

Child and Youth Safeguarding Annual Report 2023/2024



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| About this report | i |
| Executive summary | ii |
| Developments in child and youth safeguarding | 1 |
| Compliance and incident data | 5 |
| Compliance with organizational minimum requirements in 2023 | 6 |
| Safeguarding risk profiles of SOS Children's Villages associations | 7 |
| Child and youth safeguarding incidents reported in 2023 | 9 |
| Focus areas for 2024 and 2025 | 18 |

About this report

SOS Children's Villages is committed to creating safe and nurturing environments for all children and young people in contact with the organization. By supporting accountability and learning, our annual child and youth safeguarding reports are an important part of this process.

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 2023 and June 2024, data on compliance with minimum requirements by national associations in 2023, and 2023 incident statistics. Data on compliance, risk and incidents is aggregated across SOS Children's Villages globally. Child and youth safeguarding covers children under the age of 18 and young people up to the age of 24.

Effective child and youth safeguarding relies on a broader framework of high-quality programming, good governance and organizational culture. For information on improvements we are pursuing in other areas of safeguarding and compliance work, including adult safeguarding and asset protection, 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!

Correction

The original version of this report, published on 11 September 2024, contained an error in figure 6 on page 13. The number of staff who received a warning letter should read 158 and not 87. The figure has been corrected in this updated version, released on 5 November 2024.

Executive summary

The experience gathered in the past several years, including in implementing our Safeguarding Action Plan, has enabled us to define clearer child and youth safeguarding standards. These standards have been incorporated into the new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy* and associated regulations, which are mandatory for SOS Children's Villages International and all national associations.

As associations worldwide implement the new policy, we are observing significant improvements in risk management, particularly in the use of risk assessment data to inform decision-making. Similarly, we are encouraged to see improvement in incident management frameworks, structures and procedures. For example, we now systematically monitor the implementation of support plans for individuals who have experienced abuse.

While we are on the right track, we need to continue developing broader prevention work based on the standards and requirements spelled out in our [updated policy frameworks](#).

Developments in child and youth safeguarding

Since our previous report, we have made progress in rolling out the new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy* and the regulations that support its implementation. Much of our attention has been focused on ensuring a shared understanding of the policy.

We have introduced a new regulation on support for persons affected by child and youth abuse, which establishes process requirements for supporting victims/survivors of abuse. A project to support national responses to cases of past abuse closed at the end of 2023, having contributed to incident management improvements within national associations.

Promotion of child and youth participation has included various national and regional initiatives and a project to assess awareness of child rights and safeguarding processes in nine countries.

We have also continued to implement a project designed to help SOS Children's Villages associations operating in high-risk environments improve their risk management. This project closed at the end of 2023.

Finally, we have continued setting up the independent Ombuds Office to complement existing safeguarding mechanisms. Children and young people need an independent, confidential person they can share their concerns with, and national ombuds and equivalent external services, in place in 14 countries so far, are beginning to meet this need.

Compliance with SOS Children's Villages minimum requirements

The annual child and youth safeguarding survey, which is a self-assessment tool to monitor the status of national child and youth safeguarding, has been revised in line with new policy requirements. According to the survey data, in 2023 the average global rate of compliance with organizational requirements was 81%, which falls short of the targeted 90%. The new policy and accompanying regulations have defined many areas not explicitly covered previously, which means full implementation will take time and sustained effort.

Compared to 2022 data, a greater share of national associations have reported medium to high risk levels: the number of associations reporting a low level of internal and external safeguarding risks has fallen from 31 to 19. This is due to changes in the risk profiler tool that contributed to a more accurate assessment.

In 2023, 26 associations reported holding external certification of their safeguarding systems, and 38 said they were planning to seek such certification in the future.

Incident statistics

In 2023, 3,682 child and youth safeguarding incidents were reported to SOS Children's Villages – 516 more than in 2022. This represents incidents that were reported to have occurred in 2023. This increase is likely due to recent efforts to strengthen safeguarding systems and introduce new reporting channels.

Of the reported incidents, 1,938 were categorized as peer-on-peer or adult-on-child abuse; 1,536 of those abuse incidents were confirmed. We found 490 individual staff members to have perpetrated abuse towards children and young people, dismissing 143 and reporting 62 to the authorities.

Of the 1,938 reported incidents of abuse, 62% were closed by the end of 2023. Individual support plans have been finalized for all but one of the children and young people identified as victims of abuse (one child declined support). For 47% of the children and young people, the plans have already been implemented in full.

In 2023, we also received 312 reports of child and youth safeguarding incidents believed to have occurred before 2023, including 229 reports of peer-on-peer or adult-on-child abuse. We were able to confirm 172 of the 229 reports of abuse, with the confirmed incidents involving 78 individual staff perpetrators. Of those, 31 were dismissed and 8 were reported to the authorities. In 2023, individual support plans were finalized for nearly all children, young people and adults identified as victims of abuse, and 45% of the support plans were implemented in full.

Focus areas for 2024 and 2025

Areas requiring further effort include the following:

- developing safe programming procedures, including those specific to humanitarian projects
- developing cross-functional risk management
- building on lessons learned to improve preventive mechanisms in all areas, from care quality to governance oversight
- improving coordination between safeguarding and human resources teams
- introducing a user-friendly, reliable and trustworthy feedback and complaints mechanism for non-safeguarding issues, to provide reporting options that would be more suitable than channels designed for specific safeguarding concerns
- where under-reporting is a concern, taking steps to improve staffing, training, child and youth empowerment, and ownership of safeguarding among leadership

Developments in child and youth safeguarding

Keeping children and young people safe is an absolute pre-requisite for SOS Children's Villages to deliver on our purpose – to ensure each child and young person grows up with the bonds they need to become their strongest selves. That is why we voluntarily initiated various independent reviews including the Independent Special Commission, to address past organizational failures and guide our [efforts to strengthen safeguarding](#).

Having completed three years of the Safeguarding Action Plan, which runs through the end of 2024, we are now in a transitional phase. Overall, we have made good progress in implementing that plan, as reflected in the [most recent Safeguarding Action Plan progress report](#). The lessons we have learned in implementing the plan – plus the findings by the Independent Special Commission – have informed the development of a new holistic Safeguarding Strategy for the General Secretariat, which will guide the organization's efforts through to 2030. The integrated strategy covers adult safeguarding (including prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse); anti-corruption and asset protection; and child and youth safeguarding, which is the focus of this report. While it is not binding for all national associations, the General Secretariat is promoting its use as a framework connecting all safeguarding-related policies and supporting the management of safeguarding risks in all operations and programmes.

The experience gathered in the past several years has enabled us to define much clearer, more effective child and youth safeguarding standards. These standards have been incorporated into the new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy* and associated regulations, mandatory for SOS Children's Villages International and all national associations. These standards are now being implemented worldwide, although this will require more time and effort, as illustrated by the most recent compliance data (see [p. 6](#)). We are continuously adjusting our monitoring survey to be able to capture the status of implementation more accurately. This includes monitoring support plans for those who have experienced abuse and tracking disciplinary measures against staff who are found to have perpetrated abuse.

We are encouraged to see improvement in the development of preventive frameworks, including the use of risk assessment data to inform decision-making (see [pp. 7–8](#)). We have also paid a lot of attention to strengthening incident management in recent years, which has resulted in considerably improved frameworks, structures and procedures for incident responses and safeguarding investigations. We have identified and successfully closed quality gaps in the way past incidents of abuse are managed and support is provided to those affected. While we are on the right track, there is still a clear need to continue developing broader prevention work, based on the standards and requirements spelled out in our [updated policy frameworks](#).

Our vision is to ensure that safeguarding is thoroughly woven into every aspect of how we work – including clear standards, training, risk assessments, job descriptions and performance reviews. Safeguarding will be strengthened by fostering a values-based culture in which staff act on an understanding of personal responsibility and accountability. We will continue to report transparently on our progress.

Safeguarding policy frameworks

We have made progress in rolling out the new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy* and the accompanying regulation, both introduced in 2023. At all organizational levels, much of our attention has been focused on awareness raising and training, which includes workshops and online courses for staff, board members and other target groups. Preparatory work at the national level has included, among other activities, updating job descriptions, revising existing safeguarding structures and introducing additional reporting channels.

Initiatives to ensure a shared understanding of the policy are in progress at the regional level:

- In Eastern and Southern Africa, for example, the regional office holds monthly online meetings with national safeguarding staff to discuss the policy framework and clarify the terminology and provisions in the context of national law, which has highlighted the importance of contextualization.
- The regional office for CEE, CIS and the Middle East is implementing a regional roll-out plan with face-to-face and online training sessions for national safeguarding and incident management teams and designated safeguarding focal points on national boards.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, the regional child and youth safeguarding strategy has been updated, and the regional team has held awareness-raising sessions and practical training workshops with regional and national staff.

Meanwhile, national associations are working on translations of policy documents or, as in the case of SOS Children's Villages Peru, plain-language versions.

As part of implementing the misconduct incident management and misconduct investigation regulations, trained cross-functional misconduct incident management teams have started operating at the General Secretariat and at the national level. The incident management teams at the international and regional offices of the General Secretariat involve 33 staff. So far, 76 national associations have reported having set up their incident management teams.

Support for persons affected by abuse

In March 2024, the International Senate approved a new regulation on support for persons affected by child and youth abuse. This document, mandatory for the General Secretariat and all SOS Children's Villages associations, establishes process requirements for managing support requests in cases of child and youth abuse and ensuring comparable support across countries.

A project to provide funding to national associations that do not have sufficient resources to respond to cases of past abuse closed at the end of 2023 (for additional details on the project, see p. 7 of our [recent Safeguarding Action Plan progress report](#)). With the funding, a number of associations have demonstrated good practices and achieved meaningful improvements: for example, SOS Children's Villages Ecuador proactively reviewed its records to look for signs of mismanagement of safeguarding incidents in the past, which enabled the association to identify victims/survivors of abuse and provide appropriate support. Similarly, we have observed improvements of incident management structures and procedures within national associations, including those in areas affected by war or armed conflict.

The project highlighted the importance of mapping local institutions, alliances, organizations and community networks that can provide specialized services (such as entrepreneurship support, healthcare, education, counselling and skills development) to those who have experienced abuse. For example, SOS Children's Villages Tanzania has sought collaborations with partners such as the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI) and the Department of Psychology at the University of Dar es Salaam, which has proven instrumental in addressing the complex challenges faced by those who have experienced abuse. The collaboration has encouraged other associations in the region to seek similar partnerships.

Child and youth participation

Child and Youth Participation in Safeguarding, a project to assess awareness of child rights and organizational safeguarding processes in nine African and Asian national associations, has been completed.

In the project, the findings of surveys among children and staff have been used to develop action plans to improve understanding of safeguarding systems and encourage more participation. Examples of such actions include the following:

- training children, young people and staff on safeguarding and meaningful participation
- facilitating child and youth participation in safeguarding risk assessments
- developing user-friendly reporting channels for children and adults
- holding focus groups with children to discuss reporting mechanisms

Beyond the project, many national and regional initiatives to encourage participation are in progress. In Jordan, for example, this has included setting up a children's council (in addition to an existing youth council), which advises the national association on its safeguarding policy, safeguarding team and reporting mechanisms. Meanwhile, the regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean has produced child-friendly booklets with stories and exercises on participation, accompanied by a guide for professionals.

Strengthening child safeguarding in high-risk environments

The project Strengthening Child Safeguarding in High-Risk Environments, initiated as part of the Safeguarding Action Plan (see page 35 of our [recent report](#)) and completed at the end of 2023, provided additional funding to national associations facing significant risks to help them improve their risk management. As part of the project, national associations have run risk assessment workshops, implemented risk mitigation plans and conducted final audits to assess improvement. Examples of national actions to address risks include the following:

- SOS Children's Villages Paraguay has conducted a series of workshops to provide comprehensive sexual and emotional education to children and young people participating in its programmes.
- At SOS Children's Villages Mexico, a safeguarding risk assessment flagged a lack of specific protocols to report and respond to abuse in the employability programme YouthCan! To address the gap, a youth-friendly reporting and responding protocol, a protocol for YouthCan! partner organizations, a table explaining different types of misconduct, and an awareness-raising comic were developed.

Gender sensitivity in addressing sexual abuse

The regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean has been working to improve gender sensitivity in preventing and managing incidents of sexual abuse, after recognizing patterns of revictimization and stereotyping in interactions with girls and young women who have experienced sexual abuse.

In 2023, based on a guidance document developed previously and as part of broader work in response to high rates of sexual violence against women and girls in Latin American societies, the regional office implemented interactive workshops for caregivers and programme teams on applying a gender-based psychosocial approach. The workshops addressed, among other topics, the concept of sexual violence, consent, gender, abusive sexual practices, and risks and protective factors.

As a result, national teams can now identify cases that were not previously categorized as sexual abuse, and some are holding workshops for programme participants on gender-related topics.

Ombuds Office

The Ombuds Office is being set up under the Safeguarding Action Plan to complement existing SOS Children's Villages safeguarding mechanisms. National ombuds or equivalent external systems are in place in 14 countries so far.

Collaboration between national associations and their ombuds is based on a signed master charter. Child and youth participation has been a crucial component in setting up the system and selecting ombuds candidates. Children and young people consistently say they face many barriers to sharing their concerns and need an independent, confidential person they can trust to share their concerns with. Ombuds are beginning to meet this need.

See also our recent [Safeguarding Action Plan progress report](#).

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 tool designed to monitor the status of national safeguarding systems. Recently revised to fit the requirements of the new *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy*, the survey consists of three parts:

- the Compliance Monitor, which is a questionnaire on compliance with mandatory child and youth safeguarding requirements
- the Safeguarding Risk Profiler, which helps SOS Children's Villages associations assess external and internal risks
- the Incident Monitor to gather statistics on incidents of child and youth abuse

In 2023, the survey was completed by 131 SOS Children's Villages associations operating at the national level, including three affiliate entities of national associations.¹ Four associations did not report their data: in Alsace, France; China; Finland; and Iceland. No data is available for two further entities with which SOS Children's Villages has a partnership agreement, namely Tibetan Children's Villages Dharamsala and Tibetan Homes Foundation.

In this report, the terms "association" or "national association" 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.

A growing number of SOS Children's Villages associations are seeking external certification from relevant authorities or specialist organizations. In 2023, 26 associations reported holding external certification and another 38 were planning to pursue it.

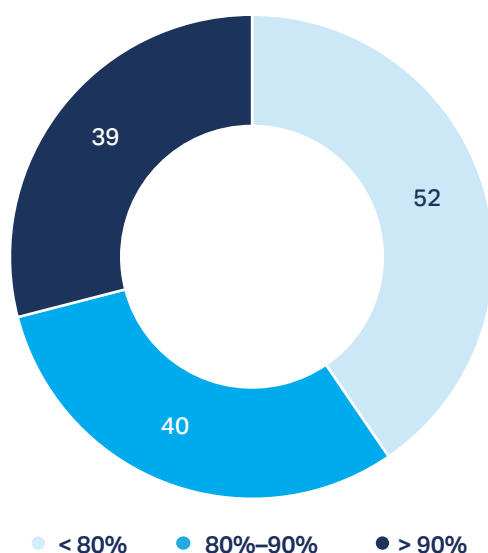
1. One national association submitted only incident data, and another only compliance data.

Compliance with organizational minimum requirements in 2023

The 2023 survey was fully redesigned based on the revised *Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy*, introduced in mid-2023. The new policy and the regulations that support its implementation have clarified many areas not explicitly covered previously, which means that new requirements were introduced and some of the pre-existing requirements were made more specific. Since full implementation will take time and sustained effort, the 2023 data provides a baseline for future monitoring.

According to the survey data, in 2023 the average global compliance rate was 81%, which represents a decrease of approximately ten percentage points compared to 2022 and falls short of the minimum target of 90%. Of the reporting associations, 30% self-assessed their compliance above 90% (see [figure 1](#)).

Figure 1. Number of national associations reporting compliance with organizational minimum requirements in 2023 below 80%, at 80%–90% and above 90%



Reporting and responding procedures were the two highest-performing areas, with average global rates of compliance at 86% and 85% respectively, which can be attributed to the effort invested in strengthening these areas in recent years. Conversely, understanding of safeguarding responsibilities had the lowest compliance rating of the areas assessed and will require considerable attention throughout 2024, since most requirements in that area are new or have been significantly revised.

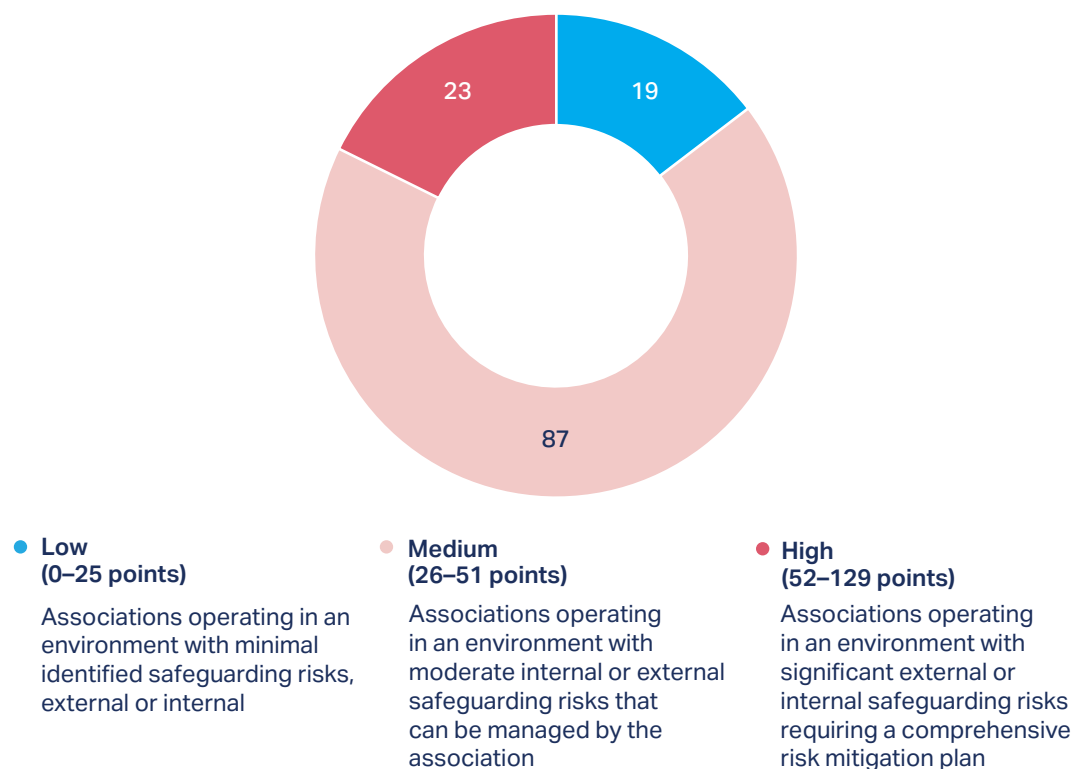
The findings will inform support and capacity building offered by the General Secretariat during 2024 and beyond.

Safeguarding risk profiles of SOS Children's Villages associations

The risk profiler included in the child and youth safeguarding annual survey enables national associations to assess their safeguarding risks across four areas: programming, staffing, external risks and partnership arrangements.

This year, 129 SOS Children's Villages associations reported their risk profiler data. The results are shown in [figure 2](#).²

Figure 2. Number of national associations reporting high, medium and low risk levels



Compared to 2022 data, a greater share of national associations have reported medium to high risk levels: since 2022, the number of associations reporting a low level of internal and external safeguarding risks has fallen from 31 to 19. This is due to changes in the risk profiler

2. Our previous reporting also included an additional risk rating that factored in self-assessed compliance with the organizational safeguarding requirements. This additional rating has now been excluded since overall compliance does not affect the scope of risk mitigation planning.

that contributed to a more accurate assessment. For example, associations operating in an area affected by war or armed conflict are now automatically assigned a high risk level, which accounts for a more than 11-fold increase in the number of associations reporting high safeguarding risk compared to 2022.

It is important to note that the risk profiler does not assess the quality of a national association's work. Its only purpose is helping the association understand its risks and develop appropriate mitigation measures.

A high risk level does not necessarily indicate a high likelihood of children and young people being harmed due to their contact with SOS Children's Villages. Rather, the risk level refers to external and internal factors that require proactive management. For example, working with partner organizations or having high staff turnover calls for more risk mitigation planning regardless of the quality of internal safeguarding systems.

Most associations reported relatively high external risks, for example in the following areas:

- national policies on corporal punishment and child sexual abuse
- gender inequality
- protection of LGBTQIA+ persons
- overall level of corruption
- harmful traditional practices

Internal areas of risk mainly concerned staff turnover and gaps in staff training.

Compared to previous years, we have observed a more data-driven approach to risk management decision-making, with greater use of risk assessment data to inform budget and policy decisions. Ongoing efforts focus on improving monitoring and evaluation and allocating more resources for staff training programmes.

Child and youth safeguarding incidents reported in 2023

Our child and youth safeguarding work focuses on two complementary pillars: prevention (which includes awareness raising, training and risk management) and incident management. Both are essential. As our safeguarding systems have matured over the past several years, proactive preventive work has been consolidating as a core component keeping children and young people safe. Our ultimate goal is to achieve long-term cultural and behavioural change that helps recognize and minimize the risk of harm.

We separately record data on incidents that were reported or confirmed in 2023 but occurred earlier, and incidents that occurred in 2023 and were reported within the same year.

Incidents are categorized according to severity, frequency and the power dynamics involved as follows:

- inappropriate behaviour (by adults)
- problematic behaviour (by children and young people)
- abusive behaviour (by children, young people or adults)

In 2023, SOS Children's Villages was active in 136 countries and territories, and our programmes directly reached 2,993,600 children, young people and adults. This includes 69,000 children and young people for whom we provide alternative care. For the numbers of people reached by programme type, see our [International Annual Report 2023](#).

Reported incidents

In 2023, 3,682 child and youth safeguarding incidents were reported to SOS Children's Villages associations and General Secretariat offices – 516 more than in 2022. This number represents incidents that were reported to have occurred in 2023. The increase is likely due to recent efforts to strengthen safeguarding systems and introduce new reporting channels.

Incidents of abusive behaviour represent just over half of the total number of incidents reported in 2023.

Figure 3. Incidents reported in 2020-2023

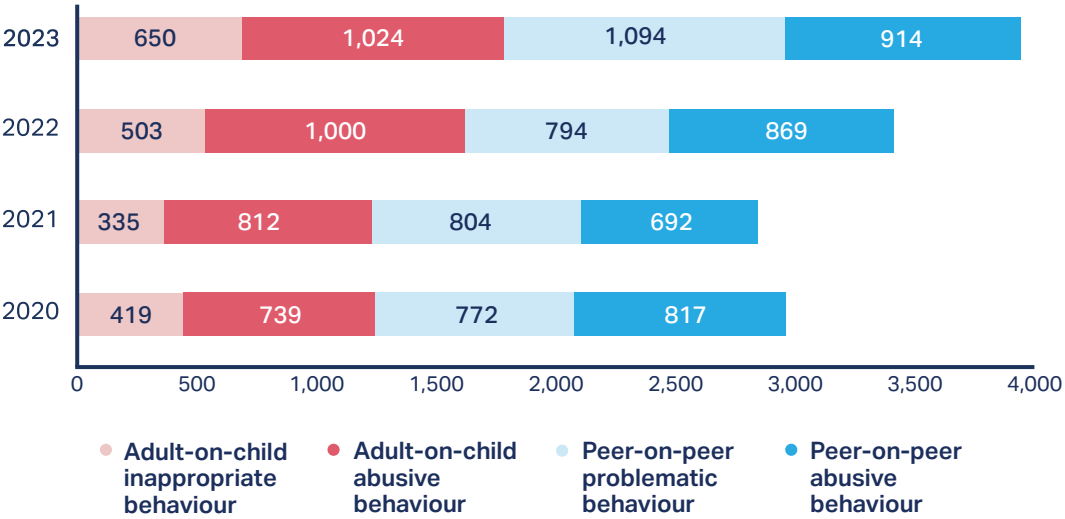
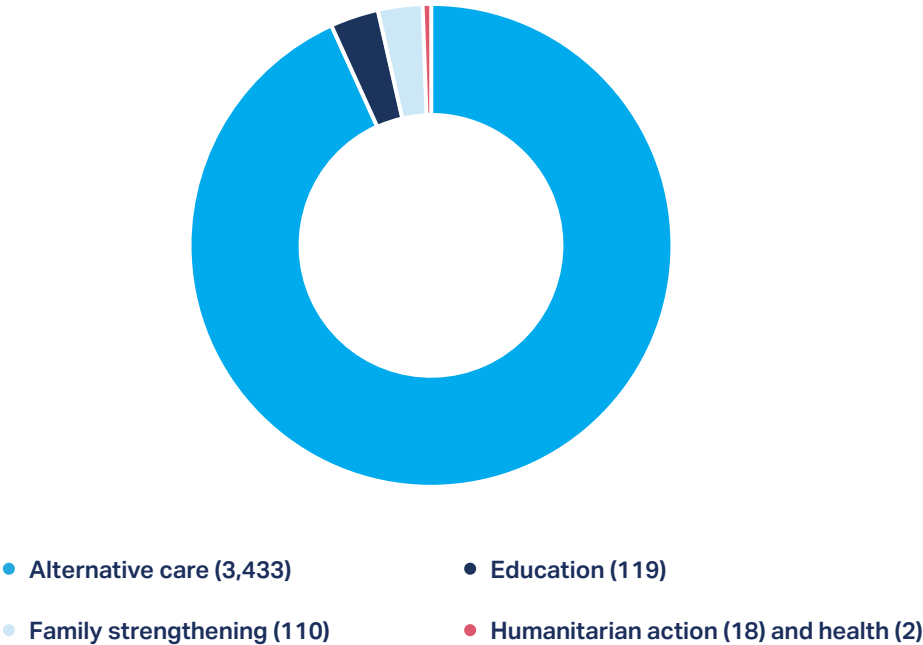


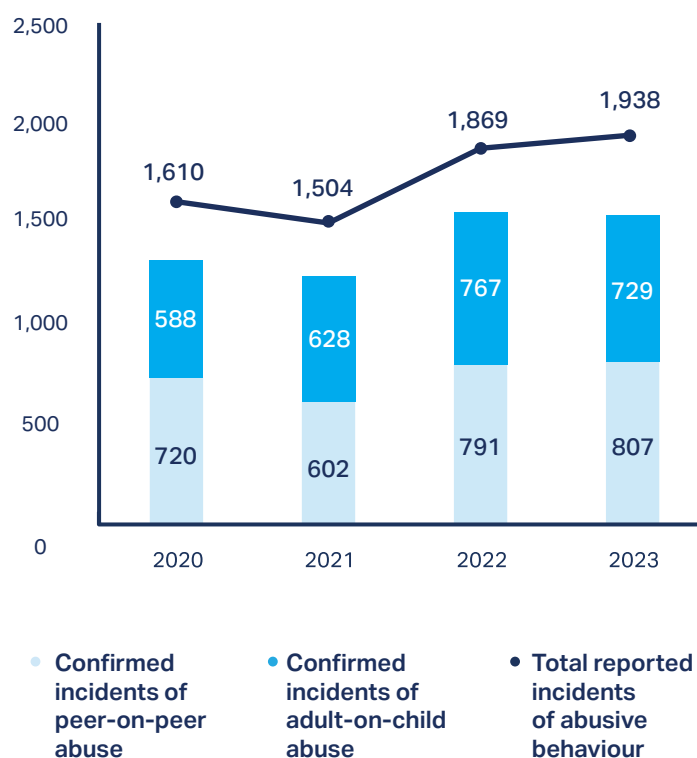
Figure 4. Incidents reported in 2023 by service type



Confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour

Of the 1,938 abusive behaviour incidents reported in 2023, 1,536 (79%) were confirmed.

Figure 5. Incidents of abusive behaviour confirmed in 2020–2023



Of the total 1,938 incidents of abusive behaviour reported in 2023, 1,209 (62%) were closed by the end of the same year. An incident is closed after a full assessment or investigation is complete, any corrective actions have been implemented, and, where appropriate, legal action has been initiated.

Children and young people affected by abuse

The 1,536 confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour affected 2,970 children and young people supported by SOS Children's Villages programmes. This includes 2,067 children and young people who were targeted by abusive behaviour and 903 children and young people who displayed abusive behaviour towards their peers.

SOS Children's Villages has a duty to respond appropriately and to provide appropriate 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 behaviours and to those who witness abuse.

Of the 2,067 children and young people who were abused while participating in SOS Children's Villages programmes, 858 (42%) were abused by staff. This is 148 children and young people fewer than in 2022.

Support provided to children and young people who were victims in confirmed incidents of abuse

Of the 2,067 children and young people who were victims of adult-on-child or peer-on-peer abuse, 2,066 had a finalized individual support plan, which can involve, for example, mental health, medical, legal, educational or financial support. The remaining child declined further support from SOS Children's Villages after they left SOS Children's Villages care and returned to their biological family, for reasons unrelated to the abuse.

In 2023, the individual support plans of 967 children and young people (47%) were implemented in full. The rest are in progress.

Staff perpetrators of abuse

In 2023, 490 individual staff members (11 more than in 2022) were found to have perpetrated abuse towards children and young people. 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 514 staff perpetrators (37 fewer than in 2022), which represents about 1.3% of the 40,690 staff working for SOS Children's Villages worldwide.

Of the 514 staff involved as perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour, 80% were caregivers, including caregivers in family-like care, youth care workers and professional foster parents.

Table 1. Number of staff perpetrators in confirmed incidents of abusive behaviours, by type of abuse

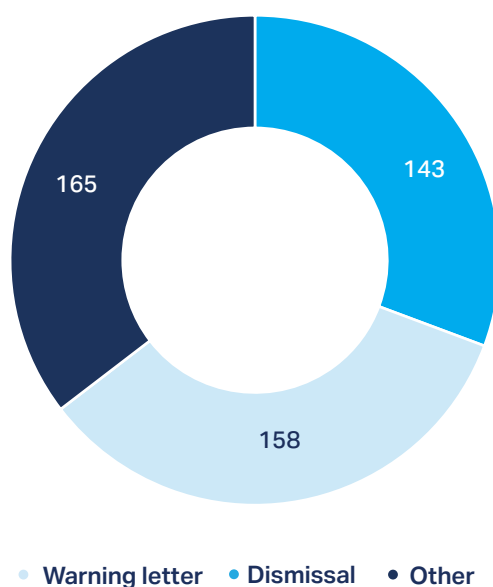
| Type of abuse | Number of perpetrators | | | | Total |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| | Senior management | Caregivers | Care support staff | Other staff ³ | |
| Physical abuse | 1 | 206 | 11 | 36 | 254 |
| Emotional abuse | 1 | 103 | 9 | 10 | 123 |
| Neglect and negligent treatment | 2 | 87 | 3 | 4 | 96 |
| Sexual coercion and abuse | — | 10 | 1 | 22 | 33 |
| Violation of privacy | — | 5 | — | — | 5 |
| Bullying | — | 1 | 1 | — | 2 |
| Financial abuse | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 4 | 412 | 25 | 73 | 514 |

3. Other staff includes, for example, administrative, maintenance and security staff and contractors.

Disciplinary actions

Disciplinary actions against 466 of the 490 staff who were found to have perpetrated abuse are shown below. In the remaining 24 cases, the organization was unable to take appropriate disciplinary action because the person was no longer on staff. We reported 62 staff members to law enforcement authorities.

Figure 6. Disciplinary actions against staff confirmed as perpetrators of abuse⁴



In addition, 338 staff (including not only confirmed perpetrators but also other staff) received additional training.

Sexual coercion and abuse perpetrated by staff

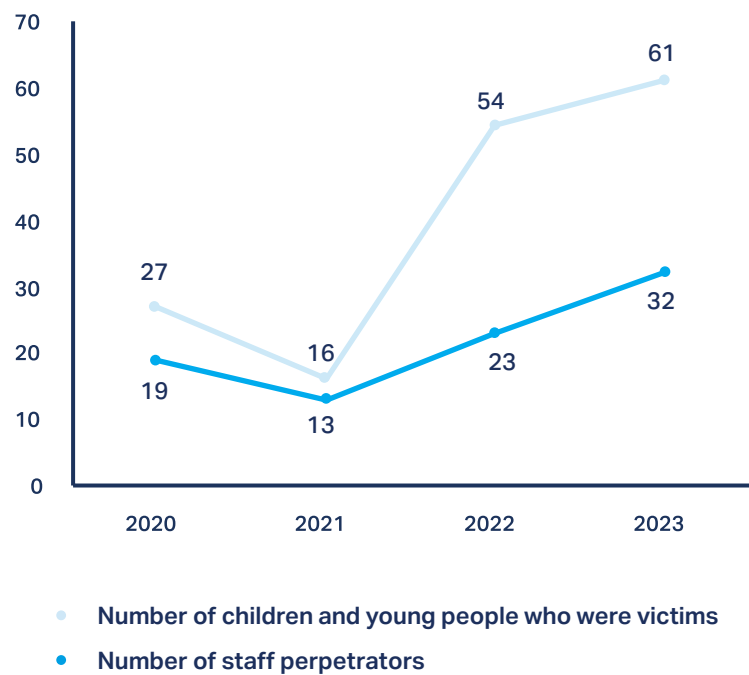
In 2023, we confirmed 33 incidents of sexual coercion and abuse by staff (10 more than in 2022):

- 22 incidents of harassment and inappropriate touching
- 9 incidents of sexual coercion
- 1 incident of rape
- 1 incident of indecent exposure

In these 33 incidents, 32 staff were confirmed as perpetrators (one staff member was involved in two different incidents) and 61 children and young people were confirmed as victims.

4. The category "Other" includes, for example, demotion, loss of discretionary pay or measures to ensure that the person involved is not allowed to work unsupervised.

Figure 7. Staff perpetrators and victims in confirmed incidents of sexual coercion and abuse in 2020–2023



As a direct result, 27 staff members were dismissed, 3 staff members resigned before they could be dismissed, 1 staff member was suspended while the judicial process is under way, and 1 staff member received a warning letter and additional training.

Of the 33 incidents, 25 were criminal offences according to national law. All but one were reported to law enforcement or child protection authorities. In the remaining case, the child’s biological family requested that no legal action be taken.

Past child and youth safeguarding incidents reported in 2023

This section discusses data on child and youth safeguarding incidents that were reported in 2023 as incidents believed to have occurred in years prior.

In 2023, we received 312 reports of child and youth safeguarding incidents believed to have occurred before 2023; 172 of these reports were confirmed.

Of the 312 reported incidents, 124 were closed by the end of 2023.

Figure 8. Reported incidents believed to have occurred before the year of reporting, 2020–2023

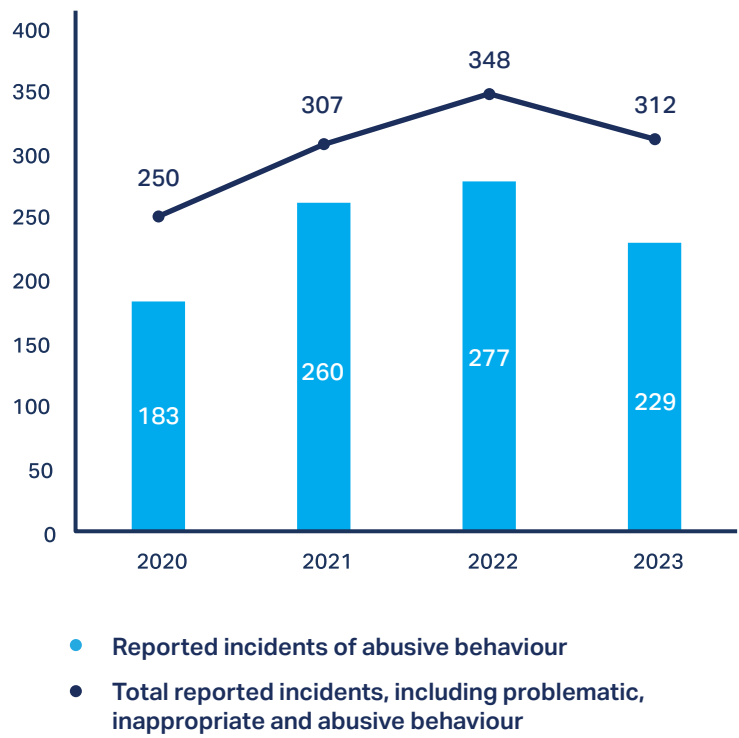


Figure 9. Past incidents reported in 2023, by service type

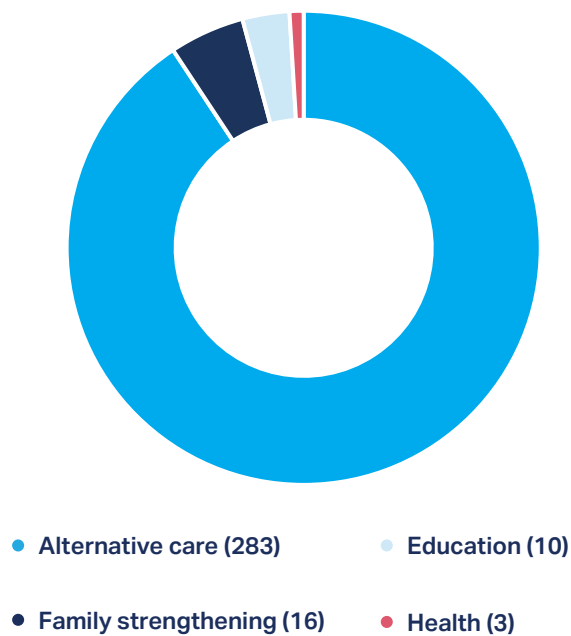
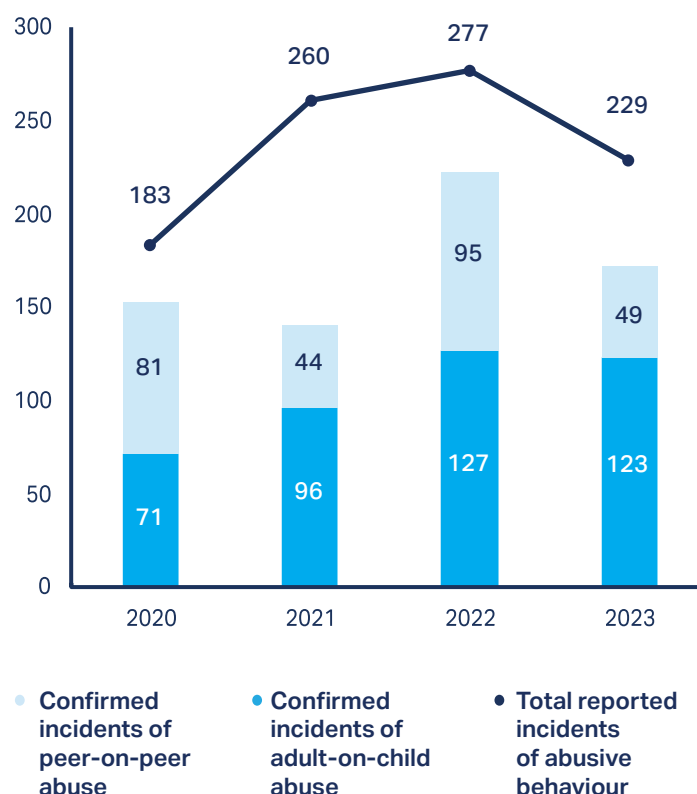


Figure 10. Reported and confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour that occurred before the year of reporting, 2020–2023

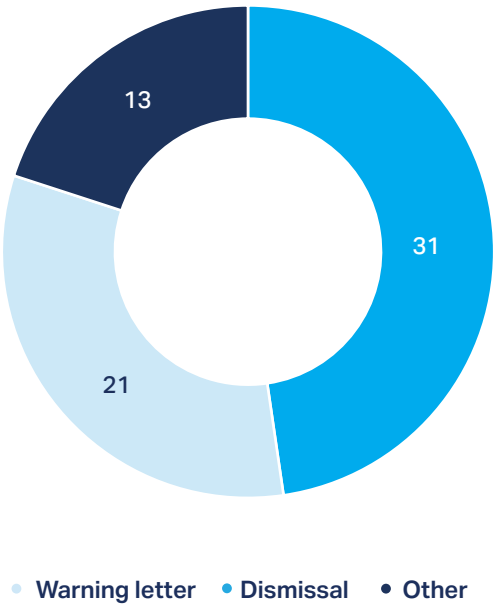


The confirmed incidents of abusive behaviour that were reported in 2023 but occurred before that year involved 242 children and young people who were victims of abuse, 52 children and young people who displayed abusive behaviour, and 115 individual adult perpetrators.⁵ As some adult perpetrators were involved in multiple incidents and some incidents involved more than one perpetrator, in our incident data we recorded this figure as 126 adult perpetrators.

Of the 126 adult perpetrators we recorded in our incident data, 84 were SOS Children's Villages staff (which represents 0.2% of SOS Children's Villages staff worldwide). The 84 staff perpetrators recorded in our incident data for statistical purposes represent 78 individuals. Disciplinary actions against 65 of these individuals are shown in [figure 11](#). In the remaining 13 cases, the organization was unable to take disciplinary action because the individuals involved were no longer on staff. We reported eight staff members to law enforcement authorities. In addition, 33 staff received extra training.

5. Since some of the incidents discussed in this section took place years or decades ago, the numbers of children and young people who were victims of abuse include adults who experienced abuse as children while in SOS Children's Villages care.

Figure 11. Disciplinary actions against staff confirmed as perpetrators of abuse that was reported in 2023 but occurred earlier⁶



Of the 242 children and young people who were victims of abuse, 234 had their individual support plan finalized in 2023. The remaining children and young people had their plan finalized in 2024, were no longer in contact with the organisation, or declined support. When victims of abuse decline support, SOS Children’s Villages makes it clear that support will still be available if they change their mind.

In 2023, the individual support plans of 108 children and young people (45%) were implemented in full.

6. The category “Other” includes, for example, demotion, loss of discretionary pay or measures to ensure that the person involved is not allowed to work unsupervised.

Focus areas for 2024 and 2025

As in previous years, we have continued observing a link between child and youth safeguarding incidents, care quality, human resources procedures and management accountability. Strengthening the child and youth safeguarding framework requires addressing quality gaps in other areas.

Developing safe programming procedures, including those specific to humanitarian projects

As mentioned throughout this report, one of the priorities in SOS Children's Villages child and youth safeguarding work is preventing and mitigating safeguarding risks, both external and internal. We will continue to work on safe programming procedures to ensure that programmes do no harm to children, young people and adult programme participants, as well as to staff and others working for or on behalf of the organization. This includes further efforts to raise awareness and build safeguarding capacity, strengthen risk management, and ensure all stakeholders including children and young people can participate in decisions affecting programme safety.

Considering the number of associations operating in volatile contexts and the low numbers of reports in humanitarian settings, we will pay particular attention to developing child and youth safeguarding procedures specific to emergency contexts. This will be done in collaboration with humanitarian action teams, based on the experiences of countries implementing humanitarian projects.

Developing cross-functional risk management

As we have developed preventive work in recent years, implementation of local mapping and risk assessment exercises have considerably improved in many countries. However, this area requires further cross-functional effort at the national, regional and international levels. SOS Children's Villages will continue to pay special attention to risk assessment and mitigation, including in guidance on child and youth safeguarding audits. The audit methodology is currently under review to strengthen its focus on prevention.

Improving preventive mechanisms

National associations have invested a lot of effort to improve reporting and responding processes, which resulted in increased numbers of reports in many countries. At times, associations can find themselves allocating all their resources to managing incidents at the expense of developing a broader preventive framework. It is critical to use the lessons learned to improve preventive mechanisms in all areas, from care quality to human resource practice to management accountability and governance oversight. This is reflected in the General Secretariat's new Safeguarding Strategy, adopted in early 2024.

Improving coordination

Coordination between child and youth safeguarding and human resources teams requires further improvement, especially in cross-functional areas such as safe recruitment, suspensions or disciplinary actions. Guidance on recruitment as well as grievance, disciplinary and appeals procedures will be included in our new people and culture policy, which is expected to be finalized in 2025.

Introducing a feedback and complaints mechanism

When reports of child and youth abuse are received, the primary issue is often not safeguarding per se but rather care quality matters, such as a lack of leaving care support at the time. As there is no separate reporting channel for care quality concerns, these reports are made through safeguarding reporting channels. This calls for a user-friendly, reliable and trustworthy feedback and complaints mechanism that would cover quality complaints and staff grievances.

Addressing under-reporting

Under-reporting remains a concern, with some national associations still consistently reporting low numbers. In some countries, the issue is best understood through the lens of cultural, societal and institutional contexts and can be attributed to cultural stigma, limited awareness and education on safeguarding issues, fear of retaliation, inadequate safeguarding mechanisms, and lack of awareness or mistrust of reporting systems. In some cases, national staff, including child and youth safeguarding focal points, lack formal training or experience in child protection work, which restricts their comprehension and awareness of child safeguarding issues. The problem is compounded where staff turnover is high. In other countries, low reporting can be attributed to lack of awareness among staff and externalization of safeguarding failures. To improve the situation, more focus on resolving these challenges at the local level will be required. This includes appropriate staffing, training to address cultural norms and promote open dialogue, and steps to empower children and youth to recognize abuse and access safe reporting channels.

To address under-reporting effectively, ownership of child and youth safeguarding and collaboration among different stakeholders within the organization, including senior management and national boards, is essential. Senior management within national associations and the General Secretariat hold pivotal roles in prioritizing efforts and allocating resources and budgets. For this reason, we have introduced child and youth safeguarding training courses for national boards and line management, delivered either online or in face-to-face workshops. Additional training and experience-sharing opportunities are in development.

Efforts to address these gaps will be guided by the General Secretariat's Safeguarding Strategy, which defines an integrated approach to developing organization-wide safeguarding and ensuring cross-functional accountability for safe programming. In addition, these and other lessons learned will help shape a revised Strategy 2030 for 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 it to the regional or international child and youth safeguarding focal point or via the SOS Children's Villages International whistle-blower channel at <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/report-a-child-safety-concern>.



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**