



Transforming how we keep children safe at SOS Children's Villages

SOS Children's Villages works in more than 130 countries and is the largest NGO working to support children without parental care or at risk of losing it. In 2021, the organisation received an independent review it had commissioned to investigate past failures in safeguarding and governance, and to identify ways to improve safeguarding practice.

Following this report, SOS Children's Villages International created a four-year [Safeguarding Action Plan](#). This plan builds on broader lessons learned since the introduction of the first Child Protection Policy in 2008.

The Safeguarding Action Plan contains a range of measures to create a safe environment for children, young people, and everyone we work with. These include prioritised actions such as providing direct support to those affected by past abuse, strengthening our response to new incidents, and fundamental programme quality and prevention work.

Over the past two years the federation has made considerable progress in the key areas covered by the action plan and has recently released a progress report which is available [on the international website](#).

This latest Progress Report shows that SOS Children's Villages has advanced on all 24 actions of the Plan. More than 70% of the 35 indicators defined in the plan are on track or completed. With some of the actions, the work is producing desired results, but is progressing slower than originally envisioned. A cross-functional safeguarding unit is being set up at the highest level of the organisation to drive implementation of the Plan and ensure consistent oversight of safeguarding activities.

One of the prioritised actions in the Safeguarding Action Plan was the launch of an Independent Special Commission (ISC) to investigate past and contemporary cases of failings and understand why the failures occurred. The ISC, which is led by high-level experts, has almost completed its work and its final report is due to be published in June. In addition, SOS Children's Villages in Austria, as the founding member of the Federation, has also launched an independent investigation, with a report published on 21 March.

The ISC's final report will be accessible from the Safeguarding Hub of the international SOS Children's Villages website. We anticipate this will provide valuable insight into areas where the organisation needs to improve, as well as specific assessments of accountability for past failings. Our International Senate will analyse and respond to the issues and recommendations raised. Findings from this final report, as well as lessons learned in the first two years of implementation of the Safeguarding Action Plan, will be used to adjust the Plan.

The leadership of SOS Children's Villages is treating this with the utmost seriousness. Any past safeguarding failures in our organisation go against everything we stand for. We are working to

establish a culture of accountability and speaking up, and investing resources to ensure the highest possible standards. Where an incident has happened, our priority is to help victims/survivors as best as possible.

In the UK, we will work closely with our international colleagues to continue to make the protection of the children we work for our highest priority. We are determined to do everything we can to ensure every child grows up feeling safe, loved and supported.

For further information about how SOS Children's Villages is transforming its approach to safeguarding, please read this [recently published Devex article](#).