, **958 children and young people were exposed to abuse by staff members**, as table 2 shows.

Incidents of physical abuse relate mainly to different forms of physical punishment. Neglect and negligent treatment are mainly incidents where caregivers left children and young people unsupervised or where their health issues did not receive the necessary attention.

Of the 16 children and young people affected by sexual coercion and abuse, 12 were harmed by non-care staff, which includes drivers and maintenance and security personnel. SOS parents and family assistants were the perpetrators of abuse against the remaining 4 children and young people.

This data provides incredibly relevant insight for reducing risk. **Rigorous background and reference checks** during the recruitment process must be undertaken for all, as well as **trainings for all staff**, including drivers and maintenance staff, not only for those staff members who have direct and close contact with children as per their job description.

Recommendations

- Ensure implementation of thorough background and reference checks for all staff, not only those providing direct care
- Ensure that all non-care staff receive basic child safeguarding training and that all care staff receive specialized child safeguarding training including training on trauma recovery and trauma-informed care
- Review all job descriptions and include each staff member’s child safeguarding responsibilities

Adult perpetrators of abuse

In 2021, a total of **440 individual staff members were involved in abusive behaviour incidents** towards children and young people. However, **as some staff members were involved in multiple incidents and some incidents involved more than one perpetrator, we recorded this figure as 469 staff perpetrators**. This represents 1.2% of the SOS Children’s Villages staff worldwide.⁹

As table 3 illustrates, approximately half of the staff perpetrators were involved in physical abuse, which mostly involved acts of corporal punishment by child and youth care practitioners. The next largest group

⁸ Includes confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour. Does not include confirmed incidents of inappropriate behaviour.

⁹ As of 31 December 2021, SOS Children’s Villages member associations employed 38,884 people (average full-time equivalents).

were incidents of neglect and negligent treatment, which mostly involved failure to provide adequate supervision, nutrition or clothing, or to meet 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 3% of the reported and later confirmed incidents in 2021. Finally, there were two staff involved in incidents of abusive behaviours where a child’s privacy was violated.

Table 3: 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	188	15	25	228	49%
Sexual coercion and abuse	2	0	11	13	3%
Emotional abuse	93	4	12	109	23%
Neglect and negligent treatment	84	13	20	117	25%
Violation of privacy	1	0	1	2	>1%
Total	368	32	69	469	100%
Grand total	469				

Of the 469 staff members involved as perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours, 78% were SOS parents and family assistants. This highlights the importance of **adequate training and development for staff who directly care for children** on topics such as positive discipline, making sure that child and youth care professionals can develop the skills they need to support the children. In addition, care practitioners must have a good understanding of what trauma is and how it can affect a child or young person.

Recommendations

- Improve training and development of care staff
- Increase focus on mental health for children, young people and caregivers, especially on trauma recovery and trauma-informed care

As a result of being confirmed as perpetrators of abusive behaviour, 76 staff members were dismissed and 59 were reported to law enforcement authorities. Not all of the dismissed staff could be reported to the authorities due to gaps in national child protection legislation.

Considering the total number of global SOS Children’s Villages staff, the number of children and young people participating and receiving care in different types of programmes including alternative care, and the number of staff confirmed as perpetrators of abusive behaviour, the number of staff dismissed or reported to the authorities due to misconduct appears to be low. This suggests that more needs to be done to make sure that abuse is detected and fully investigated, that all perpetrators are held accountable for their actions to an appropriate extent, and that line managers have a clear and consistent understanding of what does and does not constitute serious misconduct.

Accountability must extend not only to the person who committed an act of abuse but also to the people who enabled, allowed, tolerated or encouraged such behaviours, or otherwise contributed to an unsafe environment. One example of such a situation is an employee being instructed by someone in a position of authority to administer corporal punishment.

Recommendations

- Develop a formal framework that would explain how to deal with specific types of misconduct, so that those found responsible for abuse or other types of misconduct (including those enabling abuse) face proportionate and appropriate consequences
- Monitor consistent implementation of the accountability framework

Table 4. 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
Alternative care settings	365	8	37	410	87.4%
Youth programmes	2	24	7	33	7%
Family strengthening	0	0	3	3	>1%
Education	0	0	21	21	4.5%
Health	0	0	1	1	>1%
Emergency response	1	0	0	1	>1%
Total	368	32	69	469	100%
Grand total	469				

As illustrated by table 4 above, alternative care programmes carry a higher child safeguarding risk profile, so we devote significant resources to ensuring that abuse is detected and reported. Furthermore, in alternative care environments, there is a higher degree of certainty that incidents will be detected and reported due to the nature of the 24/7 care provision. In contrast, in other programmes, there are 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.

As mentioned above, there is an urgent need to invest more attention, time and resources into child safeguarding in SOS Children's Villages youth, education, health, emergency and family strengthening programmes.

Sexual coercion and abuse perpetrated by staff

In 2021, **13 staff were reported and confirmed as perpetrators of child sexual coercion and abuse** and **16 children and young people were confirmed as victims** in these incidents.

These incidents included one incident of rape by one staff member, ten incidents of harassment or inappropriate touching and two incidents where two young people were manipulated and/or coerced into sexual acts.¹⁰

¹⁰ 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).

As a direct consequence, ten staff members were dismissed, two resigned before they could be dismissed, and a further staff member was suspended and the disciplinary process is currently underway.

Eight of the incidents were defined as a criminal offence in the respective countries. Of these, seven were reported to the police or prosecuting authorities. In one of the cases, the affected young person was above 18 years of age and decided not to submit a report; in accordance with the national law, only the affected person could submit a report to the authorities.

The organization reported a further case to the law enforcement authorities. The judicial process and legal assessment of that case are ongoing.

Table 5. Sexual coercion and abuse incidents by category of staff perpetrator and by gender

Staff category	Number of staff involved		Number of children involved	
	male	female	male	female
Senior staff	2			3
SOS parents / SOS aunts	1	1	1	2
Youth care staff	—	—	—	—
Family strengthening staff	1			1
Teachers	1			1
Maintenance staff (drivers, gardeners etc.)	4			5
Security guards	2		1	1
Others (nursing assistant)	1			1
Total	12	1	2	14
Grand total	13		16	

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.¹¹

Interpreting incident data

The number of child safeguarding incidents serves as an important measure of whether child safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented and whether the organization is able to identify and respond to incidents of abuse. Analysis of statistical outliers and breakdown by gender, setting, age, type of abuse and other parameters provides insights and helps flag gaps and risks, as can be seen above.

While interpreting this data, however, it is important to understand that the **number of reported incidents in and of itself is not a reliable indicator of how well the child safeguarding system is functioning**. This quantitative indicator must be complemented by qualitative information on the implementation of the overall child safeguarding approach.

A high number of reported incidents can mean that children feel confident and safe to report concerns, possibly because they see that reporting led to SOS Children's Villages effectively addressing previous child safeguarding concerns. A high number of incidents can also simply mean that there are many issues to report or that SOS Children's Villages has not always been responding appropriately.

¹¹ International Development Committee (2018). Sexual abuse and exploitation in the aid sector. 33.

By the same token, a low number of reported incidents can mean that there is under-reporting and little confidence in SOS Children's Villages taking child safeguarding issues seriously. It can also mean that SOS Children's Villages is faring well on prevention and mitigating existing child safeguarding risks before harm occurs.

It is important to use incident numbers only in combination with data on the quality of incident handling, which provides a much more nuanced picture.

It is very important to note in this context that there were 39 associations that reported no or almost no (5 or less) incidents of any category being reported in some or all of their programmes, whether for this year or consistently. By any category, we mean reported incidents of inappropriate behaviour, problematic behaviour or abusive behaviour. This is statistically almost impossible and a likely sign of under-reporting. It could mean that reporting channels are not working or that associations are not being transparent or realistic about the state of child safeguarding in their programmes. Further work is urgently required to address this situation and ensure that associations report accurate incident numbers, which would likely contribute to an increase in incident figures.

Recommendations

- Monitor the quality of the overall safeguarding systems, instead of focusing on incident numbers and immediate response steps alone
- Prioritize independent audits in child safeguarding for 2023 to improve the collection of qualitative data and inform organizational learning and improvement

Compliance with child safeguarding requirements

SOS Children's Villages uses an annual self-assessment survey to monitor member associations' progress in child safeguarding activities and compliance with federation-wide requirements. The survey includes minimum child safeguarding requirements, a risk profiler and the reported child safeguarding incidents on a yearly basis.

Minimum requirements:

- **Putting the policy into practice** – there is a clear commitment to promote the wellbeing of children, prevent child abuse and create a safe and positive environment for children.
- **Organizing staff** – responsibilities and expectations towards staff members and associates are clearly defined and communicated through relevant policies, procedures and guidance.
- **Planning** – there is a systematic process of planning child safeguarding measures to ensure a child safe environment.
- **Implementing** – there is a systematic process of implementing child safeguarding measures to ensure a child safe environment.
- **Monitoring and review** – mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing the child safeguarding measures are in place.

Risk profiler: Programme risks, staffing risks, external risks, risks relating to partnerships and other risks are assessed against compliance with the minimum child safeguarding requirements.

Child safeguarding incidents: Adult-to-child and peer-on-peer incidents are reported, with information on type of abuse, programme setting, victims and survivors, and perpetrators.

The findings discussed in this section concern compliance with minimum requirement and the use of the risk profiler. For incident data, see "Child safeguarding incidents" above.

Rates of compliance with child safeguarding requirements

In 2021, 132 member associations reported their self-assessment data, while 7 associations did not.¹²

Global child safeguarding compliance levels continued to increase gradually in 2021, with an overall global compliance rate reported at 90%. Member associations reported the highest compliance levels in the area of implementing measures (92%) and the lowest levels in the areas of planning (86%) and organizing staff (90%).

African and Latin American associations reported that their compliance levels had remained almost the same as in 2020, with minimal changes of up to 1.5 percentage points. A similar situation was reported by Central and Eastern European, Central Asian and Middle Eastern associations and by the associations in Asia.

Western European and North American associations with domestic programmes reported compliance level increases of up to seven percentage points. The regional integrity and safeguarding network that had been dormant for several years was reactivated in 2021. This coincided with the overall increased attention to the

¹² The seven associations that had active operations but did not report their data include SOS Children's Villages in China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, France-Alsace, French Polynesia and Ukraine. Three further associations that are not full federation members but with whom SOS Children's Villages has a partnership agreement did not report either, namely Shreyas Balgram, TCV Dharamsala, and Tibetan Homes Foundation. Registered associations without any active operations are not counted.

child safeguarding area and contributed to more associations in the region improving their structures and creating action plans related to minimum requirements.

Western European and North American associations without domestic programmes, on the other hand, reported a decrease of up to seven percentage points. Some associations had incorrectly rated some of the minimum requirements to be not applicable to their operations in 2020. Support and exchange in the regional network contributed to an improved understanding and awareness of the obligations and minimum requirements in 2021. This resulted in reported compliance levels more reflective of reality and thus improved data quality.

The General Secretariat must support member associations to continuously improve annual survey data quality and take action to meet minimum requirements in child safeguarding.

At the same time, it is important that independent child safeguarding audits take place on a regular basis to complement the picture provided through the data from the annual survey.

Our current child safeguarding policies and procedures require every member association to conduct a child safeguarding audit in every programme location every three years, and every regional office, in at least three member associations every year. However, currently this requirement is not always fully met due to capacity and resource limitations.

Recommendations

- Prioritize independent audits in child safeguarding for 2023
- Make sure member associations carry out a child safeguarding audit in at least one programme location annually
- Make sure regional offices carry out child safeguarding audits in at least three member associations annually

Planning and risk management

Only 75% of member associations reported that they carry out child safeguarding risk assessments on a regular basis and use the outcomes as input for their annual planning. Only 80% indicated that they conduct a legal and stakeholder mapping (analysis of the child protection context).

Without knowing the potential and existing child safeguarding risks, the relevant child protection and social welfare laws (legal mapping) and child protection stakeholders (stakeholder mapping), it is difficult to determine what actions can actually address existing risks and how these actions can be best delivered together with child protection partners.

A large majority of member associations (92%) reported that their annual plans include specific child safeguarding measures with detailed timelines and responsibilities. However, of the associations that planned specific child safeguarding measures, 25 planned without knowing or considering their child safeguarding risks, 21 planned without knowing or considering their legal context, local stakeholders or service providers, and 11 planned without having undertaken either a risk assessment or legal and stakeholder mapping.

The need to do more to manage child safeguarding risks has also been recognized by the Independent Special Commission in its 2022 interim report, which recommends that safeguarding risk identification and risk management are defined as preventive measures on the policy level. The new Child Safeguarding Policy, which will be available in 2023, will specifically define the federation-wide child safeguarding risk management approach.

Recommendations

- Explicitly clarify risk management requirements as binding for all member associations in the updated Child Safeguarding Policy
- Develop concerted efforts to ensure all member associations apply a consistent risk management approach
- Expand internal mechanisms to enforce compliance

Child and youth participation in safeguarding

Children and young people are the people most affected by child safeguarding. It is critically important that they are consulted and involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of safeguarding projects and activities. Participation should be systematic and not limited to a project. Age-appropriate child and youth participation in safeguarding is particularly important in assessing risks and planning mitigating actions.

Of the 123 member associations that implement domestic programmes, 88 (72%) reported that age-appropriate and relevant content on child safeguarding is promoted and made available to children and young people in their language. Of the remaining 35 associations, 34 said this requirement was met only partially and 1 indicated that it did not meet it at all.

Under two-thirds of member associations (77 associations, or 63%) reported that inputs from children and young people were taken into account in annual planning. A further 38 member associations (31%) met this requirement only to some extent, while another 8 reported that they didn't consider children and young people's inputs at all.

Recommendations

- Develop concerted measures to listen to children and young people's views and suggestions on strengthening child safeguarding and reflect their suggestions in the next year's plan
- To strengthen participation, involve children and young people in a meaningful way when identifying safeguarding risks and developing mitigating actions

Staffing

In 2021, all but three associations reported having a national child safeguarding focal person in place and all but five associations reported that there were child safeguarding teams at programme locations.¹³ This figure does not provide information on whether the child safeguarding staffing level matches the association's actual needs or whether the national child safeguarding focal person is a full-time or a part-time position. Furthermore, only slightly over 50% of the member associations reported carrying out regular performance appraisals to identify and address the development and support needs of their child safeguarding staff.

Under a project implemented within the Safeguarding Action Plan, ten member associations received additional project funding in 2021 and 2022 to secure a full-time child safeguarding position at national level. A few more associations secured funding for additional child safeguarding positions independently. A sustainable federation-wide solution to strengthen staffing across all member associations is still urgently needed.

¹³ The total number of associations for this question is 123 instead of 132, as this requirement is not relevant to funding and fundraising associations without domestic programmes.

Under the same project, the child safeguarding teams at all but one of the General Secretariat offices increased by an average of one full-time position per team. There are now two to five staff members in each global and regional child safeguarding team except the Western European and North American region, which has a part-time position to provide child safeguarding support.

The 2021 Independent Child Safeguarding Review report and the 2022 interim report by the Independent Special Commission have both recommended that adequate resources and staffing be allocated to strengthen the federation-wide child safeguarding system. The 2021/22 child safeguarding staffing increases at the General Secretariat and in some member associations have eased some of the workload, but many critical gaps persist.

In addition to staffing and supporting safeguarding teams that are in charge of prevention and monitoring, the organization must secure much-needed dedicated resources to better support our investigators and increase the pool of professionals who are able to carry out high-quality investigations. In recent years, this demanding work has been done by a global pool of trained child safeguarding investigators from member associations across the federation. The strained internal resources of the global pool members, who perform their investigative duty in addition to their professional roles, and a significant reliance on external service providers, who may need lengthy orientation and support, highlight the need to strengthen investigative capacity.

Recommendations

- Assess current and required child safeguarding staffing in individual member associations and the General Secretariat, including the share of part- and full-time positions among national focal persons
- Secure long-term funding to cover child safeguarding needs in all member associations as part of core budgets
- Provide dedicated resources to better support investigators and to increase the global pool of internal investigators
- Provide staff members who serve as investigators in addition to their regular roles with a stand-in who can take over their daily tasks while they perform their duty

Monitoring

Only 77% (101 associations) monitor the progress of their child safeguarding activities including the incident response. Of the remaining associations, 28 report that this monitoring requirement is only partially met; 2 report that they don't meet it at all and 1 reports that it is not applicable to them.

Our experience as well as independent reviews have shown that member associations and the General Secretariat need to improve monitoring of child safeguarding work, particularly when it comes to incident response.

The 2021 Independent Child Safeguarding Review and the recent interim report by the Independent Special Commission (2022) have recommended that SOS Children's Villages establish an incident management system with a body responsible to monitor the handling of all reported incidents and allegations across the federation.

To implement these recommendations, the General Secretariat has started developing a Safeguarding Information Management System that will collect and securely store data on safeguarding incidents and compliance with binding safeguarding policies across the federation. In the first phase, the system will include data on child safeguarding and asset protection. In a later stage, the system will also capture information on adult safeguarding.

As part of the project, the following high-level indicators are envisioned for real-time reporting:

- The number and percentage of programme participants who have experienced abuse

- The average time (in days) taken for incident response measures
- Fulfilment of child safeguarding requirements (in %)

The software will be developed in 2023 and rolled out from 2024 onwards. Ultimately, the system should improve the efficiency of responses for children and young people affected by abuse.

Recommendations

- Make the Safeguarding Information Management System mandatory for all member associations and General Secretariat-run operations that are not required to use a state-mandated system and that have not developed their own
- Where another information management system is in place, require the use of the Safeguarding Information Management System to the extent necessary for data compatibility and the ability to produce national, regional and global reports

Member associations' risk profiles

A risk profiler was introduced as part of the self-assessment survey in 2021 to identify associations that may need additional funding and support in improving their child safeguarding systems. The profiler lets member associations calculate an overall risk score that is measured against their overall compliance level with the minimum child safeguarding requirements.

A combination of risk scores and overall levels of compliance with minimum child safeguarding requirements shows that 73% of associations have a low risk profile, 27% have a medium risk profile and only one is categorised to have a high risk profile. However, the Global Child Safeguarding Network has found that the outcomes of risk profiles do not always match other data and experience pertaining to internal and external risk mitigation, so the risk profiler data needs verification. The network will review the utility of the safeguarding risk parameters used in the profiler.

Project updates and promising practices

Research on child and youth participation in safeguarding

Recently conducted global research is providing important insights into how children and young people view child safeguarding and is contributing to creating a global baseline on the topic.

So far, the research has taken place in eight locations in four countries, with the participation of 238 children and young people aged 12–17, as well as 103 staff members, including child and youth care practitioners, drivers, cleaners, social workers, child safeguarding coordinators and managers.

Findings and recommendations are providing the basis for participatory action planning with children, young people and staff members for implementation in 2023. Outcomes will be evaluated to measure change over time. The project will be scaled up to further countries and locations in 2023 and 2024.

A large majority (86%) of children and young people indicated that they feel safe or very safe, and a strong majority (73%) indicated that they tell someone if they are hurt or mistreated. However, the research confirmed that children and young people's knowledge of and confidence in safeguarding and children's rights needs to increase. The main reasons for not reporting concerns included being afraid they might get in trouble (40%) or not knowing how and where to report (20%). Increasing the use of child-friendly methods and language can make it clearer for children and young people what can be reported, to whom and how to do so safely.

The research confirmed that various structures and processes such as children's clubs or youth groups provide a regular space for children and young people to access information, collectively discuss and get involved in decisions that concern them. However, there is an urgent need to increase the opportunities for children of all ages to engage in such spaces and to discuss safeguarding and protection issues more. There must be more opportunities for young people's autonomous decision-making and practical strategies to resolve tensions around safeguarding reporting, such as fear of negative repercussions. Proposals to achieve this are currently under way.

Empowering children to create safe spaces in Laos

SOS Children's Villages Laos has been focusing on creating safe spaces and teaching children how to identify and articulate child protection and safeguarding risks. Currently, there are 18 active child protection groups in Laos. Every group consists of 5–10 children.

To promote structure, ownership and democratic functioning in the children's groups, SOS Children's Villages Laos together with children has set up criteria for membership in the group and selection of group leaders:

- Children learn about child rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and child safeguarding.
- Every group can select up to three group leaders depending on the size of the group.
- The group makes a quarterly plan to guide their activities.
- Every child who is a part of the group receives a certificate of training.

The role and responsibilities of the children's groups include:

- raising awareness on child safeguarding in their children's village
- reporting incidents or risks to the child safeguarding team of the village or the national office
- representing children in child safeguarding meetings at the village level

Since the formation of children's groups, the children have highlighted issues like bullying among children and discrimination at school and village.

ConectadaSOS: Campaign for safe digital environments in Peru

The purpose of the ConectadaSOS campaign was to promote safe digital environments for children and adolescents. The specific goals were:

1. Inform children and adolescents (both those in SOS Children's Villages alternative care and those from the surrounding community) about the risks they are exposed to in virtual environments and how they can avoid them.
2. Inform parents and caregivers (internally and in the community) about the risks faced by children and adolescents and how they can avoid them.
3. Empower children and adolescents so that they can take care of themselves, promote the protection of their peers and use digital platforms responsibly.

The campaign's target audience was children and adolescents aged 10–17 who have internet access and who play online games or use social media and other apps to communicate online but are not aware of the risks involved. The campaign also targeted parents and caregivers who have limited technical knowledge and a lack of awareness of internet safety.

As part of the project, two infographics, "Safe Surfing is More Fun" and "Let's Help Them Surf Safely," were developed and an educational song and an animated video were produced. The campaign was promoted through a webinar, a social experiment, a TikTok challenge and regular posts on Twitter. Furthermore, there were mentions of the campaign in the national press and news programs in the form of interviews, press releases and opinion articles. Finally, the campaign was presented to working groups and national and local authorities.

Support for people affected by past abuse

Support for people affected by past abuse is being facilitated through the Immediate Support Project. This project provides funding to associations who do not have sufficient resources to cover the costs of providing holistic immediate support. The project provides a framework for SOS Children's Villages to respond effectively to an increase in reported incidents (past or current). It enables member associations to provide immediate support to children, young people, staff members and other persons who experienced abuse; the support is based on tailored individual plans that consider locally available services from community partners.

By August 2022, member associations in 16 countries applied to participate in the project. In two other countries, the General Secretariat has contracted external service providers to conduct a thorough situation assessment in order to identify victims/survivors and determine how to best respond to their individual needs. Based on the outcomes of this external assessment, the General Secretariat and the two member associations will prepare a detailed plan of action.

According to the concept notes submitted by the member associations, more than 500 people are currently receiving support or are expected to receive it soon. The majority are adults that are victims/survivors of past abuse. Some member associations also include in the support programme children and young people in care who experienced abuse before entering SOS Children's Villages alternative care.

The support provided includes counselling and psychosocial support, educational support such as various trainings, legal aid, start-up capital for income-generating activities, support in renting or even buying decent apartments or houses, etc.

Child Hearing Sessions to improve child safeguarding in Mozambique

During the COVID-19 outbreaks, children couldn't interact freely with other people since schools were closed and other spaces that normally give children the chance to play and spend time with their friends were highly restricted. Children living in children's villages were instructed to abide by all COVID protocols to keep them safe from possible virus infections in these difficult times.

In all these adversities, the regional child safeguarding team was looking for alternatives to foster child participation in child safeguarding. The team focused on good local practices of the communities in which SOS Children's Villages programmes are located. In Mozambique, there are community rituals that are celebrated every two weeks and where SOS Children's Villages caregivers spend time socializing at the local campfire. Participants sing and dance together and discuss community issues.

The child safeguarding team of Mozambique found this platform appropriate for children to participate in and share their safeguarding concerns. The caregivers started allocating time for "Child Hearing Sessions" where children, usually below the age of 15, can speak out about their safeguarding concerns. Topics include physical abuse such as beatings, emotional abuse such as bullying, and even fears of sexual abuse. The caregivers discuss solutions to the concerns they have heard and other issues, such as education and child-friendliness in the family settings. Together with the children, plans are developed for further action, and progress is evaluated during the next session.

The Child Hearing Sessions are an additional reporting channel and response mechanism in one, alongside the usual channels such as reporting boxes, an email address, a hotline, or speaking to child safeguarding local team members or other adults the child trusts. The unique feature of the Child Hearing Sessions is that they make it easy for children and the community to address issues in a low-stress environment.

Applying Safe Behaviours – preventing and responding to peer violence

The Applying Safe Behaviours project focuses on peer violence among children and young people. More than half of all reported and confirmed child safeguarding incidents at SOS Children's Villages relate to violence among children and young people. In 2021, 53% of these incidents were physical abuse and 37% sexual coercion and abuse. This illustrates how important it is that SOS Children's Villages ensures safe environments for children and young people in all situations, not only when harm comes from adults but also when it comes from other children and young people.

Through trainings and workshops, the project aims to equip children and young people with the understanding, tools and practical strategies to prevent, recognize and speak out about peer violence in their own lives. It also aims to support child and youth care practitioners and other professionals to prevent, recognize and appropriately respond to this form of violence. This requires that care and attention is given not only to those targeted by peer-on-peer violence but also to those who initiate harmful behaviours.

The project has been co-funded by the European Union. The training content and methodology were developed in 2021–22, and the training is being delivered in Romania, Italy, Belgium, France and Spain. Consultations with young people heavily informed the development and delivery of the training packages. By the end of the year, trainings and workshops will have been delivered to 572 professionals and to 455 children and young people in schools, community centres, social programmes and SOS Children's Village programmes, discussing how adults and children and young people can prevent and better respond to peer-on-peer violence.

Following the pilot in the first five countries in Europe, the project will be rolled out to further countries in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East in 2023 and 24.

Speaking to children about their rights in Jordan

SOS Children's Villages Jordan has worked to educate children on the child safeguarding and reporting procedures. Although the regular training was beneficial to provide basic information, the children reported the need to have a more interactive format. Therefore, the national child safeguarding advisor, in coordination with the programme child safeguarding teams, developed a child-friendly storybook that supported children

to raise their understanding of their rights and ways to protect themselves. Developed for children aged 6 to 12 years old, the storybook also included stories and games explaining how to report abuse.

Social workers and local child safeguarding teams were trained on how to use the storybook and how to use the storytelling as a methodology in awareness raising. After the sessions had taken place, children reported that they understood their rights better and knew what abuse means. Children also added that they should always be protected and speak up when they have concerns similar to the characters mentioned in the story.

Strengthening child safeguarding in high-risk environments

The project focuses on strengthening the child safeguarding work in member associations that operate in high-risk environments. Particular attention is being paid to preventive activities and strengthening incident management.

Some member associations operate in a challenging context (weak national legislation on child protection, governmental authorities not willing to take up their responsibility to protect children and young people at risk of harm, high prevalence of violence in the community, etc.). At the same time, some member associations are in the process of implementing the child safeguarding approach defined by the organizational policies and procedures. These factors significantly increase the risk profile of the member associations, which may lead to a situation when children and young people in care of and supported by the organization experience abuse or neglect. The project aims to address these potential and existing risks in the child safeguarding work of a member association.

The project started in 2021 with a pilot phase in ten associations in Eastern and Southern Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. In early 2022, the project expanded to 15 more associations in Asia, Latin America and Western and Central Africa.

The project includes the following key activities:

- Staff trainings in accordance with their specific roles and responsibilities
- Child safeguarding risk assessment to identify existing and potential child safeguarding risks
- Designing and implementing risk mitigation actions
- Conducting a child safeguarding audit to verify the implementation of the mitigation actions and minimum child safeguarding requirements. Depending on the local context, this child-safeguarding audit can be included in a cross-functional audit conducted by the regional office.

A multi-sectoral approach to child safeguarding in Greece

SOS Children's Villages Greece has been focusing on creating a strong alliance network with different public authorities, organizations, and professionals from the public or private sector, to accomplish a holistic approach to child needs assessments and programming in the best interest of the child. As part of this work, the organization has contributed to the content and formulation of a new law in Greece, which requires public institutes and NGOs to have a transparent dialogue with public agencies regarding the organization's procedures and protective measures to fulfil child rights, as well as their response to potential child safeguarding incidents.

SOS Children's Villages Greece has also participated in a domestic program called "Child Guarantee," through which they have been working with major partners such as the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and the Greek Institute of Child Health to contribute the organization's expertise in relation to the target group to inform deinstitutionalisation and child protection. Additionally, SOS Children's Villages Greece, along with six other member associations, has been part of the European project Trauma-Informed Practices, which has included close cooperation with Greek public authorities and institutions.

Child safeguarding trainings and assessments in Benin

At SOS Children's Villages Benin, every year, all staff receive training in child safeguarding and renew their commitment to the Child Protection Policy with their signature. New employees, associates and partners have to take a test that requires a passing score of 12/20. Before a new person is allowed contact with children and young people, the test is repeated as many times as necessary to achieve a satisfactory level of understanding of the Child Safeguarding Policy and associated documents.

The introduction of this new assessment in 2022 not only ensures that all new staff members are familiar with the child safeguarding policy but also helps identify topics that require further strengthening. The fact that very few people pass the test on the first attempt demonstrates the importance of the test in cementing knowledge on child safeguarding.

During this year, none of the individuals who sat and passed the test was involved in a recorded child safeguarding incident. It has also been noticeable that programme participants, staff and associates are living by a more pronounced child safeguarding culture than in previous years.

Conclusion and recommendations

With an increased focus by leadership and staff throughout the federation, there has never been a greater opportunity to strengthen child safeguarding in SOS Children's Villages. It needs to be understood that the commitments made require sufficient resources and a shift in organizational dynamics, changes to the way that reported incidents are followed up and monitored, and meaningful steps towards real accountability.

Child safeguarding, and safeguarding in general, needs to become more about transforming organizational culture. Compliance is just the bare minimum. Across the development sector, child safeguarding is often considered too narrowly. In the worst circumstances, the topic is perceived as threatening. Organizations including ours still encounter moments where the ability to keep delivering programmes for all participants and reputation are the main drivers for decisions and actions, instead of the human costs and human suffering that happens when there are child safeguarding failures.

Our projects to strengthen child safeguarding in recent years have yielded very promising results. We now need to build on these achievements and increase the scale and speed at which they are implemented globally. To do so, some of activities currently carried out through projects need to become part of the core activities. This requires responsive budgeting mechanisms that will help allocate sustainable funding and match the challenges member associations may be facing in meeting minimum child safeguarding requirements, such as applying a risk management approach in their ongoing work and having appropriate staffing levels in place.

The most important measure for our safeguarding work must be the way children, young people and adults experience the programmes they participate in. For the child safeguarding area, this means constantly and critically assessing whether we are doing enough so that children and young people are not harmed or exposed to any risk of harm.

The Global Child Safeguarding Network urges decision makers at all levels of the federation to incorporate the following actions into their plans and strategies.

Oversight and accountability

1. Monitor the quality of the overall safeguarding systems, instead of focusing on incident numbers and immediate response steps alone

1.1. Prioritize independent audits in child safeguarding for 2023 to improve the collection of qualitative data and inform organizational learning and improvement

- Make sure member associations carry out a child safeguarding audit in at least one programme location annually
- Make sure regional offices carry out child safeguarding audits in at least three member associations annually

1.2. Streamline safeguarding information management

- Make the Safeguarding Information Management System, which is expected to be rolled out in 2024, mandatory for all member associations and General Secretariat-run operations that are not required to use a state-mandated system and that have not developed their own
- Where another information management system is in place, require the use of the Safeguarding Information Management System to the extent necessary for data compatibility and the ability to produce national, regional and global reports

2. Increase accountability for misconduct

SOS Children's Villages made important steps in 2021 by acknowledging past child safeguarding failures and beginning implementation of an action plan to strengthen safeguarding across the federation. The Global

Child Safeguarding Network welcomes the increased attention and visibility that has raised the profile of this important work.

In order to make meaningful change, line managers at the local, national, regional and international level must ensure that staff members found responsible for child safeguarding incidents are held accountable for their actions, regardless of their position.

- Develop a formal framework that would explain how to deal with specific types of misconduct, so that those found responsible for abuse or other types of misconduct (including those enabling abuse) face proportionate and appropriate consequences
- Monitor consistent implementation of this framework

3. Invest more attention, time and resources into child safeguarding in SOS Children's Villages youth, education, health, emergency and family strengthening programmes

Prevention, planning and risk management

- 4. Ensure implementation of thorough background and reference checks for all staff, not only those providing direct care**
- 5. Ensure that all non-care staff receive basic child safeguarding training and that all care staff receive specialized child safeguarding training including training on trauma recovery and trauma-informed care**
- 6. Review all job descriptions and include each staff member's child safeguarding responsibilities**
- 7. Improve training and development of care staff**
- 8. Increase trainings on preventing and responding to peer-on-peer violence to more countries, such as the Applying Safe Behaviours programme**
- 9. Position child safeguarding as child and youth safeguarding**

Child safeguarding should be broadly understood as our responsibility to prevent harm not only to those strictly defined as children but also to the young people over 18 who started receiving support through various SOS Children's Villages programme as children and are still supported by our programmes after they have become adults. Calling on our duty to care for and protect children and young people, the Global Child Safeguarding Network urges the federation to make sure that young people over the age of 18 are explicitly included and protected under our child safeguarding framework and to clearly embed this requirement in the upcoming child safeguarding policy.

10. Ensure compliance with risk management requirements in every member association, especially risk assessment and analysis of the child protection context

- Explicitly clarify risk management requirements as binding for all member associations in the updated Child Safeguarding Policy
- Develop concerted efforts to ensure all member associations apply a consistent risk management approach
- Expand internal mechanisms to enforce compliance

11. Increase child and youth participation, especially in risk assessments

- In member associations and the General Secretariat, develop concerted measures to listen to children and young people's views and suggestions on strengthening child safeguarding and reflect their suggestions in the next year's plan
- To strengthen participation, involve children and young people in a meaningful way when identifying safeguarding risks and developing mitigating actions

12. Increase focus on mental health for children, young people and caregivers, especially on trauma recovery and trauma-informed care

Care practitioners may find themselves caring for several children or young people with different experiences of past trauma, including complex trauma. It is essential that the children and young people in our programmes, especially those affected by past trauma or child safeguarding incidents, are provided with mental health support. It is equally important that the care practitioners who look after them have a good understanding of what trauma is and how it can affect a child or young person.

Since care practitioners may have their own experiences of past trauma, which affect the way they relate to children and young people, the Global Child Safeguarding Network calls for increased attention to the important role that mental health can play in fostering and maintaining a safe environment in our programmes.

Staffing

13. Allocate resources for adequate staffing

- Assess current and required child safeguarding staffing in individual member associations and the General Secretariat, including the share of part- and full-time positions among national focal persons
- Secure long-term funding to cover child safeguarding needs in all member associations as part of core budgets

14. Strengthen child safeguarding investigative capacity

The Global Child Safeguarding Network recognizes the importance of high-quality investigations in providing a strong basis for important decisions about child safeguarding incidents.

Taking into consideration the strained internal resources of the global pool of child safeguarding investigators and the reliance on external service providers, the Global Child Safeguarding Network sees the need to strengthen the investigative area, in accordance with the recommendation provided by the Independent Special Commission.

- Secure dedicated resources to better support our investigators and increase the pool of professionals who are able to carry out high-quality investigations
- Provide staff members who serve as investigators in addition to their regular roles with a stand-in who can take over their daily tasks while they perform their duty

If you would like to report a child safeguarding concern connected to SOS Children's Villages, please do so through the relevant national child safeguarding focal point. Alternatively, you can report to the regional or international child safeguarding focal point, or via the whistleblower channel of SOS Children's Villages International <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/report-a-child-safety-concern>.

