



Child Safeguarding Annual Report 2021/22

Executive Summary

Global Child Safeguarding Network



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Incident analysis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Compliance with child safeguarding requirements

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

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

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

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

² For more information on the distinctions between these different types of behaviour, see page 12 of the [full report](#).

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

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

Project updates

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

- **Child safeguarding policy framework** – in 2022 the General Secretariat developed incident management procedures that are consistent across child safeguarding, adult safeguarding and asset protection. It began the process of updating the Child Protection Policy.
- **Incident management** – the General Secretariat started the development of a Safeguarding Information Management System. This online system will collect and maintain information on safeguarding incidents across the whole federation.
- **Global ombuds system** – a global approach was developed and piloted in three countries. The Global Child Safeguarding Network cautions the federation to ensure the ombuds system works alongside the existing safeguarding procedures.
- **Independent Special Commission (ISC)** – we reported last year on the establishment of an independent special commission of experts who would assess allegations and concerns as well as the broader policy framework. The ISC's interim report issued in June 2022 provided valuable guidance for our work on strengthening the child safeguarding system.
- **Research on child and youth participation in safeguarding** – internal research we conducted showed that a strong majority of the children who participated in the research feel safe and tell someone if they are hurt. However, it also suggests children and young people's knowledge and confidence in safeguarding and children's rights needs to increase. The findings are providing the basis for participatory action planning with children, young people and staff members for implementation in 2023.
- **Immediate support for those who have experienced abuse in the past** – this project enables member associations who need additional funding to provide immediate support to individuals who experienced abuse, whether in an SOS Children's Villages programme or prior to entering our care. As of August 2022, the project encompassed support for 545 individuals in 16 countries.
- **Preventing and responding to peer violence** – we continued the Applying Safe Behaviours programme, part-funded by the European Union, which delivers training and workshops to equip children and young people with the understanding, tools, and practical strategies to prevent and speak out about peer violence.
- **Strengthening child safeguarding in high-risk environments** – the General Secretariat has supported 25 member associations, focusing on assessing specific child safeguarding risks in consultation with different groups of staff, children and young people, and external experts, and putting targeted risk mitigating measures in place to increase preventive activities and strengthen incident management.

Other projects and promising practices

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

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

Recommendations

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

Oversight and accountability

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

Prevention, planning and risk management

4. Ensure implementation of thorough background and reference checks for all staff, not only those providing direct care
5. Ensure that all non-care staff receive basic child safeguarding training and that all care staff receive specialized child safeguarding training
6. Review all job descriptions and include each staff member’s child safeguarding responsibilities
7. Improve training and development of care staff
8. Increase trainings on preventing and responding to peer-on-peer violence, such as the Applying Safe Behaviours programme
9. Explicitly clarify that the child safeguarding framework fully applies to young people over the age of 18 who entered SOS Children’s Villages programmes as children and continue as programme participants after they have become adults

10. Ensure compliance with risk management requirements in every member association, especially risk assessment and analysis of the child protection context
11. Increase child and youth participation in safeguarding measures, especially in risk assessments
12. Increase focus on mental health for children, young people and adults, including trauma recovery and trauma-informed care

Staffing

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