

One of the pillars to improve child safeguarding is to establish an independent ombudsperson in every member association to represent the rights of children, young people and others affected by abuse. Building on the model already practiced in some member associations, the local ombudsperson does not replace but complements existing safeguarding procedures.



IMMEDIATE ACTIONS & TARGETS

- Develop an organization-wide ombudsperson approach with the support of external safeguarding experts.
- Children and young people will be critical players in determining the model and selecting ombudspersons.
- Appoint an interim ombudsperson serving the General Secretariat (GSC) to be operational by Sept. 2021.
- Pilot the ombudsperson approach in various countries, starting with the SOS Children's Villages member associations in Benin and Sierra Leone.
- The goal is to have an ombudsperson in every country where needed by the end of 2024.



IN PRACTICE

- SOS Children's Villages Austria introduced an ombudsperson system in 2019.
- Three ombudspersons in the country serve as an independent external point of contact for anyone with a complaint of alleged abuse.
- Individuals with a complaint usually first contact the public Austrian Ombudsman Board or SOS Children's Villages Austria directly. They are then referred to one of the three ombudspersons, who document the complaint with a focus on how the person's life has been affected.
- Based on the ombudsperson's recommendations, an impartial SOS Children's Villages commission – consisting of internal and external members - decides on follow up actions, such as the need for therapy or financial compensation.



OVERVIEW

- The role of an ombudsperson is to independently assist children, young people, whistleblowers or other individuals to determine options to resolve their complaints and concerns.
- The ombudsperson maintains a neutral and impartial position and is independent of formal organizational structures.
- Ombudspersons also make SOS Children's Villages' staff and management aware of challenges in the effectiveness of policies and procedures, and concerns around safeguarding.
- An ombudsperson does not replace existing child safeguarding policies and reporting and responding procedures within SOS Children's Villages member associations or the GSC. Rather, it complements safeguarding by providing an external and independent view on safeguarding practices and procedures.
- Working with external experts, SOS Children's Villages will select an ombudsperson model that works best for the organization. Children and young people will be key players in the process, helping to determine the model and in selecting ombudspersons.
- After piloting the ombudsperson approach in Benin and Sierra Leone, the approach will be extended to five more countries in West and Central Africa, and at least 20 others globally over the course of 2022.
- By the end of 2024, member associations should have an ombudsperson in place according to their need.