

Child and Youth Safeguarding Annual Report 2022/2023



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES

Child and youth safeguarding

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

SOS Children's Villages is a federation of independent member associations operating under one 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 and Youth Safeguarding Network

Annual child and youth safeguarding reports are developed by the Global Child and Youth Safeguarding Network, which consists of child and youth safeguarding staff from the international and regional offices of SOS Children's Villages International. Together with our colleagues from member associations, we focus on increasing child and youth safeguarding awareness, preventing harm and strengthening reporting and responding capabilities.



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About this report

SOS Children's Villages is committed to continuously improving its safeguarding systems to keep every child, young person and adult in contact with the organization safe. Our annual child and youth safeguarding reports prepared by the Global Child and Youth Safeguarding Network are an important part of this process.

In this report, the term *child safeguarding* has been replaced with the more accurate *child and youth safeguarding*, since the work of SOS Children's Villages in this is guided by the *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy*, which covers not only children under the age of 18 but also young people up to the age of 24.

This annual report discusses the status of child and youth safeguarding at SOS Children's Villages, including the main developments in this area between September 2022 and August 2023, data on compliance with minimum requirements by national entities in 2022, and 2022 incident statistics. Data is aggregated across the whole of the SOS Children's Villages federation; there is no data in this report disaggregated for specific countries.

Effective child and youth safeguarding relies on a broader framework of high-quality programming, good governance and organizational culture. This report focuses only on child and youth safeguarding data and activities. For information on improvements we are pursuing in other areas of safeguarding and compliance work, please refer to our [Safeguarding Action Plan progress reports](#).

If you have any questions or comments, please contact us at childsafeguarding@sos-kd.org. We appreciate your feedback!

Executive summary

This annual report focuses on progress in child and youth safeguarding in 2022/2023. Ongoing activities to strengthen other areas of safeguarding and compliance are discussed in our Safeguarding Action Plan [progress reports](#).

Since our previous child and youth safeguarding report published in December 2022, we have seen improvements in a number of areas of child and youth safeguarding, for example risk management and awareness. Although these changes are steps in the right direction, more effort is still required to completely address the lessons we have learned in the past few years.

Developments in child and youth safeguarding

Throughout 2022 and 2023, we have continued implementing the 2021 Safeguarding Action Plan.

SOS Children's Villages International as well as individual member associations have undertaken several independent assessments or investigations of past safeguarding failures. Most notably, the Independent Special Commission, set up by the International Senate under our Safeguarding Action Plan, [released its final report in June 2023](#). Its findings and recommendations, along with the outcomes of the other safeguarding reviews, will guide actions to improve compliance frameworks, internal oversight, risk management, and child and youth participation. In this way, the recommendations will feed into improvements at country level.

We have introduced several new binding safeguarding policy documents. This includes a new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy*, an accompanying regulation with detailed requirements for its implementation, and regulations on incident management and investigations. We are also planning a new binding regulation on support for persons who have experienced child and youth abuse. These documents address the issues identified in recent safeguarding reviews by clarifying safeguarding standards and responsibilities.

The independent Ombuds Office for SOS Children's Villages, set up as an independent office to support children and young people in situations that have not been successfully resolved by SOS Children's Villages safeguarding processes, currently comprises three national and two regional ombuds and an Ombuds Board. In 2023, ombuds implementation has started in another 22 countries.

Compliance with SOS Children's Villages minimum requirements

The 2022 annual child and youth safeguarding survey was completed by 136 entities operating at the national level, including three affiliate entities of national associations. The survey comprises a self-assessment of compliance with organization-wide child and youth safeguarding requirements, a risk assessment, and incident statistics. Of the reporting entities, 91 reported compliance of at least 90%, which is the minimum targeted level.

Based on the survey, 103 national entities reported they operated in an environment with medium safeguarding risks and another 2, high safeguarding risks. Factoring in self-assessed compliance with internal policies, 30 national entities reported a medium overall risk score and 1, a high overall score. The General Secretariat will support these national entities at high and medium risk in strengthening their safeguarding systems.

Strengthening child and youth safeguarding in high-risk environments received particular attention in 2022 and 2023. A dedicated project has so far reached 28 countries, which has helped to improve the foundations of safeguarding systems, whereas sustained improvement will take more time.

Incident statistics

In 2022, 3,166 child and youth safeguarding incidents were reported to SOS Children's Villages associations, affiliate entities and General Secretariat offices – 523 incidents (20%) more than in 2021. This represents incidents of abusive, inappropriate or problematic behaviour that were reported to have occurred in 2022. The increase in reports might in part be due to increased awareness or willingness to report past abuse, improved reporting channels, and an increased focus on incidents of inappropriate or problematic behaviour.

Of the reported incidents, 1,869 were categorized as incidents of abuse (peer-on-peer or adult-on-child); 1,558 of those incidents of abusive behaviours were confirmed. Most of the incidents of abuse occurred within alternative care settings, where the nature of 24/7 supervision creates greater risks of abuse but also makes reporting more likely. However, under-reporting remains a concern across all settings.

There were 22 incidents of sexual coercion and abuse, in which 23 staff were confirmed as perpetrators and 54 children and young people were confirmed as victims. Of these staff perpetrators, 18 were non-care workers.

In 2022, we also received 348 reports of child and youth safeguarding incidents believed to have occurred before 2022, including 277 reports of peer-on-peer or adult-on-child abuse. We were able to confirm 222 of the abusive behaviour incidents. Between 2020 and 2022, we observed an increase in the number of incidents reported as having occurred before the year of reporting. This is likely due to efforts to encourage reporting of misconduct after our public acknowledgement of past safeguarding failures.

SOS Children's Villages offices and associations have implemented a variety of awareness-raising initiatives, such as workshops and information materials for children and adults.

Priorities for the next year

Despite last year's progress in achieving compliance, long-term improvements will require sustained effort, so it is critical that child and youth safeguarding remains a priority organization-wide.

In the months ahead, we will prioritize the following actions:

- continuing to implement the new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy*
- implementing the recommendations by the Independent Special Commission
- providing support and guidance on managing programme quality as a necessary condition to prevent safeguarding risks
- strengthening collaboration with HR teams to support the implementation of safeguarding requirements in relevant HR processes
- developing online courses, training sessions and workshops
- improving compliance with auditing requirements
- improving budgeting of safeguarding expenses
- introducing an additional mechanism to solicit feedback and suggestions for improvement from former service recipients and employees

Developments in child and youth safeguarding

Throughout 2022 and 2023, we have continued implementing the 2021 **Safeguarding Action Plan**, achieving progress in areas such as the following:

- providing immediate and longer-term support to those affected by abuse
- creating an environment where people with knowledge of misconduct feel comfortable and safe to come forward
- gradually implementing an ombuds system in consultation with children and young people
- developing an overarching safeguarding framework including a new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy*
- strengthening child and youth safeguarding in high-risk environments
- strengthening child and youth participation in safeguarding

Some of these actions are discussed below. For more on our progress against the Safeguarding Action Plan, see our most recent [progress report](#), published in March 2023.

Independent reviews of safeguarding at SOS Children's Villages

We have continued drawing important lessons from our past and current practice. After the organization's acknowledgement of past failures and its calls for anyone with knowledge of wrongdoing to come forward, many individuals have spoken up about their experiences with SOS Children's Villages. Several independent assessments or investigations of past safeguarding failures of varying scopes have been commissioned by SOS Children's Villages International and member associations. For example, an independent assessment of reports of past abuse in the former SOS Children's Villages Suriname, commissioned by SOS Children's Villages International, [was published](#) in June 2023, and the German association SOS-Kinderdorf e.V. has set up an independent commission to review and learn from incidents of past abuse in its own programmes. The Independent ChildProtection Commission, launched by SOS Children's Villages Austria to investigate a number of safeguarding cases of concern to the member association, [finalized its work](#) in March 2023.

Most notably, the Independent Special Commission, set up in October 2021 under the Safeguarding Action Plan, [released its final report](#) on 6 June 2023. In its findings, the commission recognized progress made by SOS Children's Villages over the past two years and discussed crucial changes that are still required in a number of areas, for example staffing

standards, accountability, leadership and governance. Its findings and recommendations, along with the outcomes of the other safeguarding reviews, will guide actions to improve compliance frameworks, internal oversight, risk management, and child and youth participation. SOS Children's Villages is working on following up on the commission's investigation reports to hold individuals responsible, including managers, to account. A [resolution on the report by the International Senate](#) and a [management response](#) to the findings are available on our website. The Global Child and Youth Safeguarding Network fully supports these recommendations.

Internal child and youth safeguarding frameworks

In mid-2022, child and youth safeguarding, adult safeguarding and asset protection teams worked together to streamline and harmonize their procedures and develop two new regulations, on misconduct incident management and misconduct investigations. Both were approved by the Executive Board and Management Council of SOS Children's Villages International in January 2023 and are currently being implemented. The regulations are binding for all entities within SOS Children's Villages.

The most significant change introduced with these documents is the requirement to separate responsibility for prevention from that for incident management. The intention is to professionalize incident management by concentrating this knowledge and expertise in a specialized, well-trained team while enabling child and youth safeguarding teams to focus on prevention and awareness raising.

We have also developed a new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy*, approved by the International Senate in April 2023. This policy is accompanied by the binding *Child and Youth Safeguarding Regulation*, which explains the requirements to implement the policy in detail. The updated policy incorporates developments since 2008, recommendations by the Independent Special Commission, and advice from specialist organizations. It defines minimum requirements in specific and explicit terms, for example:

- the individuals who are expected to abide by the policy
- the policy's coverage of both children under 18 and young people up to the age of 24
- risk management requirements
- the responsibilities of national boards
- child and youth participation
- accountability for misconduct

Implementation of the policy began in October 2023. It includes online and face-to-face training sessions and workshops for various groups, including children and young people who are in contact with SOS Children's Villages.

Integrated safeguarding department

To strengthen organizational monitoring and oversight of safeguarding activities, the International Office of the General Secretariat is setting up a new cross-functional department comprising separate child and youth safeguarding, adult safeguarding and asset protection units. The new department, which will be led by its own international director, is expected to be in place by the end of 2023.

Management of past incidents of abuse

As part of the Safeguarding Action Plan, we have continued to provide support for individuals affected by past abuse.

When abuse is reported years or even decades after it happened, our ability to investigate the incident is often limited. In such cases, our focus is on supporting the person affected by abuse. Experiences of abuse can affect many parts of the person's life, including their coping skills, their ability to maintain healthy relationships, their parenting, their education and their economic status. In cases of past abuse, our support focuses both on meeting the person's urgent needs and providing them with tools and resources so that they can recover, access development opportunities and build a better future for themselves. This support can take many forms, including psychological, psychosocial, educational, economic and legal support. Unfortunately, in some cases of longer-term support for people who experienced past abuse we have found that the support did not always have a clear scope and decision-making was too slow, which can lead to the person having to relive their trauma over extended periods of time.

Based on the lessons learned in the past two years, we will review and clarify federation-wide guidelines on responding to experiences of past abuse. The areas that require revision or clarification include the following, for example:

- Application of the principles must be uniform regardless of the organizational level.
- We must be able to respond to the specific situation of the abused person but also the socio-economic realities in which they live.
- All processes to provide and manage support must be trauma informed.
- Timely, clear and consistent decision-making and communication are essential to minimize the risk of re-traumatization.

We are planning to address the gaps we have identified in a new binding regulation on support for people who have experienced child and youth abuse, which is expected to be approved by the end of 2023.

Ombuds Office

As reported in [our March 2023 Safeguarding Action Plan progress report](#), implementation of the independent Ombuds Office is ongoing.

The Ombuds Office does not replace SOS Children's Villages child and youth safeguarding; rather, it helps children, young people and adults in resolving concerns that they believe have not been handled appropriately by SOS Children's Villages, which enables management and governing bodies to respond to issues and improve safeguarding systems. The Ombuds Office and safeguarding teams work independently but collaboratively.

By mid-2023, the Ombuds Office comprised three national ombuds (in Benin, Sierra Leone and Uruguay), two regional ombuds (in Latin America and in West, Central and North Africa) and an Ombuds Board. Until a permanent global ombuds can take over, the Ombuds Office will be overseen by interim global ombuds from Proteknôn Foundation. In 2023, ombuds implementation has started in another 22 countries.

Involving children and young people in all phases of ombuds implementation helps to ensure that the ombuds are accessible but also have the qualities children are looking for in a third-party confidante. Engaging children in selection and monitoring also ensures that the ombuds understand that they are accountable to children. For more information on the Ombuds Office, please visit the [Ombuds Office website](#).

Safeguarding Information Management System and a digital incident management system in Latin America

The development of the Safeguarding Information Management System, which will store data on incidents of misconduct and on compliance with binding policies, is ongoing. The team developing the system is consulting with federation stakeholders to identify the appropriate solution in terms of both technical and content requirements. A final decision is expected by early 2024.

Meanwhile, the regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean has started implementing its own digital system to manage child and youth safeguarding incidents, seeing it as a key part of improving incident management, record-keeping, reporting and monitoring. The system was developed in 2021 and is currently being implemented in 12 countries, two of which have already used the system to submit their annual child and youth safeguarding reports.

Keeping Children Safe certification

SOS Children's Villages International has previously held Keeping Children Safe certification, which expired in 2020. In the future, each national association is expected to undergo this certification individually.

In mid-2021, our member association in Spain received Level 1 Keeping Children Safe certification, using it as a mechanism to move towards best practice in safeguarding.

The certification process has helped the association to establish solid child and youth safeguarding structures and teams at both national and local levels and increase its level of compliance with minimum safeguarding requirements. Actions to implement Keeping Children Safe's recommendations issued at the time of certification are in progress.

Strengthening child and youth safeguarding in high-risk environments

A project designed to strengthen safeguarding in national associations working in high-risk environments has been in progress under the Safeguarding Action Plan since 2021. The project involves assessing risks and child and youth safeguarding capacity, implementing mitigating actions, developing capacity, and finally conducting child and youth safeguarding audits. The project has already reached 28 countries. Some of the project's findings so far include the following:

- Two years is not enough to strengthen a child and youth safeguarding system in a high-risk context. Rather, this time span should be considered as a period of putting the basics in place without which the association would not be able to move forward, for example safeguarding structures, staff capacity, local mappings and risk assessments.
- Inadequate child and youth safeguarding work is a consequence of long-standing issues in other areas such as governance, management, overall programme quality, or HR. Strengthening child and youth safeguarding systems requires solving these other issues as well. Indeed, a cross-functional approach employed in the project has proven beneficial. One-on-one sessions with each functional area have helped harmonize the understanding of child and youth safeguarding risk, leading to better wording and overall agreement on mitigation actions.
- The commitment and sensitivity of top management, particularly the national director, is critical for success, contributing to greater mobilization and vigilance.

Common recommendations issued in audits and reviews included strengthening preventive activities, developing safe recruitment standards and procedures, developing guidance on disciplinary action, strengthening child and youth participation, improving cross-functional collaboration, and strengthening management accountability for policy implementation.

Audits have also identified good practices, for example:

- having programme-level staff fully dedicated to safeguarding to ensure proper management of preventive work

- conducting annual risk analyses for all functional areas in consultation with children, caregivers and local partners
- holding regular meetings of local and national safeguarding teams and keeping records of the decisions made
- having an internal strategy that promotes positive discipline and prevents corporal and emotional punishment
- having a dedicated annual child and youth safeguarding budget to support the implementation of preventive measures and improvements in incident management (such as introduction of gender-sensitive and trauma-informed practices or training on positive parenting)

Method to collect compliance and incident data

Every year, SOS Children's Villages associations fill out an annual child and youth safeguarding survey, which is a self-assessment designed to monitor national progress in child and youth safeguarding. The survey consists of three parts:

- questionnaires on compliance with minimum child and youth safeguarding requirements according to the federation-wide *Child Protection Policy* and related documents¹
- a risk profiler
- incident statistics

In 2022, the survey was completed by 133 SOS Children's Villages associations operating at the national level and a further 3 affiliate entities of national associations that report their safeguarding data to SOS Children's Villages International independently.

Three national associations that had active operations did not report their data: in Algeria, China and Alsace, France. Two further entities that are not federation members but with whom SOS Children's Villages has a partnership agreement, namely Tibetan Children's Villages Dharamsala and Tibetan Homes Foundation, did not report either. A registered association that currently does not have any active operations is not counted.

In this report, the terms "entity" or "national entity" are used to refer to national associations that are active formal members; legally dependent entities operated by SOS Children's Villages International; and entities affiliated with national associations but reporting their safeguarding data independently.

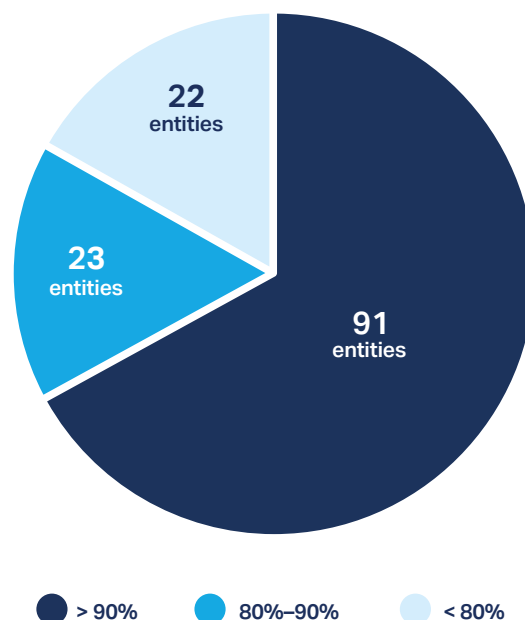
It is important to bear in mind that the survey data is self-reported and may therefore be subject to bias. To complement the survey data, SOS Children's Villages associations are required to conduct independent on-site child and youth safeguarding audits at least every three years. The audit findings are recorded and addressed at national level, and corrective actions are implemented with guidance and support from the relevant regional office.

1. In April 2023, the *Child Protection Policy* was replaced by the new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy* and the accompanying binding *Child and Youth Safeguarding Regulation*.

Overall compliance with organizational minimum requirements in 2022

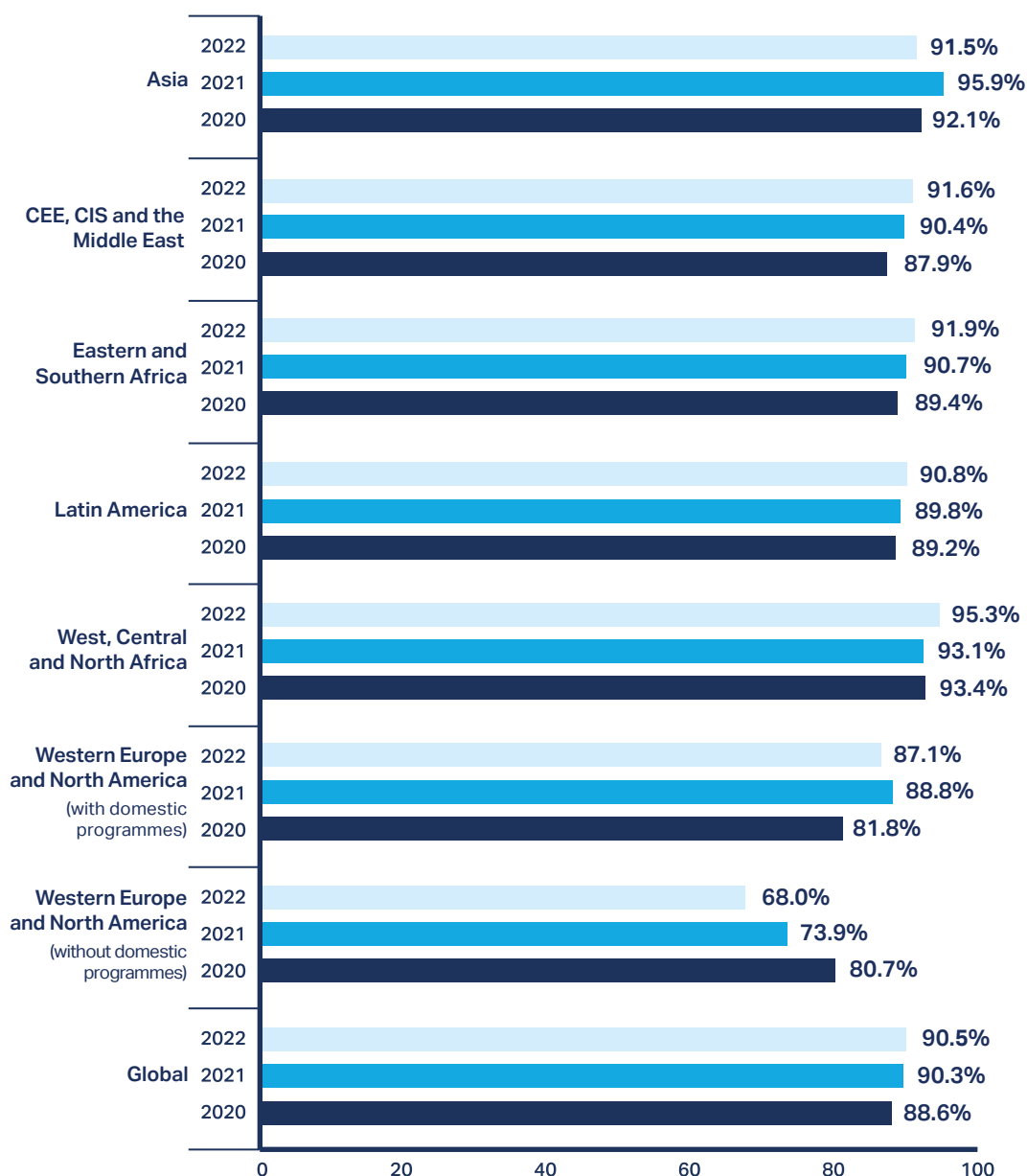
According to the annual survey data, in 2022 the average global compliance rate was 90.5%, which represents a slight increase from 90.3% in 2021 and is just above the minimum targeted 90% compliance. Fifteen national associations reported full compliance.

Figure 1. Distribution of overall compliance ratings among national entities in 2022



The most significant change was reported by fundraising associations without domestic programmes in Western Europe and North America, where the overall compliance rate decreased by almost six percentage points since 2021. This was a continuation of a similar decline between 2020 and 2021. While this is not a positive development overall, it is likely that the current survey data is more accurate compared to data from previous years. Some of these associations reported that a number of questions did not apply to them, which requires follow-up. These issues will be taken up by the regional Integrity and Safeguarding Network.

Figure 2. Self-assessed overall compliance with minimum requirements according to the *Child Protection Policy*, 2020–2022



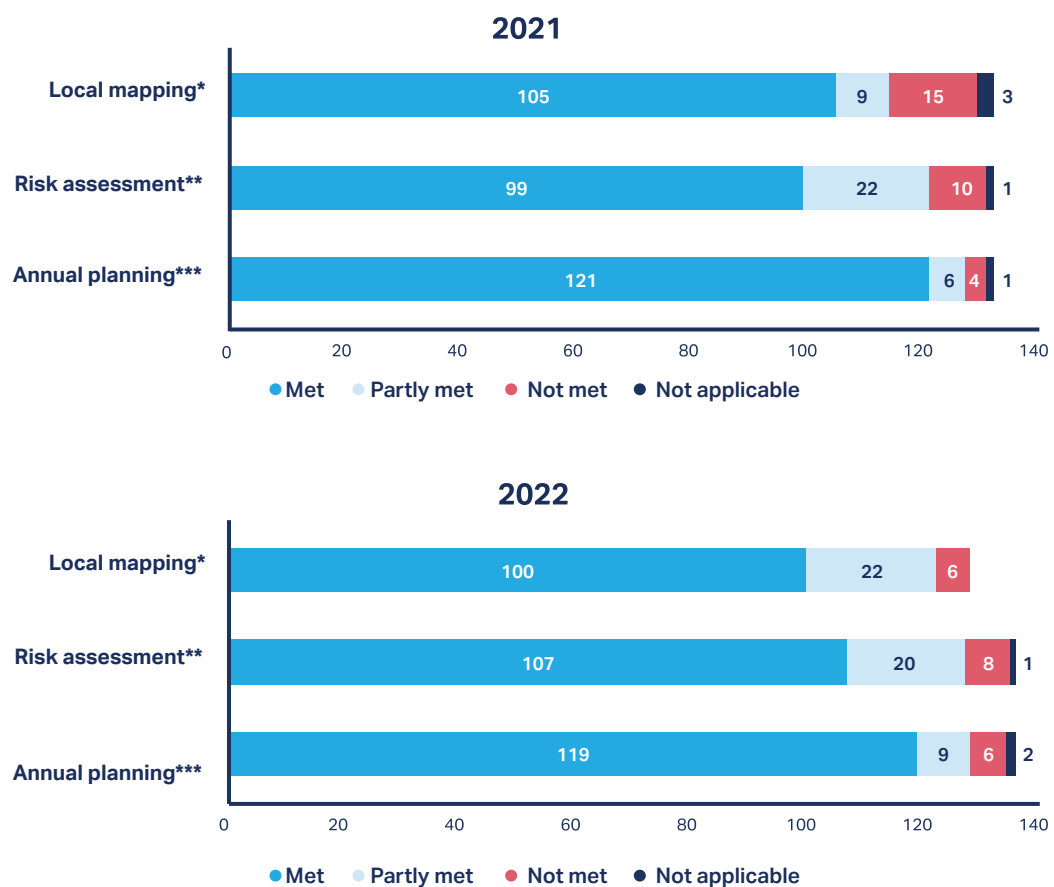
On the other hand, in recent years fundraising associations in Western Europe and North America have played a significant role in strengthening child and youth safeguarding requirements and compliance monitoring – in the federation as a whole and in their partner SOS Children's Villages associations.

The following sections discuss some of the individual areas of assessment that make up the overall compliance rating.

Planning and risk management

One of our child and youth safeguarding priorities is identifying and managing risks, which includes understanding the legal, social welfare and child protection context in which the national entity operates.

Figure 3. Compliance with risk management requirements by national entities



*** Local mapping:** The member association has conducted a local mapping exercise (analysis of the legal, social welfare and child protection context in which the member association works) and updates this analysis every 3–5 years.

**** Risk assessment:** A child and youth safeguarding risk assessment is conducted on a regular basis, and its findings are used as an input for the annual planning process.

***** Annual planning:** The annual plan of the member association details what child and youth safeguarding measures are to be developed and implemented, by when and who has responsibility for these measures.

Note: The 2022 survey was revised so that the requirement to conduct a local mapping exercise applies only to associations and affiliate entities that run domestic programmes, which means the total number of national entities assessed under this criterion in 2022 is 128 rather than 136.

The survey shows that the majority of national entities include specific child and youth safeguarding actions in their annual plan. In fact, we have observed gradual improvement in risk management overall.

Child participation in risk assessments in Syria

In the past two years, risk management has received particular attention in projects designed to strengthen safeguarding in high-risk environments. An important part of these projects has been to increase the involvement of programme participants – children, young people and adults – in identifying risks and appropriate mitigation measures. For example, our member association in Syria has involved children in conducting safeguarding risk assessments. The children received orientation and were asked to choose a profession they aspire to, for example a police officer, a doctor or a mechanic. The choice of profession helped children to imagine themselves in a role that has an impact on the safety and well-being of their community. The children were then prompted to move around their children's village in their chosen professional capacity and identify safety improvements. This way, the children were able to identify risks that would not have been apparent to the adults.

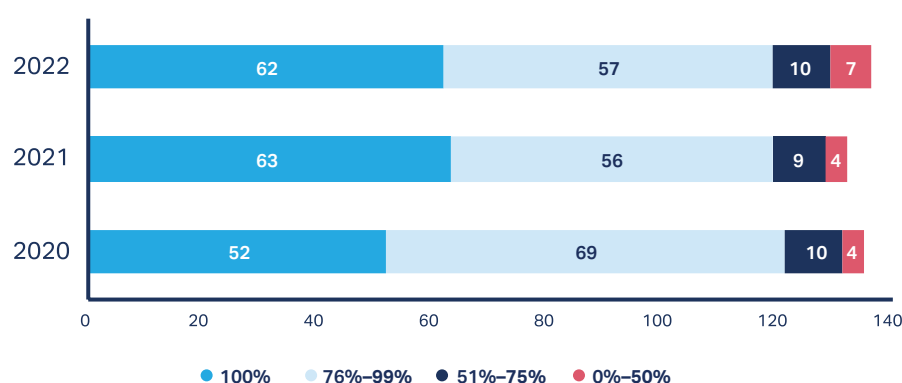
Despite improvements, much more remains to be done to close gaps in this area. For example, some national entities still report that they do not map the local context or conduct risk assessments before planning their work. Improvement of risk management will be a priority in organization-wide child and youth safeguarding work in the coming months. The General Secretariat will hold online training sessions and webinars for senior national management, board members and programme-level staff. Individual associations will also be encouraged to share good practice, and the examples will be included in an upcoming how-to guide on risk management.

Staffing

In 2022, almost all SOS Children's Villages entities that filled out the survey had a national child and youth safeguarding focal person (133 of 136 entities) and child and youth safeguarding teams at programme level (116 of 128 entities).² However, only 85 of the 116 entities with programme-level child and youth safeguarding teams reported that these teams had regular performance reviews that could identify and address their development and support needs. Similarly, only 92 of the 133 entities that had a national child and youth safeguarding focal person reported conducting performance reviews for this group of staff.

Of the 136 entities, 125 reported having an induction process for new staff that covered child and youth safeguarding, 10 reported meeting that requirement only in part, and only one reported not meeting the requirement. The figure below shows the share of staff trained according to such an induction process reported by the entities.

Figure 4. Percentage of national staff who participated in induction that covered the *Child Protection Policy* and relevant procedures

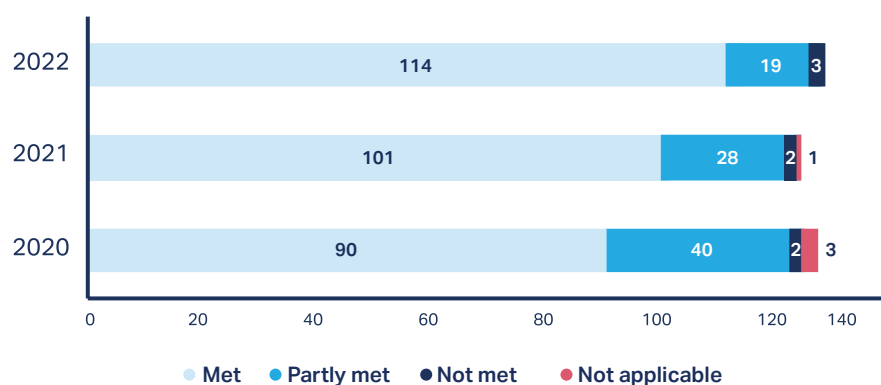


Monitoring and oversight

According to the 2022 survey, 114 entities were fully meeting the requirements for management monitoring of progress in child and youth safeguarding, including child and youth safeguarding incidents (another 19 were meeting the requirements in part). Similarly, 113 reported that their national board had child and youth safeguarding as a standing item on the agenda of its meetings, and 111 said their national director was submitting an annual child and youth safeguarding report to the board.

² Since the requirement to have a programme-level child and youth safeguarding team applies only to entities with domestic programmes, the total number of entities here is 128 instead of 136.

Figure 5. Monitoring of child and youth safeguarding progress (including incidents) by national management



Note: Means of verification under this requirement include receipt of written reports on incidents and evidence of reports on the progress of *Child Protection Policy* implementation being discussed in management meetings.

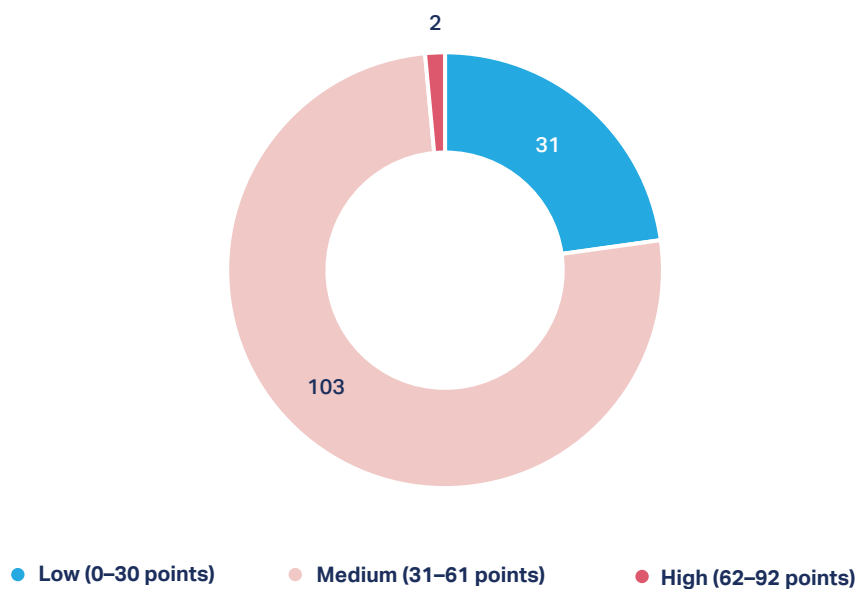
Training board members

We have implemented a number of activities to strengthen national governance and leadership in high-risk environments. For example, this past year, the regional office for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Middle East held a series of onboarding and awareness-raising training sessions for a group of board members and national directors. The objective was to introduce the concept of child and youth safeguarding as part of a holistic safeguarding approach and explain the role of board members. The importance of this understanding was recognized by the participating boards, who then requested advanced training. The regional office also recommended appointing one to two board members child and youth safeguarding ambassadors who would be in charge of promoting child and youth safeguarding and liaising with others in child and youth safeguarding matters. As an outcome of the training, terms of reference were drafted for the ambassadors, outlining the objectives and responsibilities of boards in child and youth safeguarding.

Safeguarding risk profile of SOS Children's Villages associations

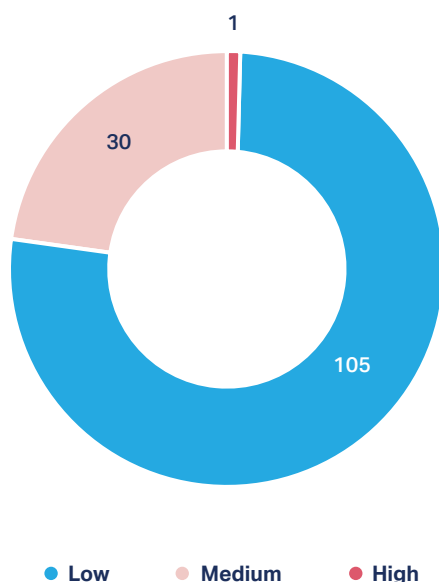
The risk profiler included in the child and youth safeguarding annual survey enables national entities to assess their safeguarding risks across four areas: programming, staffing, external risks and partnership arrangements. National entities can also include other risks in addition to these mandatory categories.

Figure 6. Assessment of national safeguarding risks (number of national entities)



The overall risk score is calculated based on a combination of an assessment of safeguarding risks across the four mandatory categories and compliance with minimum child and youth safeguarding requirements, as discussed in the [previous section](#).

Figure 7. Overall national safeguarding risk score based on a combination of safeguarding risk assessment and self-assessment of compliance with minimum policy requirements (number of national entities)



All national entities with a high or medium risk profile will receive assistance by the General Secretariat in the coming months, for example:

- support in setting up and strengthening child and youth safeguarding structures at programme and national level
- capacity building of staff in various positions
- support in conducting safeguarding risk assessments in all programmes and functional areas and developing mitigating actions

It is important to note that while the data on the safeguarding risk profile is largely derived from external sources, compliance with the minimum requirements is self-assessed, so the compliance data may be biased.

Strengthening safeguarding in Honduras

The national association in Honduras is implementing a results-based project to strengthen the national child and youth safeguarding system. Based on the opportunities for improvement identified in the past two years, the project aims to improve supervision, governance and accountability, promote a safe organizational culture, and implement adequate incident management. A number of positive results have already been achieved:

- There are improvements in the physical and psychological environment, adult awareness, and child participation.
- All staff have been trained on topics such as safeguarding and psychological well-being.
- In 2022, the association exceeded its year-end target of 60% compliance with safeguarding quality standards, reaching 69% instead. By 2025, 90% compliance is targeted.

Child and youth safeguarding incidents reported in 2022

Mitigating child and youth safeguarding risks, raising awareness and taking preventative action are central to our child and youth safeguarding practice. When child and youth safeguarding concerns or incidents do arise, our objectives are as follows:

- ensure there are multiple safe and accessible ways for children and adults to report their concerns
- protect children and young people from further harm or retaliation
- respond appropriately to each reported concern or incident in accordance with national law and our policies and procedures
- learn from incident management and propagate good practices, such as gender-sensitive and trauma-informed practices or education on positive parenting

The child and youth safeguarding incident data discussed below is reported by national entities as part of the child and youth safeguarding annual survey.

Reported incidents

In 2022, 3,166 child and youth safeguarding incidents were reported to SOS Children's Villages associations and General Secretariat offices – 523 incidents (20%) more than in 2021. This number represents incidents that were reported to have occurred in 2022. The increase in reports might in part be due to increased awareness or willingness to report abuse as the organization has been addressing past failures and encouraging anyone with knowledge of wrongdoing to come forward. The increase may also be attributed to improvements in reporting channels as well as increased attention devoted over recent years to incidents of problematic or inappropriate behaviour, which have the potential to escalate to serious abuse. An increase in reports is to be expected as people become more trusting of the organizational safeguarding system.

For context as to the total number of children, young people and adults directly reached by SOS Children's Villages, please see the table below.

Table 1. People reached by SOS Children's Villages programmes

	2021	2022
Alternative care <i>Children and young people</i>	68,000	69,200
Family strengthening <i>Children, young people and adults</i>	455,400	512,500
Education <i>Children, young people and adults</i>	203,000	195,500
Other activities <i>Children, young people and adults</i>	57,400	77,600
Health	300,800	307,200
Humanitarian action <i>Children, young people and adults</i>	192,400	1,386,400 (children aged 0-17: 792,700)

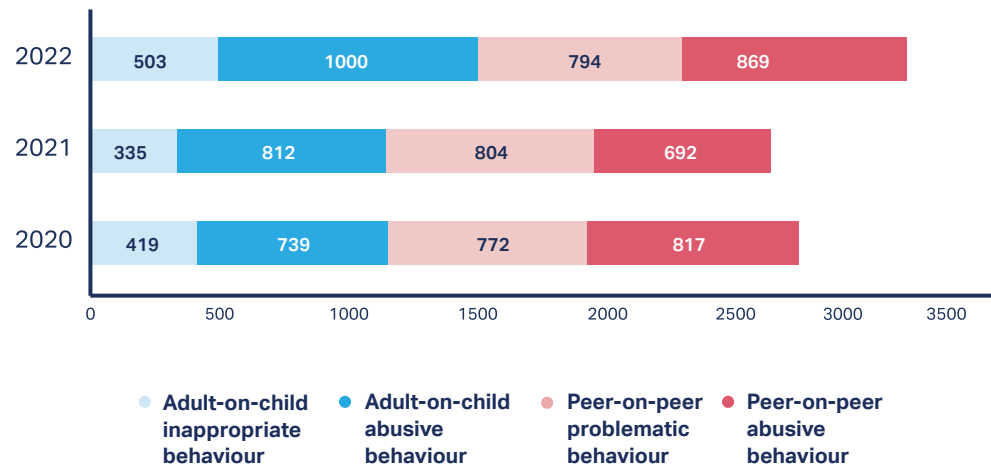
Note: For more information, see [International Annual Report 2021](#) and [International Annual Report 2022](#).

Over the last three years, child and youth safeguarding incidents have been categorized according to severity, frequency and the power dynamics involved as follows:

- An **inappropriate behaviour incident** is an isolated incident in an otherwise stable care relationship where an **adult**, such as a care practitioner, reacts to a challenging situation with anger, by pulling or pushing a child or making a minor threat.
- A **problematic behaviour incident** is a single incident of aggressive behaviour such as fighting, hitting or pushing between **children or young people of similar age or status** – that is, where there is no power imbalance.
- An **abusive behaviour incident** can involve either repeated instances of inappropriate behaviour or situations where a child experiences physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, exploitation or violation of privacy as defined in the *Child Protection Policy*. The person initiating the abusive behaviour can be **an adult or another child or young person**.

This distinction has been introduced to help practitioners determine the most appropriate response to an incident, to reduce paperwork for the less serious incidents that do not require a full investigation, and to provide a more nuanced picture of the incidents that occur in SOS Children’s Villages programmes. We have found that these categories remain useful, but it is important not to apply them prematurely but rather only after the incident has been appropriately assessed, so that the response is appropriate and proportionate.

Figure 8. Incidents reported in 2020–2022



The number of child and youth safeguarding incidents is an important measure of child and youth safeguarding. In interpreting this data, however, it is important to understand that the number of reported incidents is not in itself a reliable indicator of how well the child and youth safeguarding system is working. A high number of incidents can suggest confidence in the reporting process, but it can also be a cause for alarm. This quantitative indicator needs to be complemented by qualitative information on the implementation of child and youth safeguarding requirements.

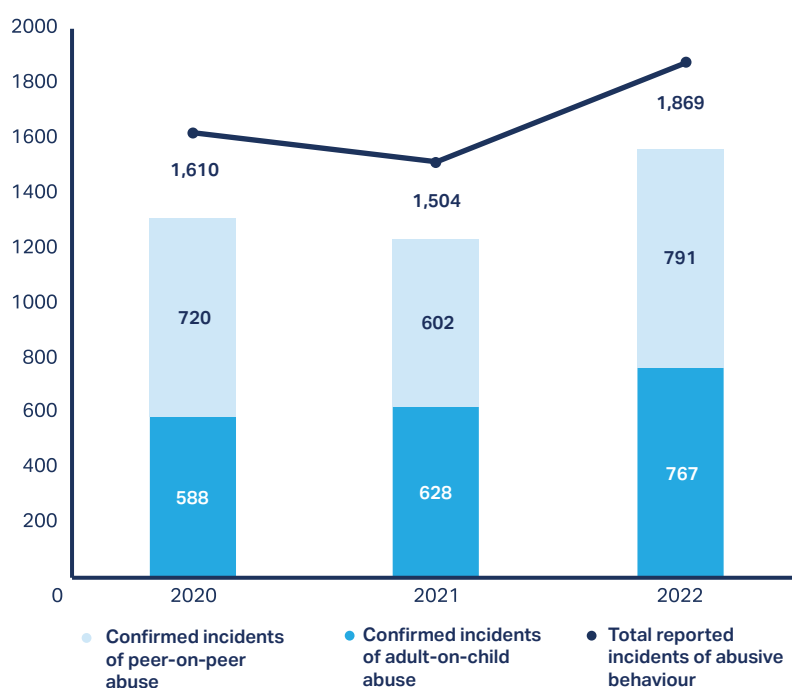
Significantly, there are associations that report low or almost no incidents in some or all of their programmes, whether for one year or consistently. This is statistically impossible and remains a cause for concern.

Confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour

Of the 1,869 incidents reported in 2022 that were recorded as incidents of abusive behaviour, 1,558 were confirmed.

Please note the figures discussed below refer only to abusive behaviour and do not include incidents of adult-on-child inappropriate behaviour or peer-on-peer problematic behaviour.

Figure 9. Incidents of abusive behaviour confirmed in 2020–2022



Children and young people affected by confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour

Confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour affected 3,077 children and young people participating in SOS Children's Villages programmes in 2022. This includes 2,211 children and young people targeted by abusive behaviour and 866 children and young people who displayed abusive behaviour towards their peers.

SOS Children's Villages has a duty to respond appropriately and to provide remediation and care not only to children and young people who are victims of abuse but also to children and young people who display abusive or problematic behaviour and to those who witness the abuse. Experience and research show that children and young people who initiate harmful behaviour towards others may have experienced abuse themselves. All children and young people involved in incidents of abuse have access to mental health support and counselling as well as other types of short- or longer-term support where necessary. For those children and young people who have displayed abusive behaviour, the focus is on identifying the root causes of the behaviour, helping them to understand why such behaviour is harmful, and guiding them towards positive changes in their behaviour.

Table 2. Number of children and young people participating in SOS Children's Villages programmes who were targeted by abusive behaviour in 2022

Programme setting	Adult-on-child abuse	Peer-on-peer abuse
Alternative care ³	1,114	792
Youth care	104	58
Family strengthening	26	5
Education	89	16
Health	1	0
Humanitarian action	5	1
Total	1,339	872
Grand total		2,211

3. Alternative care includes family-like care, foster family care, small group homes, and other types of alternative care provided by SOS Children's Villages.

Table 3. Children and young people participating in SOS Children's Villages who displayed abusive behaviour in 2022

Programme setting	
Alternative care ⁴	784
Youth care	56
Family strengthening	4
Education	21
Health	0
Humanitarian action	1
Total	866

The incidents of abuse perpetrated by staff affected 1,006 children and young people, up from 958 the previous year.

Table 4. Number of children and young people who were victims of abuse by staff, by type of abuse and type of staff perpetrator⁵

Type of abuse	Type of staff perpetrator				% of total
	Caregivers in alternative care	Youth care staff	Other staff	Total	
Physical abuse	312	15	45	372	36.9%
Sexual coercion and abuse	10	0	44	54	5.4%
Emotional abuse	181	11	22	214	21.3%
Neglect and negligent treatment	170	28	123	321	31.9%
Violation of privacy	15	2	28	45	4.5%
Total	688	56	262	1,006	100%

4. Alternative care includes family-like care, foster family care, small group homes, and other types of alternative care provided by SOS Children's Villages.

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

Staff perpetrators

In 2022, 479 individual staff members were found to have abused children and young people. However, as some staff were involved in multiple incidents and some incidents involved more than one perpetrator, in our incident data we recorded this figure as 551 staff perpetrators, which represents about 1.4% of SOS Children's Villages staff worldwide in full-time equivalents.

Table 5. Number of staff perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours by programme setting

Programme setting	Number of perpetrators	% of total
Alternative care	472	85.7%
Youth care	34	6.2%
Family strengthening	9	1.6%
Education	34	6.2%
Health	0	0%
Humanitarian action	2	>1%
Total	551	100%

Table 6. Number of staff perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour

Type of abuse	Number of perpetrators				% of total
	Caregivers in alternative care	Youth care staff	Other staff	Total	
Physical abuse	217	14	40	271	9.2%
Sexual coercion and abuse	4	0	19	23	4.2%
Emotional abuse	106	5	17	128	23.2%
Neglect and negligent treatment	89	8	19	116	21%
Violation of privacy	10	2	1	13	2.4%
Total	426	29	96	551	100%

Of the 551 staff involved as perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour, 77% were caregivers in alternative care. This highlights the importance of adequate training for staff working directly with children on issues such as positive discipline and trauma-informed care.

As a result of being identified as perpetrators of abusive behaviour, 136 staff of the 479 individual staff members involved in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour were dismissed and 69 were reported to law enforcement authorities. Not all dismissed staff could be reported to the authorities due to gaps in national child protection legislation, such as short statutes of limitation, high thresholds for the burden of proof, or in some cases a risk of serious human rights violations for suspected perpetrators. In addition, 178 of the confirmed perpetrators received a warning letter and 243 received additional training.

The General Secretariat will provide additional training and guidance to ensure that abuse is identified and fully investigated, that all perpetrators are held appropriately accountable for their actions, that line managers have a clear and consistent understanding of what constitutes serious misconduct, and that accountability extends to those who have enabled, permitted, tolerated or encouraged abusive behaviours.

As shown above, alternative care programmes have a higher child and youth safeguarding risk profile, so we devote significant resources to ensuring that abuse is detected and reported. Furthermore, 24/7 care provision means that it is more likely that incidents will be identified and reported. However, under-reporting remains a concern across all settings. For example, the extremely small number of incidents in programmes other than alternative care is almost certainly an indication of under-reporting. Over the coming months, we will prioritize strengthening safeguarding in settings other than alternative care.

Sexual coercion and abuse perpetrated by staff

In 2022, we confirmed 22 incidents of sexual coercion and abuse by staff:

- 16 incidents of harassment or inappropriate touching
- 3 incidents of rape by three staff members
- 2 incidents of children and young people being exposed to pornography
- 1 incident of two young people being coerced into sexual activity

In these 22 incidents, 23 staff were confirmed as perpetrators of child sexual coercion and abuse and 54 children and young people were confirmed as victims of these incidents. Most staff perpetrators were non-care workers, which reinforces the need for rigorous background and reference checks and safeguarding training of all staff. National entities are currently strengthening both these areas.

Table 7. Staff perpetrators and victims in incidents of sexual coercion and abuse in 2017–2022

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of staff perpetrators	21	23	12	19	13	23
Number of children and young people who were victims	42	26	15	27	16	54

Table 8 . Sexual coercion and abuse incidents in 2022, by category of staff perpetrator and by gender

Staff category	Number of staff involved		Number of children involved	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Senior staff	—	—	—	—
Caregivers in family-like care	3	1	8	3
Youth care staff	1	—	—	1
Family strengthening staff	—	—	—	—
Teachers	5	—	2	13
Maintenance staff (drivers, gardeners, etc.)	5	—	1	17
Security guards	5	—	—	5
Others (programme technical team, medical staff, etc.)	3	—	—	4
Total	22	1	11	43

As a direct result, 17 staff members were dismissed, one staff member resigned before he could be dismissed, one staff member was suspended and the disciplinary process is under way, and another staff member received a warning letter and additional training.⁶ Three staff members had left the organization before the sexual abuse incident was reported.

Of the 22 incidents, 21 were defined as criminal offences according to national law. Of these, 18 were reported to law enforcement authorities. In two cases, the young people concerned and their families requested that no legal action be taken. In one case, the accused staff member was provided by a contracted security company and the member association did not pursue legal action after learning that the person had left his position. The General Secretariat has advised the association to ensure appropriate referral of such cases to the relevant state authorities in the future.

Incorporating a gender perspective in managing incidents of sexual abuse

As can be seen above, most perpetrators of sexual abuse tend to be male and most victims female. The regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean identified the gender dynamics of most incidents of sexual abuse as a major challenge in incident management, especially considering the prevalence of patriarchal attitudes in Latin American societies. The regional office developed a guide on managing sexual abuse incidents based on a gender perspective and disseminated it in the regional child and youth safeguarding and gender networks. For the coming months, training sessions and an expert review of incident management from the gender perspective are planned.

6. According to the Rules of Criminal Procedure of the country, if the victim has explicitly forgiven the accused, then charges are not pressed against the accused.

Past child and youth safeguarding incidents

In the past two years, a lot of our child and youth safeguarding work has been focused on learning from past incidents of abuse – incidents that are not reported soon after they would have occurred – and improving the way these incidents are managed. As discussed above, investigating past incidents becomes more challenging as more time elapses between the incident and the day it is reported, which makes it crucial that concerns are reported as soon as possible.

This section provides an overview of child and youth safeguarding incidents reported to SOS Children's Villages in 2020–2022 as incidents believed to have occurred before the year of reporting.

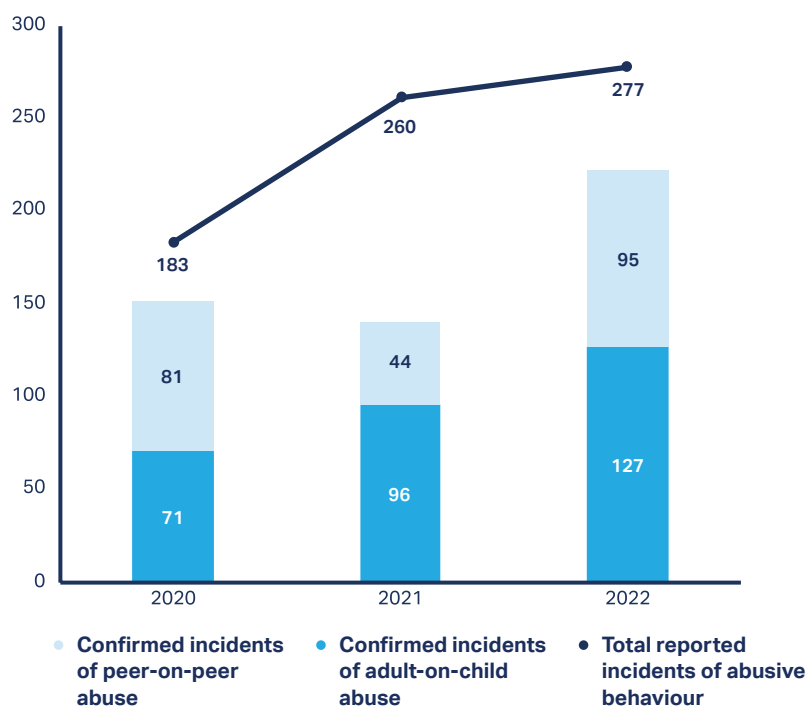
Between 2020 and 2022, we have seen an increase in the total number of such reports. We believe this is likely due to the work done in the past two years to encourage reporting of misconduct. Please note that the time frame for reporting is not limited and may include events from years past.

In 2022, we received 348 reports of child and youth safeguarding incidents believed to have occurred before 2022, including 277 incidents of abusive behaviour.

Table 9. Reported incidents believed to have occurred before the year of reporting, 2020–2022

	2020	2021	2022
Total reported incidents, including problematic, inappropriate and abusive behaviour	250	307	348
Reported incidents of abusive behaviour	183	260	277

Figure 10. Reported and confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour that occurred before the year of reporting, 2020–2022



The confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour that were reported in 2022 but occurred before that year involved 316 children and young people who were identified as victims of abuse, 98 children and young people who initiated abuse against their peers, and 128 adult perpetrators, including 88 staff perpetrators.

Table 10. Children and young people involved in confirmed incidents of abuse that occurred before the year of reporting, 2020–2022

	2020	2021	2022
Children and young people who were victims of adult-on-child abuse	212	166	217
Children and young people who were victims of peer-on-peer abuse	83	50	99
Children and young people who displayed abusive behaviours towards their peers	89	48	98

Table 11. Adult perpetrators of abuse that occurred before the year of reporting, 2020–2022

	2020	2021	2022
Total adult perpetrators (including external adults)	73	100	128
Staff perpetrators	50	65	88

Table 12. Staff perpetrators of abusive behaviours that were reported in 2022 but occurred before 2022, by type of abuse and by staff category

Type of abuse	Caregivers in alternative care	Youth care staff	Other staff	Total
Physical abuse	58	2	10	70
Sexual coercion and abuse	3	—	3	6
Emotional abuse	2	1	—	3
Neglect and negligent treatment	5	1	1	7
Violation of privacy	1	—	1	2
Total	69	4	15	88

Incidents of sexual coercion and abuse that were reported in 2022 but occurred before that year involved 20 adult perpetrators, 6 of which were SOS Children's Villages staff.

Table 13. Victims and adult perpetrators of adult-on-child sexual coercion and abuse that occurred before the year of reporting, 2020–2022

	2020	2021	2022
Children and young people who were victims of adult-on-child sexual coercion and abuse	31	46	55
Adult perpetrators of sexual coercion and abuse (including external adults)	28	37	20
Staff perpetrators of sexual coercion and abuse	10	12	6

Improving awareness to prevent abuse

During 2022 and 2023, a variety of awareness-raising techniques have been employed by national associations to prevent incidents. Examples include the following:

- The regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean has developed a child-friendly booklet on the reporting and responding process, told through a story of a young girl named Lorena. The booklet was developed in a collaborative way with national safeguarding coordinators, young people and the regional youth network. It was also validated in sessions with adolescent programme participants from Guatemala. The booklet includes puzzles and other activities to facilitate learning and is available in several languages.
- SOS Children's Villages Uruguay has recently released a [publication](#) to share the association's experience in various areas of child protection programming, such as disability, child sexual abuse, gender and participation.
- The national team in Sri Lanka has developed key child and youth safeguarding messages for staff, covering issues such as signs of abuse, reporting procedures, risk mitigation and children's rights. The key messages are available in three main languages spoken in the country.

Developing feedback and complaints mechanisms: the Ukraine humanitarian response

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, SOS Children's Villages launched one of its largest humanitarian programmes to date, in Ukraine itself and countries hosting refugees. To date, the Ukraine response has supported 254,000 people, including 107,000 children and young people. The Ukraine Support Team made it a priority to develop child-friendly feedback and complaints procedures.

In Ukraine, focus group discussions with young project participants found that young people mainly want to use social media for the purpose, but SOS Children's Villages Ukraine also has a hotline, an email address and suggestion boxes. They developed a poster explaining the separate channels available for general feedback and complaints and for child and youth safeguarding concerns. The humanitarian programme and the child and youth safeguarding team are working together closely.

Among other countries, the associations in Greece and Bulgaria have also been working to develop child-friendly feedback and complaints mechanisms. To seek children's views on activities, the teams use visuals such as smiley faces. This helps the local teams to improve while also building children's trust in the feedback and reporting mechanisms. At the same time, these mechanisms are key for early identification of child and youth safeguarding issues.

Our priorities for the next year

The past year has once again shown that child and youth safeguarding is not limited to safeguarding teams but rather involves every member of staff. Prevention is a major part of this effort.

Although the child and youth safeguarding survey shows progress since last year, long-term improvements in a number of safeguarding areas will require continued effort. It is important that child and youth safeguarding remains a priority organization-wide, including in terms of funding and staffing.

In the months ahead, SOS Children's Villages will prioritize the following issues in its child and youth safeguarding work.

- Continue to implement the new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy* and associated regulations.

All staff and board members at all levels of the organization will be required to attend training on the new policy. Certain groups of staff, for example senior management, child and youth safeguarding experts and care workers, will receive training specific to their responsibilities. Senior management at all levels of the organization are expected to lead this process within their sphere of responsibility.

All SOS Children's Villages entities will be required to achieve at least 90% compliance with the policy by the end of 2024.

- Implement the recommendations of the Independent Special Commission's final report, which covers many aspects of safeguarding and compliance, in collaboration with the Ombuds Office.

In child and youth safeguarding, we will focus on two main issues:

- improving monitoring of organizational responses to incidents, including the support provided, disciplinary actions and other remedial steps, by implementing the Safeguarding Information Management System
- improving support for those who have experienced abuse, to ensure uniform management of responses by all entities (including when it comes to the level of support provided to those affected by abuse) regardless of where they live or where they reported abuse

The recommendations of the Independent Special Commission's final report will guide effort to improve coordination of safeguarding and compliance work across child and youth safeguarding, adult safeguarding and asset protection.

- Provide support and guidance in managing programme quality as a necessary condition to prevent safeguarding risk.

- Strengthen collaboration with HR teams to support the implementation of child and youth safeguarding requirements in relevant HR processes, such as safe recruitment, induction and training, and disciplinary action.
- Develop additional online courses, training sessions and virtual workshops on child and youth safeguarding.
- Ensure compliance with the requirement to carry out a child and youth safeguarding audit of each programme at least every three years.

Wherever possible, the organization will seek external audits to minimize bias. Audit results will be shared with relevant partners, including government agencies and funding partners.

- Improve budgeting of safeguarding expenses so that they are always treated as an integral part of project budgets at all levels of the organization.
- Introduce an additional mechanism for people who used to receive SOS Children's Villages services or who were previously employed by the organization to share their experiences and suggest improvements.



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

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