

CHILD SAFEGUARDING ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020

Child Care and Safeguarding Team
Programme and Strategy International Competence
Centre



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
A loving home for every child



Name of artist unknown, a girl's drawing of flowers, Croatia.

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1 Introduction

Each year, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team at SOS Children's Villages International produces a report on the organisation's safeguarding activities, incidents and recommendations coming out of the past year. The report is intended to be helpful for both internal and external stakeholders.

The Child Safeguarding Annual Report provides information on the monitoring of and compliance with child safeguarding standards and related procedures in member associations of SOS Children's Villages. The report also includes an analysis of the child safeguarding incidents that have taken place in the past year involving children and young people under the care or support of SOS Children's Villages, including incidents involving staff members¹, associates, or volunteers of the organisation. Additionally, the report offers recommendations for the General Secretariat² (SOS Children's Villages International) and member associations (in the 136 countries and territories in which we have a presence) to consider in delivering programme improvements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the risk of being harmed for both the children in our care³ and the children living with their biological families⁴. Furthermore, it has presented a number of new safeguarding challenges in how we carry out our work as an organisation. This report reflects how we have acted quickly to adapt our safeguarding measures to provide support that is virtual, flexible and appropriate.

We made a number of recommendations in last year's Child Safeguarding Annual Report, and this report shows how we've made progress against them.

The learnings addressed in this report are strongly informed by both the ongoing work we do to evaluate and improve our safeguarding measures, as well as learnings being collected in the Independent Child Safeguarding Review (ICSR)⁵. The ICSR has progressed over the past year and continues to provide the organisation with important learnings that are informing our programmatic and safeguarding work.

Many of the actions described in this report demonstrate that we have made good progress, with concrete improvements in our programmes and the oversight of them. Nevertheless, there is still more work to do. The report provides recommendations for ensuring that we strengthen our programmes and safeguarding to address existing and potential gaps.

2 How to use this report

In the past, one of the primary purposes of this report has been to keep our colleagues informed throughout the SOS Children's Villages federation and to focus their attention on recommendations for improvement. However, we make it available publicly in hopes that a wide range of our stakeholders outside the organisation will also benefit. 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.

Colleagues within SOS Children's Villages 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 3.1) and the further recommendations for the future (section 7). **Managers and board members** should read the entire report – especially the incident analysis (section 5), lessons learned (section 6), and recommendations (section 7) – with an eye towards ensuring that safeguarding measures and resources are fit for purpose in their area of responsibility.

¹ There were 37,970 staff members employed by SOS Children's Villages in March 2020.

² See Glossary for an explanation of SOS Children's Villages governing bodies.

³ There were 65,800 children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages in 2019.

⁴ There were 395,000 children and their families supported by the SOS Children's Villages Family Strengthening programme in 2019.

⁵ In March 2017 the SOS Children's Village International Senate initiated the Independent Child Safeguarding Review (ICSR). The ICSR is proactively reviewing child safeguarding practices of the past and present in the organisation. SOS Children's Villages commissioned [Keeping Children Safe](#), a child safeguarding expert organisation, as the independent reviewer. The final ICSR Report will be available in 2021.

Child safeguarding is everybody's business, which means not just colleagues who are directly working with children and young people, but everybody within the organisation. We need to continually improve, and this includes ensuring that everyone knows their responsibilities and that all incidents are reported.

Alternative care providers and other experts in child safeguarding may find the whole of this report of interest, but especially section 6, which explains the lessons we have been learning through our routine safeguarding work, as well as through the Independent Child Safeguarding Review.

We are a learning organisation, constantly seeking to improve our safeguarding performance. We also want to share our learnings so that more children around the world are better protected.

Other civil sector organisations (charities, other Non-Governmental Organisations, etc.) may be interested in how we have developed our child safeguarding approach (Appendices) and the broader lessons we have learned recently (section 6). The entire civil sector is responding to increased regulatory pressure, which is reflected in the case study on "Regulatory interest in safeguarding" (section 3.3).

The children we support are those without, or at risk of losing, parental care, and we encounter a high child safeguarding risk in our work. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased those risks, and we are committed to being transparent about our challenges.

Institutional and corporate partners will have diverse interests, but the timeliness of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic in section 3.2 may be of particular interest. Note that the entire report is oriented towards implementing an open approach to dealing with risks and incidents, and this is typified in the case study of SOS UK's dealings with the UK Charity Commission (section 3.3), and the detailed incident analysis in section 5.

We are grateful for the support of our partners and we hope this report serves to strengthen the understanding of our child safeguarding approach.

Individuals who donate to SOS Children's Villages (including child sponsors) – may wish to focus on developments in 2019/2020, described in section 3. Please note also that the Appendices (section 9) include background information on our child safeguarding approach that does not change year-to-year, so this may be a useful reference point.

We are the primary caregiver for children around the world and our greatest responsibility is to safeguard them from harm.

If you are ...	Have a look at these sections...
Colleague within SOS Children's Villages	3, 4, 6, 7
Manager or board member of an SOS Children's Villages member association	All
Alternative care provider or other expert in child safeguarding	All, but especially 6
Other civil sector organisation	3, 4, 5, 6, 9
Institutional donor or corporate partner	3, 4, 7, 9
Individual donor	3, 7, 9

One final piece of guidance is that we advise against using this report to compare the numbers of incidents provided in section 5 with those reported last year. As part of our safeguarding journey of continual improvement, we are fostering an environment in which more people feel willing and able to raise concerns and report incidents. Accordingly, an increase in the number of reported and even confirmed incidents can be an indication of improved reporting and responding procedures and of heightened awareness of child safeguarding.

3 Progress and developments in 2019/2020

3.1 Recent progress

In the 2018/2019 Child Safeguarding Annual Report, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team made a number of recommendations of priorities and changes for the period of 2020 – 2022. In the past year, the organisation has addressed these recommendations in a number of ways. They continue to be salient in our child safeguarding improvements.

In 2018/2019 the focus of our recommendations were:

- Improve working conditions and increase capacity building of child and youth care professionals.
- Continue trainings on child safeguarding roles and responsibilities for line managers, national boards and other SOS staff members across all functions and teams, with an increased focus on risk management.
- Align our approaches, procedures and structures for managing matters relating to safeguarding, integrity, and compliance.
- Improve procedures, support, monitoring and oversight, specifically in countries and programmes where there is a higher safeguarding risk profile.
- Ensure the available human and financial resources in regional offices is proportionate to the child safeguarding risks in the member associations they support.
- Strengthen child safeguarding and prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse of young people in our youth programmes, as well as children, young people and vulnerable adults in family strengthening programmes and emergency response programmes.
- Update the Child Protection Policy⁶ and related child safeguarding guidelines to reflect the learnings from the ongoing Independent Child Safeguarding Review process, as well as from our internal information gathering.

In 2019/2020 some of the care and child safeguarding activities were:

Supporting child and youth care professionals through guidance

In January 2020, two guidance documents were published to support child and youth care professionals in providing quality care and support to children and young people:

- **The SOS Parent User Guide**, outlining the professional requirements of SOS parents.
- **The Youth Development User Guide**, providing guidance on caring for, working with, and supporting young people.

Child safeguarding investigation training

In 2019/2020 these were held:

- Trainings in September 2019 with child safeguarding practitioners, HR staff and line managers from the International Office, Regional Office CEE/CIS and member associations in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Western, Central and Northern Africa. Some participants became certified investigators.
- Trainings in October and December 2019 with staff from member associations in Western, Central and Northern Africa and Latin America.

Supporting child and youth care professionals through capacity building

At the end of 2019 and start of 2020, a number of capacity building sessions were held.

- Trauma-informed care trainings with child and youth care professionals and children and young people in Benin, Dominican Republic, Iraq, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Palestine, Serbia, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe.
- Positive discipline and positive parenting trainings in Mexico, Bolivia, and Nicaragua.
- Trainings on protective behaviours, conflict prevention and trauma-informed care were delivered to more than 6,500 children, young people and child and youth care professionals in five member associations in CEE/CIS.

⁶ Available on our website here: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/safeguard-children>

Improving assessment procedures and addressing risks

In the last five years the number of member associations (MAs) carrying out risk assessments has increased.

2016: 15% of MAs

2017: 42% of MAs

2018: 52% of MAs

In 2019 the percentage dropped slightly to 44%, a decrease that may be a result of new detailed guidelines on risk assessments (introduced in mid-2019). Nevertheless, the trend towards an increase in risk assessments shows positive steps in the organisation moving away from a reactive approach and towards a preventative approach to child safeguarding risk management.

E-learning on child safeguarding

Reporting and Responding

Since July 2017, an e-learning course on reporting and responding procedures has been available to all staff members. By mid-March 2020, 25% of all staff had passed and 10,294 participants from 131 countries had enrolled in the course.

Investigations

In October 2019, an e-learning course on child safeguarding investigations was launched. By July 2020, 397 staff members from 61 countries, in all 7 regions, enrolled and 281 completed the course.

3.2 Child safeguarding during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken by governments to respond to this unprecedented situation have impacted millions of children and young people all over the world. Some have lost their parents or other caregivers. Many families face a significant decrease in their income, and as a result, caregivers are not able to provide sufficient food, ensure medical care and cover other needs of their children. Governments announced lockdowns, and many schools were temporarily closed. Closed schools and limited virtual learning opportunities have led to a situation where many children and young people, particularly those living in vulnerable environments, have been deprived of their education. Additionally, children and young people who have lost, or are at risk of losing, parental care are at a higher risk of experiencing abuse and violence, with limited possibilities of receiving direct support. Services that monitor and support vulnerable families, children and young people – such as those provided by child and youth care professionals, social workers or teachers – have been unable to access the families or individuals, and/or their services were stopped as a result of the pandemic. Such situations have a major psychological impact on children, young people and their families, as well as increased challenges and strain on child protection, safeguarding and care.

Child safeguarding risk assessments, used to identify risks and inform mitigation actions, have become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. The new reality of social distancing, lockdowns, families facing poverty, and loss of jobs has further increased existing risks such as domestic violence. Additionally, there are new risks that must be considered, such as children and young people being exposed to inappropriate content and cyberbullying in their increased use of virtual technology. These and numerous other risks are present in alternative care settings, and risk assessments help address and prevent them. To assist in this effort, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team drafted a new risk assessment tool. It identifies major child safeguarding risks which emerged as a consequence of the pandemic and aids member associations in developing mitigation plans that address these risks.

Member associations used the risk assessment tool to conduct thorough assessments of the situation and to create action plans to mitigate risks. According to the regional office for Asia, this exercise was particularly helpful in terms of evaluating child safeguarding risks at individual programme locations. Risks identified included an increase in child vulnerability, specifically due to tension and conflict between children and young people, and an increase in children and young people experiencing emotional and psychological difficulties, which arose from a lack of socialising and the inability to attend school. As a result of caregivers being unable to deal with challenging situations in the household and unable to receive necessary support from other staff, there is an increased risk of their using abusive or inappropriate disciplinary measures. Additionally, there is a risk that young people and caregivers face challenges in reporting child safeguarding concerns. These challenges can arise from closures of support services, lack of access to a phone, poor or no internet connection, or being unable to receive support from child and youth care professionals.

Caregivers and child and youth care professionals have been trained to mitigate these risks. Topics include positive parenting skills in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and emotional expression activities. Implementation of the action plans is ongoing, and active efforts are helping to address the increased risk of child safeguarding incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In programmes around the world, SOS Children's Villages has put in place different **measures to address the situation**. These measures have included:

- Strict hygienic requirements to minimise the risk of spreading the virus
- Group online sessions for emotional support for both children and caregivers
- Online or phone counselling to support children in times of crisis
- Alternative remote channels to report concerns (through telephone calls, SMS, online communication platforms)
- Additional confidential reporting/suggestion boxes near their homes that are easily accessible.

Throughout member associations, counsellors are working virtually and by phone with caregivers, child and youth care professionals, caregivers, and children and young people, teaching relaxation exercises and providing emotional support and guidance on managing fear and anxiety. Messaging groups and virtual meetings have been created for sharing information on COVID-19 and safety precautions. Additionally, caregivers, children and young people have been shown the alternative remote reporting channels and other ways that they can reach out for support. A strong focus has been placed on maintaining a safe and stable environment for children and young people, promoting recreational and creative activities and providing meeting spaces where they can feel safe to express their emotions and concerns and to ask questions. To aid the caregivers in implementing these measures, the local child safeguarding teams and support networks provide regular virtual meetings to monitor and support.

Another part of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic is **to support child and youth care professionals and caregivers** so they can respond adequately to the new social reality and support the children and young people they take care of. This includes providing counselling, guidance and emotional support to the child and youth care professionals, providing them clear guidance on how to deal with the risks associated with the pandemic in our programmes.

Child safeguarding investigations during COVID-19

In accordance with the internal procedures on safeguarding investigations⁷, it is required to conduct interviews face-to-face. Only in exceptional cases are interviews conducted virtually. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictive measures, it is not always possible to conduct safeguarding investigations in accordance with the standard procedures. This applies both to investigations commissioned by member associations and by the General Secretariat.

In response to the situation, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team, in cooperation with the global child safeguarding network and the global pool of safeguarding investigators, developed a how-to guide⁸ on conducting virtual investigative interviews. The document complements the previously existing guide⁹ on conducting safeguarding investigations. The new document has been translated to French, Russian and Spanish and it has been shared with all member associations.

⁷ Internal procedures on safeguarding investigations can be found in the SOS Children's Villages child safeguarding investigations policy document, providing guidance for all member associations on conducting child safeguarding investigations.

⁸ See Appendix 2 for a description of the guide on conducting virtual investigative interviews.

⁹ See Appendix 2 for a description of the guide on conducting safeguarding investigations.

3.3 Regulatory interest in safeguarding

In recent years, there has been increasing scrutiny of INGOs with regards to how they ensure that they do no harm to the children who they are meant to support. External regulatory bodies are becoming more interested and involved in organisations' safeguarding practices. Requests for information on safeguarding incidents, operations and responses are increasing in frequency and detail. This increased scrutiny not only calls for further transparency in SOS Children's Villages' work but also calls for the strengthening of safeguarding operations, responses and communications. It is crucial that SOS Children's Villages is able to show how it meets the new and higher standards in child safeguarding and responds professionally and openly to regulatory body enquiries. Doing so puts additional resource demands on our teams, especially staff with child safeguarding responsibilities. Responding to information requests and meeting reporting requirements should not come at the expense of actual child safeguarding work.

In November 2019, SOS Children's Villages UK experienced a detailed exchange with an external regulatory body. Following UK-required reporting guidelines, SOS UK reported to the UK Charity Commission findings from a safeguarding incident investigation in one of the international programmes it funds. In response, the Charity Commission requested answers to a long list of probing questions concerning the incidents, responses, accountability and specifically the recruitment screening steps that were carried out for the involved staff. Over a period of two months, SOS UK worked with the regional office and location staff to answer the Charity Commission's questions. During this process, one question stood out above all others as a strong cause for concern, "Was the staff member in question suitably checked prior to being employed?" The answer to this question was no; it was identified that pre-employment background and reference checks had not been carried out. The individuals started their employment before the mandatory pre-employment checks were introduced, as is now standard in SOS Children's Villages. It was clear, however, that regardless of the required minimum standards at the time, the failures in the recruitment process increased the safeguarding risks to the children in that location.

While this remains an ongoing discussion with the Charity Commission, SOS UK's experience has highlighted several issues and areas necessary for consideration. A key learning from this experience is the importance of a safe recruitment process. A crucial objective of child safeguarding is ensuring that our staff do not represent a risk to the children that we support. We are unable to say that we provide a safe environment for the children in our care if we are not informed on the staff we are hiring. A fundamental step in ensuring safe recruitment is the vetting of candidates through reference and criminal record checks. These checks are crucial in the prevention of child abuse and other safeguarding incidents and are part of our standard recruitment procedures. Since 2008, the Child Protection Policy has provided key basic requirements regarding Human Resources procedures, and it is important that all member associations assess their adherence to these minimum requirements. The SOS Children's Villages Human Resources Manual outlines that reference and criminal record checks are a basic required step in the recruitment processes. It is crucial that member associations consistently assess and maintain adherence to these minimum requirements. By carrying out reference and criminal record checks, we as an organisation are better able to say that we have exercised due diligence in ensuring a safe recruitment process.

As an organisation, we must be prepared for questions and scrutiny from governmental bodies and institutional donors. SOS UK's experience is not an isolated incident of external questioning. To ensure that we are able to provide regulatory bodies with sufficient answers, we must be rigorous in the steps we take to document a safe recruitment processes and strong child safeguarding measures. Importantly, we must use external questions and checks as a reminder that we have our own minimum quality, record keeping, and safeguarding requirements that we have committed to, to ensure that the children in our care are safe.

4 Annual child safeguarding survey 2019

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

Putting policy into practice	Organising staff	Planning	Implementing	Monitoring and review
A safe environment is created for children and young people in SOS programmes.	Capacity building is carried out, and roles and responsibilities of co-workers 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.	Learning and monitoring is done on day-to-day child safeguarding work and incidents, and oversight ensured.

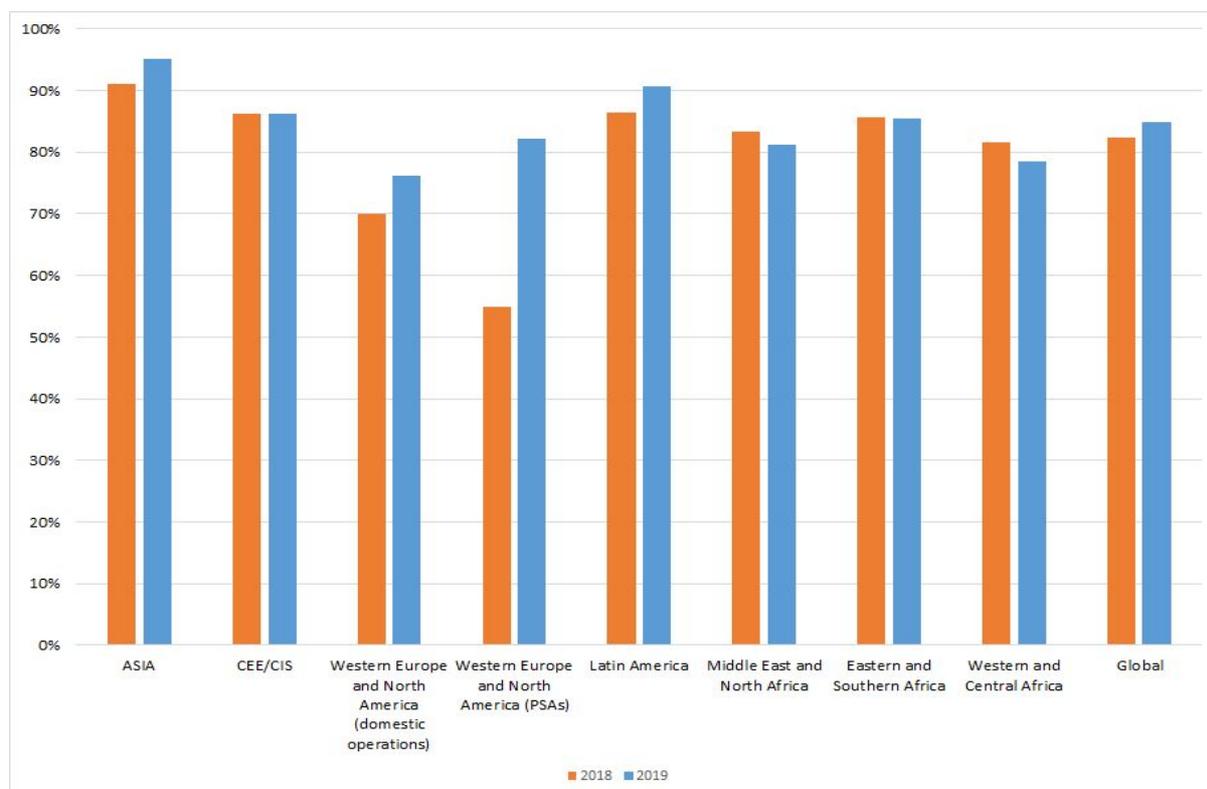
In total, 135 member associations completed the 2019 child safeguarding annual survey. Eight Promoting and Supporting Associations (our fundraising associations in Europe and North America) completed the reduced survey¹⁰; one response fewer than in 2018. One hundred and twenty-seven member associations answered the full survey; the same as in 2018. The following member associations and organisations affiliated to SOS Children's Villages have not completed the survey: Aide à l'Enfance du Vietnam, Australia, China, Japan, Shreyas Balgram, South Korea, Taiwan, Tibetan Children's Villages, Tibetan Homes Foundation and USA.

SOS Children's Villages global child safeguarding compliance level increased from 82.6% in 2018 to 83.57% in 2019. While the overall level of compliance was already relatively high, there were only marginal improvements from 2018 to 2019.

Eleven member associations reported full compliance: Albania, Alsace-France, Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Germany¹¹, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uganda – five member associations more than in 2018.

¹⁰ Without questions relating to programmes as they do not have domestic programmes.

¹¹ SOS Kinderdorf e.V.

Chart 1: Child safeguarding compliance of member associations per region – 2018 and 2019

Regional aggregation shows that most member associations have slightly increased or remained on the previous years' levels of compliance. Slight decreases can be observed in member associations of the former Middle East and North African and the West and Central African Region¹².

Among the five focus areas of the child safeguarding annual survey, the highest global compliance was observed in the focus area of *Implementing* (88.22%), while challenges remain in the area of *Planning* (71.07%). The survey findings confirm that in member associations in Western Europe and North America, despite the positive progress achieved in the past year, there is a need to pay particular attention to the implementation and further improvement of child safeguarding procedures and policies. In that region, the overall compliance level is only 76.77% in member associations with domestic operations and 74.69% in member associations without domestic operations.

It is important to keep in mind that the results of the child safeguarding annual survey are outcomes of a self-assessment. Given known child safeguarding challenges in some member associations, it is important that we also conduct regular and independent child safeguarding audits.

5 Child safeguarding incidents

A child safeguarding incident is defined as a situation when a child is harmed as a result of action (or lack thereof) of SOS Children's Villages' staff, associates and/or operations. A child safeguarding incident may involve multiple perpetrators and/or multiple victims.

When it comes to child safeguarding incident management, it is important to respond appropriately, provide the right kind of support to victims/survivors, and mitigate risks so that the likelihood of similar abuse happening in future is reduced. Guided by this principle, SOS Children's Villages recently

¹² In 2020, North African member associations joined the Western and Central Africa Region, and member associations from the Middle East joined the CEE/CIS region.

introduced the child safeguarding incident categories of ***inappropriate*** and ***abusive*** behaviour for adult-to-child incidents, and ***problematic*** and ***abusive*** behaviour for child-to-child incidents.

Adult-to-child incidents

A situation is considered as **inappropriate behaviour** if actions by staff including child and youth care professionals are not as expected and not in line with the scope of practice, work plan or job description. This is often a problem of too much or too little in the way that a situation with a child or a young person is responded to. For example, these are instances where child and youth care professionals respond in anger that leads to inappropriate punishments, rules or demands. Inappropriate behaviours are potentially harmful.

Actions or inactions of the adult or child and youth care professional are classified as **abusive behaviour** if they represent major boundary violations and are harmful and abusive as per the definitions of physical, sexual, emotional abuse, negligent behaviour or exploitation in the Child Protection Policy.

Child-to-child incidents

Problematic behaviours may be self-focused and therefore only create risk for the young person engaging in the behaviour, e.g., compulsive masturbation or self-harm behaviours such as cutting. The behaviours may also be interpersonal in that they create risks for others as well as the person carrying out the behaviour. These behaviours are often planned and involve a degree of secrecy. Usually, the intention is not to harm and there is no power imbalance between those involved.

Abusive behaviours may be similar to non-abusive problematic behaviours, but they are distinguished as harmful and abusive because they include an intention to cause harm and there is a clear power imbalance between the children involved. The actions are initiated by a more dominant child towards a more vulnerable child.

5.1 Child safeguarding incidents analysis

The majority of reported and confirmed incidents relate to inappropriate or problematic behaviour. Such incidents are best illustrated with the following example:

- An SOS parent and teenager argue about house rules over dinner. In the process, the caregiver loses her temper, shouts and aggressively tries to remove the teenager's headphones. In the process she unintentionally scratches the teenager's neck. The subsequent assessment establishes that there is a healthy bond between the teenager and caregiver. The caregiver acknowledges that she overreacted, and the teenager admits to have broken a standing house rule. Both agree to work on how to react in such situations in future.

When such an incident happens in an alternative care setting, the child and youth care worker or the staff member who becomes aware of the incident is required to report it via the appropriate channel (for example, inform their supervisor, and/or review as part of the regular multidisciplinary care team). The incident should also inform prevention interventions to avoid it escalating into major boundary violations that do have a detrimental impact on children's wellbeing and development.

In the Child Safeguarding Annual Report, we report statistics only on confirmed abusive behaviours. We do *not* include inappropriate (adult-to-child) or problematic (child-to-child) incidents, or allegations that are not later confirmed.

In 2019, a total of 617 child safeguarding incidents of abusive behaviours were reported and later confirmed in SOS Children's Villages programmes. Of those, 432 were confirmed adult-to-child incidents, and 185 were confirmed child-to-child incidents. The total represented a global increase by nearly 5% over 2018, with the situation varying significantly at regional level. Confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours involved 781 children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages, approximately 1% of the children and young people in alternative care of SOS Children's Villages.

However, it should be noted that our past experience – as well as the experience of other child care organisations – shows that there is a risk that not all child safeguarding incidents are reported.

Perpetrators of the incidents of abusive behaviours can be SOS Children's Villages staff, members of the family of origin, external adults, children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages, and also children and young people not in SOS Children's Villages programmes. In this analysis, we focus on two categories of perpetrators that we as an organisation are directly liable for:

- Staff (including SOS parents and other child and youth care professionals)
- Children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages

5.1.1 Staff-to-child incidents of abusive behaviour

In 2019, a total of 328 staff members¹³, 0.9% of the SOS Children's Villages staff worldwide, were reported and later confirmed as perpetrators of incidents of abusive behaviour in SOS Children's Villages programmes. This represents an increase of seven percent compared to 2018.

Table 1: Staff as perpetrators of incidents of abusive behaviour reported and later confirmed in 2019

Region	Staff as perpetrators
Asia	23
Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States	23
Western Europe and North America	24
Latin America and the Caribbean	144
Middle East and North Africa	36
Eastern and Southern Africa	30
Western and Central Africa	48
Total	328

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 2019 occurred in alternative care settings.

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

Programme setting	No. of perpetrators	% of total
SOS families or other alternative care settings	287	87.5%
Youth programmes	22	6.7%
Family strengthening	6	1.8%
Education	12	3.7%
Health	0	0%
Emergency Response	1	0.3%
Total	328	100%

When looking at the number of confirmed incidents in SOS families in Table 2, it is important to keep in mind that SOS families are a family-like alternative care setting in which children are cared for 24 hours per day, seven days a week. Whilst this situation increases the safeguarding risk profile, it also enables child and youth care professionals and support staff to immediately identify, report, respond to and monitor child safeguarding concerns, and it enables them to focus on prevention and to minimise harm.

¹³ As of March 2020, 37,970 staff members are employed in SOS Children's Villages.

A higher number of child safeguarding incidents in SOS families therefore does not necessarily reflect on the quality of care offered in SOS families.

During 2019, a total of 278 individual staff members were involved in abusive behaviour incidents towards children. However, as some staff members were involved in multiple incidents, and some incidents involved more than one perpetrator, we recorded a total of 328 staff perpetrators, as Table 3 illustrates. Approximately half of these incidents were physical abuse, which mostly involved acts of corporal punishment by child and youth care professionals. The next largest group are 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 is 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 four percent, or 12 staff members as perpetrators, reported and confirmed in 2019. Finally, there were six 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	% of total
Physical abuse	150	45.7%
Neglect & negligent treatment	95	29%
Emotional abuse	65	19.8%
Sexual coercion and abuse	12	3.7%
Violation of privacy	6	1.8%
Total	328	100%

Table 4 illustrates that out of the 328 staff involved as perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours, 78% of the incidents involved SOS parents and SOS family assistants (256), i.e., staff providing direct care to children and young people in SOS Children's Villages' programmes. The most common form of abuse committed by SOS parents was physical abuse (49% or 125 perpetrators) followed by neglect and negligent treatment (30% or 78 perpetrators), emotional abuse (17% or 43 perpetrators) and sexual coercion and abuse (2% or 4 perpetrators).

The category of "other staff" includes individuals working in youth care, administrative, maintenance, security and other support functions, as well as staff at SOS Children's Villages schools and medical centres. In 2019, there were 72 of these staff involved as perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours. In comparison with SOS parents, we can see a significantly higher ratio of incidents of sexual coercion and abuse involved this category of "other staff" (see table below).

Table 4: Number of staff perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours per type of staff

Type of abuse	No. of perpetrators	
	SOS parents, family assistants	Other staff
Physical abuse	125	25
Neglect & negligent treatment	78	17
Emotional abuse	43	22
Sexual coercion and abuse	4	8
Violation of privacy	6	0
Total	256	72

In 2019, a total of 455 children¹⁴ were abused by staff in incidents of abusive behaviour. This represents a decrease by 20% compared to 2018. Table 5 illustrates that when SOS parents and family assistants were confirmed as the perpetrators of these abusive behaviour incidents, the predominant form of abuse was physical abuse (155 children or 43% of the victims) followed by neglect and negligent treatment (112 children or 31%). As explained above, incidents of physical abuse mainly related to different forms of corporal punishment. Neglect and negligent treatment can be mainly interpreted as incidents where children and young people were left unsupervised or their health issues did not receive the necessary attention from their SOS parents and family assistants. Four children were victim of sexual coercion and abuse incidents by SOS parents or family assistants.

In cases of children abused by other staff, we can see significantly higher ratio of incidents of sexual coercion and abuse (such incidents representing 12%, or eleven children, of the total victims of “other staff” compared to 1%, or four children, in for SOS parents and family assistants; see Table 5 below). This confirms the importance of paying further attention to preventive measures such as thorough background checks and reference checks during the recruitment process for all staff, not only those staff members who have direct and close contact with children.

Table 5: Number of children abused by staff in confirmed incidents of abusive behavior

Type of abuse \ Type of perpetrator	SOS parents, family assistants	Other staff
Physical abuse	155	29
Neglect & negligent treatment	112	24
Emotional abuse	79	30
Sexual coercion and abuse	4	11
Violation of privacy	11	0
Total	361	94

5.1.2 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. During 2019, 12 staff globally were reported and confirmed as perpetrators of child sexual coercion and abuse. Fifteen children were confirmed as victims in these incidents. As a direct consequence, all 12 staff members were dismissed.

Eight of the allegations were defined as criminal acts in the respective countries. Six of those were reported to police or prosecuting authorities. In one incident the family of origin preferred not to report the incident to the police. In one case, the victim was already above the age of 18 and did not agree with reporting the incident to the police.

Table 6 further breaks down the type of sexual coercion and abuse incidents involving staff perpetrators that were reported and confirmed in 2019.

¹⁴ A total of 65,800 children and young people in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages in 2019 and a total of 395,000 of children and their families supported by SOS Children's Villages Family Strengthening Programme in 2019.

Table 6: 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	0	0
Recording of inappropriate and/or sexually degrading imagery of children / young people	0	0
Exposing children/youth to pornography	0	0
Attempted rape	1	1
Rape	1	1
Harassment / inappropriate touching	6	9
Child/Young person manipulated and/or coerced into sexual acts ¹⁵	4	4
Total	12	15

Some important learnings can be drawn from these incidents:

- 1) Staff who work directly with children were the perpetrators in four incidents.
- 2) There were eight staff who worked in non-care services and were involved as perpetrators. They held senior management, social worker, teacher, or driver positions.
- 3) In total, ten men (three social workers, three teachers, two caregivers, one Children's Village director, and one driver), and two women (caregivers) were involved as perpetrators.

It must be noted that – as is the case with child safeguarding, corruption or other misconduct incidents in any organisation, country or context – there is a risk of underreporting. Underreporting 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.¹⁶

5.1.3 Child-to-child incidents of abusive behaviour

Globally in 2019, a total of 199 children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages were confirmed to have displayed abusive behaviour towards other children or young people. This represents an increase of 55% compared to 2018.

Disaggregated by regions, Table 7 shows that almost half of the children and young people who displayed abusive behaviour were in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. This is the continuation of a past trend, and it is a result of the specific attention paid by the member associations in that region to the issue of child-to-child abuse.

The overall increase in the number of confirmed incidents where children and young people displayed abusive behaviour towards other children shows the need for further preventative efforts. This should include educating children and young people on the topics of safety and personal boundaries, protection of themselves and their peers and why certain behaviour cannot be tolerated and may be considered harmful or even abusive. At the same time, it is important to train child and youth care professionals so that they are able to prevent, identify and respond appropriately to such behaviour when it occurs.

¹⁵ 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 protections against sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse. 2020.*

¹⁶ International Development Committee. 2018. Sexual abuse and exploitation in the aid sector, p. 33

In 2019, a total of 147 individual children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages were involved in child-to-child incidents of abusive behaviours. However, some of these children and young people were involved in multiple incidents, and these were recorded separately, as reflected in Table 7.

Table 7: Children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages programmes who displayed abusive behaviours in 2019 (confirmed incidents)

Region	Children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages who displayed abusive behaviours
Asia	8
Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States	12
Europe and North America	29
Latin America and the Caribbean	90
Middle East and North Africa	20
Eastern and Southern Africa	22
Western and Central Africa	18
Total	199

Approximately 63% of these, or 126 children and young people, were involved in incidents of physical abuse, which mostly involved acts of fighting and bullying. See Table 8. In some cases, children and young people physically abused other children or young people in their SOS families on behalf of their SOS parents, who directed them to discipline the children.

It must be noted that 60 children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages programmes displayed abusive behaviours in incidents of sexual coercion and abuse. These incidents ranged from inappropriate touching to rape. For the future it is vital to pay particular attention to this issue and implement specific preventive measures.

Table 8: Number of children and young people who displayed abusive behaviour in 2019 (confirmed incidents)

Type of abuse	Children and young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages who carried out abusive behaviours	% of total
Physical abuse	126	63%
Emotional abuse	13	7%
Sexual coercion and abuse	60	30%
Violation of privacy	0	0%
Total	199	100%

In 2019, a total of 211 children were abused by other children and young people who were in direct care of SOS Children's Villages. This represents an increase by 65% compared to 2018.

Focusing specifically on sexual coercion and abuse incidents in **youth care programmes** (both adult-to-child and child-to-child), we can see that in 2019 they represented 40% (or 17 incidents) of all types of incidents in these programmes. This figure is substantially lower in SOS families and other alternative care programmes, where sexual coercion and abuse incidents represented 27% (or 150 incidents) of all incidents confirmed in these programmes in 2019. While in absolute numbers, the incidents occurring in SOS families could give larger cause of concern, the higher likelihood of incidents in youth care programmes underscores the need to focus on prevention and awareness raising with young people in these programmes. This includes coaching on sexual and reproductive health, healthy relationships, self-protection, and more. At the same time, it is important to address

issues of power imbalances between staff and young people and situations where young staff members and young people enter a relationship with each other, disregarding the existing power imbalance.

5.1.4 Deaths

Table 9 illustrates the number of death incidents of children in direct care reported globally during 2019. Sadly, in comparison to the previous year there is a 23% increase in the number of deaths, from 26 to 32. Of these, there were nine more deaths as a result of illness in comparison to the previous year. No staff member was responsible for any of the deaths.

There is one fewer death as a result of suicide in comparison to the previous year. One suicide was registered in Asia and one in the Western and Central Africa region.

One child tragically died as a result of neglect in the family of origin while in the process of being admitted to SOS Children's Villages. The cause of death was severe malnutrition.

Regrettably, there were two incidents of death as a result of murder. There was also one incident of death as a result of manslaughter.

Table 9: Number of death incidents reported in 2019

Cause of the death incident	SOS family or other alternative care setting	Youth programme
Illness	12	7
Malnutrition	1	0
Drowning	1	2
Suicide	2	0
Accident	3	1
Manslaughter	1	0
Murder	1	1
Total	21	11

5.1.5 Child safeguarding incidents in which the General Secretariat was involved

This category includes incidents monitored or managed by the General Secretariat (SOS Children's Villages International). In 2019, a total of 26 incidents were reported directly to the General Secretariat, requiring it to assume a monitoring or direct management role. Categorised by the nature of the incident, Table 10 shows that approximately one third of these incidents were related to general child safeguarding and care quality concerns. This further highlights the need to continuously improve the quality of the SOS Children's Villages programmes. We have seen that when the overall quality of programme work declines, it increases child safeguarding risks. The incidents escalated to the General Secretariat in 2019 were mainly related to lack of capacity building for child and youth care professionals and other staff, lack of support provided to child and youth care professionals, and lack of national management monitoring and follow up on identified gaps and challenges.

Table 10: Child safeguarding cases in which the General Secretariat was involved in 2019

Nature of the incident	No. of incidents	% of total
General child safeguarding and care quality concerns	9	34.5%
Sexual coercion and abuse	9	34.5%
Physical abuse	7	27%
Emotional abuse	1	4%
Total	26	100%

6 Lessons learned in child safeguarding

We are committed to being a learning organisation and to continually improving our child safeguarding. This ongoing process has been aided by the Independent Child Safeguarding Review, as well as yearly analysis of reported incidents. Here, we take the opportunity to summarise some of the lessons learned from recent years. When we look externally we see similar trends in the increased focus and resources being committed to ensure safe environments for children. We encourage our member associations to consider how the lessons can be used to improve child safeguarding in our programmes.

6.1 Lessons from incident analysis

The child safeguarding annual survey 2019 shows a slight increase in the number of reported and later confirmed child safeguarding incidents. However, it is important to keep in mind that the experience shared across the child care sector confirms that the number of child safeguarding incidents are usually under-reported. Under-reporting results from various reasons such as victims being afraid of speaking out because of possible negative consequences (such as threats from the perpetrators, shame, etc.), fear of not being taken seriously, weak or non-existent national laws on different forms of abuse, lack of confidence or trust in the police and other statutory authorities, and more. Additionally, the influence of socio-economic, religious, cultural and traditional practices on social structures and on how abuse is understood should not be underestimated. It is therefore important to continue to raise awareness and focus on prevention, while ensuring accessible and age-appropriate whistleblowing mechanisms so that the organisation is able to respond to reported concerns and allegations.

The most common form of abuse reported in SOS families in 2019 was physical abuse, specifically corporal punishment and other forms of inappropriate disciplining methods. This remains a problem and requires concerted efforts within the General Secretariat and member association to address. There are already good practice examples of trainings and capacity building for child and youth care professionals and other staff to help them implement positive parenting, protective behaviours and more, and this good practice needs to be spread more widely.

The child safeguarding annual survey 2019 also shows us that there was a very small number of incidents related to violation of children's privacy, and it is assumed that these incidents may be severely under-reported. It raises the question as to what extent the right of privacy of children and young people is understood and taken seriously.

6.2 Programme quality¹⁷ reduces child safeguarding risks

An important learning is just how closely programme quality and child safeguarding are connected. When the quality of care that a child receives is low, there is a higher risk that the child is harmed. Conversely, child safeguarding incidents are often an indication of severe gaps in the quality of the programme. When a child is harmed and a child safeguarding incident is reported, it is critical that the responsible staff members respond to the incident in line with the relevant policies and procedures and they ensure that the child receives adequate support. It is also necessary that programme quality gaps

¹⁷ Organisational policies and guidance setting the foundation and minimum requirements for quality care and prevention of harm include: SOS Care Promise, Child Protection Policy, youth development and leaving care guidance, as well as trainings on trauma-informed care, positive parenting and protective behaviours.

that contributed to the incident occurring in the first place are addressed so that the risk of a similar incident happening again is reduced. It is crucial that equal opportunities for educational growth, consistent care, basic necessities and emotional support are provided for all children and young people in our care and those who we support. Important for providing equal opportunities for growth is the integration into the surrounding communities as well as adequate support and training for caregivers. To ensure these aspects of care and programme quality are provided, sufficient oversight and monitoring of programmes is necessary.

6.3 Child safeguarding responsibilities must be enforced

Safeguarding responsibilities must be sufficiently understood and implemented at all levels. An important learning is understanding the close relationship between our ability to safeguard children and the necessity for managers and leaders to ensure that the response and follow-up to incidents is in line with organisational procedures. Taking responsibility and ensuring accountability helps victims/survivors find closure and healing, helps staff on the ground better deal with the consequences of an abuse incident, has a deterring effect on other perpetrators, and overall reduces the risk of similar child safeguarding incidents or misconduct occurring in future. Key aspects of an appropriate response include:

- An impartial investigation taking place without delays, interference or conflict of interest
- Full cooperation with the relevant authorities
- Confirmed allegations are responded to in a timely manner
- Victims/survivors receive adequate support and access to justice
- Appropriate disciplinary action is taken against perpetrators and those accountable
- Possible underlying governance, management and programme quality issues are addressed.

However, it remains a significant challenge to ensure the rigorous and consistent application of these necessary and minimum guidelines and responses across the federation. It is clear that *all* incidents, whether alleged or confirmed, need to be taken seriously and followed up according to the existing procedures and at appropriate levels within the organisation. Conflicts of interest must be managed, incidents must be reported to the relevant authorities as required per law, and management and boards at all levels of the organisation must play their part in ensuring that responses to cases are adequate and compliant with the law and internal procedures. Promised actions must be followed through.

6.4 Victims/survivors must be at the centre of our response

A victim/survivor-centred approach cannot be put into action through a single policy, department, team or member association. Applying an approach that places victims/survivors at the centre of our work must be addressed in all aspects of our operations, responses and communications. Through the development of our safeguarding work and the strengthening and development of our programmes, we have made and continue to make active strides to employ a victim/survivor-centred approach. This approach must prioritize the needs, rights, privacy and concerns of the victim/survivor in any response. The learnings have shown us that victims/survivors were not always taken seriously or protected and often experienced victim-blaming, questioning of their credibility, and obstacles in their pursuit of justice. Information from the past years has shown us that safeguarding allegations and complaints are not always adequately reported to the authorities, and the organisational response has not always included psychosocial or material support, with recognition of the victims/survivors experiences often missing or downplayed. As an organisation, we must reflect on incidents we are confronted with, current practices, procedures and approaches and further define what it means to place victims/survivors at the centre of our response. We then need to employ a victim/survivor-centred approach in all our work.

6.5 Child safeguarding risks must inform our work

A clear learning that can impact all aspects of child safeguarding work is that failures to adequately identify child protection and safeguarding risks can result in an increased likelihood of child safeguarding incidents. A key component of our approach is identifying, managing and mitigating safeguarding risks. The learnings have identified that children, young people and staff in our programmes are more vulnerable and at risk in regions and countries that have ineffective national child protection systems, inconclusive child protection laws and weak law enforcement, political and socio-economic instability and security threats. These factors fall into the broad category of “child protection” (*not* “safeguarding”) risks. (See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the difference between “child safeguarding” and “child protection”.) The learnings also show that child *protection* risks, if they are not fully taken into account,

increase the child *safeguarding* risks in programmes. Although we have both risk management and assessment measures in place, we need to improve and strengthen our safeguarding risk management across the federation. Our operations and programmatic work must sufficiently take into account the broader child protection risks prevalent in the country or location and understand how these factors link to child safeguarding risks and mitigation in our programmes.

6.6 Workplace culture impacts our ability to keep children safe

Providing safe and high quality care to children and young people can only be achieved if the workplace culture reflects that of a non-authoritarian and safe working environment and one in which staff and children are able to speak out. An explicit learning in this regard is that the presence of an unhealthy and authoritarian workplace culture increases the likelihood of an unsafe working environment and, as a result, an increased chance of child safeguarding incidents taking place. It was found that this type of workplace culture and environment in the organisation resulted in both children and staff being more vulnerable due to a fear of the ramifications of speaking out or questioning authority. Such effects include a risk of punishment, withdrawal of basic needs, and in the case of staff, job termination. Failure to respond to reported misconduct appropriately, especially where senior leaders are involved, contributes to environments within which misconduct and abuse are perpetuated. Unsafe and unhealthy environments are made worse by exploitation of power imbalances, gender disparities, insufficient attention being paid to possible conflicts of interest, and dismissive attitudes to children, young people and caregivers. Despite our policies, guidelines and trainings designed to assure that the organisation and staff uphold and promote the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct, we acknowledge that we still have work to do to create a healthy workplace culture and value-based leadership approach across the entire federation.

7 Recommendations

Based on the experiences and learnings described in this report, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team provides a number of recommendations for the period of 2021-2024. Some recommendations are carried over from the previous year, while others are new. The Child Care and Safeguarding team advises that both the General Secretariat as well as member associations consider these recommendations carefully and implement actions as appropriate.

- 1) **Refine our approaches for dealing with *problematic* and *inappropriate* behaviours.** All reported incidents must be recorded according to our existing procedures; but depending on the nature of the incident, the organisational response should vary. Incidents of *problematic* behaviour by children should be handled by child and youth care professionals when they occur. Incidents of inappropriate behaviours by staff require a performance management approach where the staff concerned receive further support and guidance to improve their performance so that the inappropriate behaviour is not repeated. It is acknowledged that this approach will require more attention and further discussion going forward.
- 2) **Improve consistency and implementation of our programme quality standards.** To achieve this the General Secretariat must increase support for member associations to address existing programme quality gaps and increase support and resources for child and youth care professionals and caregivers. Member associations must consider how they can make concrete improvements to programme quality that will directly improve child safeguarding performance. Additionally, we need to improve the monitoring and oversight of programmes by member associations, national boards and the General Secretariat to ensure minimum quality standards are in place.
- 3) **Strengthen the child safeguarding management chain in member associations considered to have higher risks.** This includes better matching the available human and financial resources in regional offices to the specific child safeguarding risks in the member associations they support. This also entails increasing targeted capacity building and allocating dedicated staff and resources. Additionally, a strong focus must be placed on trainings and direct support to enable managers and boards to implement and sustain the child safeguarding approach in their local context, focusing on prevention, response and accountability.

- 4) **Strengthen our ability across all levels of the organisation to apply a victim/survivor-centred approach.** This will include developing and rolling out guidelines for member associations on how to implement this approach in their daily work, as well as employing an increased focus on providing victims/survivors the opportunity for recovery and reconciliation through a holistic approach that addresses the needs of victims/survivors.
- 5) **Put a strong emphasis on workplace culture and value-based conduct across the federation. This means implement and *live* the policies and procedures we have now.** This includes addressing issues that relate to:
- dismissive attitudes towards children and young people
 - exploitation of power imbalances
 - gender inequality
 - insufficient attention being paid to possible conflicts of interest
 - young people and staff fearing to question authority
 - addressing and reforming environments within which misconduct and abuse are perpetuated and where failures to appropriately report and respond to misconduct happen.
- It is particularly important that leaders and management in both the General Secretariat and member associations lead by example. This includes establishing and maintaining a collaborative, value-based, and non-authoritarian working environment – one that protects our target group and staff through safe recruitment, efforts to improve gender equality, and effective procedures for staff to report malpractice.
- 6) Child safeguarding incidents monitored by or escalated to the General Secretariat often coincide with other issues that are dealt with by other functions, such as sexual harassment of staff and vulnerable adults, corruption, fraud and governance mismanagement. Often, there are underlying factors that need to be addressed. Therefore, it is suggested that the General Secretariat **align the overall approach in prevention of and response to a range of incidents – including child safeguarding; corruption, fraud and governance; and sexual misconduct by staff or between staff and adults from the community.** This includes alignment of reporting and responding procedures, including investigation standards, as well as establishing a joint approach to prevention with a particular focus on high risk countries.

8 Glossary

General Secretariat – 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.

Management Council – The Management Council defines the global targets of SOS Children’s Villages, approves work plans developed by the Management Team and makes recommendations to the International Senate.

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 the promoting and supporting associations (see below).

Caregiver – A broad term that includes both those who provide care in biological families *and* SOS Children’s Villages staff members who provide family-like care in an SOS family. In SOS Children’s Villages these roles are often referred to as SOS parents (primary caregivers in an SOS family) and ‘SOS aunts’ (staff member supporting the primary caregiver in an SOS family; in this report, we refer to them as ‘family assistants’).

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 organisation 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 organisation. 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:

- 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, organisations – 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 we ensure 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 standardise our organisation’s safeguarding work, we have several external and internal frames that we follow. The Child Safeguarding Standards by Keeping Children Safe is an external guideline that sets the framework for our child safeguarding standards and policies. Central frames guiding our safeguarding work across the organisation are the SOS Care Promise, Child Protection Policy and 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 investigations 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 SOS 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 co-ordinate 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. As such, 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 organisational response to reported child safeguarding incidents; compliance to 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 preventative and when responding to incidents. Child safeguarding responsibilities of line managers include: ensuring compliance to 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 to 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, as well as 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, incident management and assessment, reporting to national authorities, safeguarding investigation set up, 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 to these early experiences is that children in our target group are more vulnerable to experiencing further violence and/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 whistleblowing 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 SOS Child Protection Policy, their national laws, and relevant policy support documents. The organisation has two policy support documents outlining the binding reporting and responding requirements for 1) Member associations and 2) the General Secretariat.

In March 2020, the policy support document on reporting and responding procedures in member associations was updated. The following major updates were made:

- 1) The definition of a child safeguarding incident has been clarified. With an aim to provide further guidance to the staff at programme and national level, the policy support document now includes

definitions of *inappropriate* and *abusive* behaviour for adult-to-child incidents and *problematic* and *abusive* behaviour for child-to-child incidents.

- 2) The category of *high-profile child safeguarding incidents* has been replaced with “Child safeguarding incidents where the General Secretariat gets involved”. The criteria for these incidents has been adjusted, and the policy support document now refers to: Child safeguarding incidents *monitored* by the General Secretariat or Child safeguarding incidents *managed* by the General Secretariat.
- 3) The description of the local mapping and child safeguarding risk assessment processes has been removed and placed into separate documents.
- 4) A description of the child safeguarding incidents reporting platform and information flow towards selected stakeholders through child safeguarding incident papers has been added.
- 5) A description of the real-time reporting system on safeguarding incidents (in development and implementation expected in 2021/2022) has been added.
- 6) A description of the internal child safeguarding audits process has been added.

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 further develops our 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 decide 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 organisational child safeguarding policies. For example, an incident of corporal punishment is a breach of our SOS safeguarding policies, but in some countries is not categorised 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 organisational capacities on child safeguarding investigations.

Appendix 2: 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 number four: <i>We create a safe environment for children in all our programmes.</i>
SOS Child Protection Policy	Informs all child protection and child safeguarding work carried out at SOS Children's Villages, focusing on 4 key principles: Awareness, Prevention, Reporting and Responding.
SOS Code of Conduct	Outlines the organisation's expectations and standards regarding staff management and defines appropriate and expected standards of behaviour for every SOS Children's Villages employee
Child safety is everybody's business. Child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures in member associations	Outlines step-by-step what should be done when a reported concern is received.
Working together to protect children. 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 GSC gets involved. This includes also references to the child safeguarding local mapping, risk assessment, and child safeguarding audits. These specific processes are then 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.

Other relevant SOS Children's Villages policy documents and guidance	
Gender Equality Policy	SOS Children's Villages policy to implement gender equality.
Human Resources Manual	Outlines the organisation's expectations and standards regarding staff management and professionalism.
Youth Development User Guide	Tool for improving the quality of youth care and supporting the member associations in applying

	the principles of the SOS Care Promise in their daily work with young people.
Prepare for Leaving Care: Practice Guidance	Provides guidance to care professionals working directly with care leavers on the key aspects necessary for a positive leaving-care transition. Focuses on four key principles: building sustained relationships with the care leaver based on care and respect, the importance of high levels of participation, promoting and protection of all human rights of children and young people, and the need for an inter-sectoral approach.
SOS Parent Profession User Guide	Supports member associations to implement commitment 5 of the SOS Care Promise – <i>We promote and continuously strengthen the care profession</i> – focusing on SOS parents and SOS aunts/family assistants.

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