

# CHILD SAFEGUARDING ANNUAL REPORT 2018/2019

Child Care and Safeguarding Team  
Programme and Strategy International Competence  
Centre

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SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES  
A loving home for every child



Elijah, 9, Philippines, drew children playing *Patintero* (traditional outdoor game)

## “CHILD SAFEGUARDING”

All activities SOS Children’s Villages undertakes to ensure:

- Staff, operations and programmes do no harm to children and do not expose them to the risk of harm and abuse.
- Appropriate responses and effective management of child safeguarding concerns are in place.
- We report all concerns for children’s safety in our programmes and in the communities we work in to the appropriate authorities.

## “CHILD PROTECTION”

All activities that individuals, organisations - including SOS Children’s Villages - countries, and communities undertake:

- To protect all children from the risk of harm in programmes, communities and other environments due to the situation they live in.
- To prevent and respond to maltreatment (abuse, neglect, and exploitation) of all children, such as domestic violence, commercial and sexual exploitation, physical violence, child labour or trafficking.



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## 1 Introduction

SOS Children's Villages' child safeguarding journey in the past year was a challenge in many respects, not only in terms of our ongoing efforts to ensure a safe environment for each child in every programme, but also in terms of the changes that were brought about by the sexual exploitation and abuse scandal that hit the development and aid sector in early 2018. Development and aid organisations including SOS Children's Villages are today still reeling from the lessened public confidence as well as changes in government policies and donor funding requirements to enforce accountability in the sector.

It has been one and a half years of deep reflection, during which gaps in the commitment of organisations to safeguard children, adults and staff were scrutinised by the public, staff members, programme participants and funding agencies, and root causes for exploitation and abuse came into focus. Most recently, in June 2019, two important reports presented the findings from the inquiries into sexual exploitation and abuse by Oxfam staff in several countries. The reports showcase a growing realisation in the sector, including within SOS Children's Villages, of the changes required in how humanitarian organisations operate.

At the heart of the problem in the sector is how power is managed and how values are lived. A culture which tolerates poor behaviour, lapses in child safeguarding processes and poor accountability contributes to an environment within which abuse occurs. Severe resource limitations force teams to focus on more reactive safeguarding casework than preventative work and resources invested in safeguarding often do not adequately match the level of risk that organisations are exposed to. In SOS Children's Villages, the child safeguarding incidents that were reported in 2018 are a stark reminder that our expressed commitment to protect children must translate into action.

The child safeguarding incidents reported in 2018 continue to show that shortcomings in our preventive work and gaps in our response to child safeguarding incidents occur when the governance and management bodies of the international federation<sup>1</sup>, General Secretariat, and member associations are not clear about their child safeguarding roles and responsibilities or do not adhere to them. Leaders must set the standard and model behaviour that reflects organisational values, complies with policy and procedure, and protects the rights of children, young people, adults and staff. It means holding leaders to account. SOS Children's Villages must continue to strengthen governance and oversight for child safeguarding and place a particular focus on building the capacity and empowering national management teams and boards.

Quality care is the foundation of preventing children in our programmes from experiencing harm. Historical and more recent child safeguarding incidents reflect instances of a confluence of care quality and child safeguarding concerns. It is becoming increasingly apparent that programmes in which child safeguarding incidents occur often have a history of care quality concerns. This includes:

- a lack of training, capacity building and support to care professionals (child and youth care workers)
- perfunctory child and youth participation
- a failure to address legitimate care, support and compliance concerns that are voiced by children and youth
- poor social integration and inadequate leaving-care support for youth.

These were further exacerbated by insufficient oversight and inaptitude to address those concerns. It inevitably contributed to an environment in which abuse occurred. When serious child safeguarding investigations result in recommendations for change, they must be acted upon. An approach centred on the victim/survivor is essential. The first priority must be to ensure that the victims receive the support they need and that the necessary disciplinary and legal action is taken against perpetrators. The second priority is to address any programme quality issues that prevail (whether at the programme location or national office level) that contributed to the abuse or neglect occurring in the first place. This requires a cross-functional management approach and usually involves programme, human resources, finance and other management actions to turn around the situation. Too often, this responsibility rests on the child safeguarding focal persons alone, which contributes to delayed and incomplete responses.

Violence in alternative care settings is in focus in the context of broader de-institutionalisation and childcare reform processes worldwide. As a result, not only staff-to-child but also child-to-child abuse in alternative care settings is emerging as an important topic. Children and young people who lost parental

<sup>1</sup> More information on the governance and management bodies of SOS Children's Villages International is available on this website page: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/organisation>.



care often experienced trauma as a result of neglect, violence and other abuse within their families of origin. As an unfortunate consequence, children who prior to their care placements experienced trauma which is not addressed are likely to display problematic and abusive behaviour towards their peers and adults. Strengthening the capacities of care professionals to prevent and respond appropriately to problematic and abusive behaviour when it occurs must therefore remain a priority for SOS Children's Villages in the years to come. The overwhelmingly positive responses from SOS parents and other care professionals who complete the training for Protective Behaviours, positive discipline, prevention of child-to-child abuse and trauma-informed care (more on these trainings is in section five), highlights the need for care professional capacity building and the necessity of practical preventative skills. It also partly explains the success of the roll-out of Protective Behaviours which seems to be reaching more care professionals and children year after year. We are proud of the progress we have made through our preventative efforts.

SOS Children's Villages can now feel the practical and operational implications of the changes that have been implemented by governments and donors since 2018. The Child Care and Safeguarding Team is often approached to advise how the General Secretariat and member associations should respond to the growing understanding that integrity, safeguarding and compliance are three interrelated topics that require an increasingly aligned response. For example, SOS Children's Villages must widen the integrity, safeguarding and compliance net to also include adults. New funding applications are under closer scrutiny to ensure that comprehensive integrity, safeguarding and compliance measures are in place. More donors and partners demand reports on integrity, safeguarding and compliance incidents. SOS Children's Villages is also experiencing the effects of the greater awareness on sexual exploitation and abuse of adults, in our day-to-day child safeguarding operations. An increasing number of reports of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse of adults are received through the existing child safeguarding channels due to the absence of internal mechanisms to report such concerns. For some of the allegations, trained child safeguarding investigators are used to investigate. All these developments place the existing child safeguarding resources across all levels of the organisation under significant strain.

The organisational principles which inform our response to reported misconduct remain the same, regardless of whether it is a child safeguarding, sexual harassment of an adult, or corruption concern. Our approaches and procedures relating to integrity, safeguarding and compliance must, therefore, be aligned. An internal project has been set up to achieve this, and the Child Care and Safeguarding Team is actively participating. This will contribute to clarifying roles and responsibilities, making the resource requirements clear, and simplifying the process for staff and leaders who work on these issues.

Looking forward, we continue to build on the many successes that were achieved in 2018. This includes the introduction of learning workshops as part of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review. These workshops, through a carefully facilitated process involving staff, children, young people and (where appropriate) survivors, not only provide a strong platform for learning about past and current practices but also establish a basis for safeguarding improvements in the future. These workshops should remain part of our future child safeguarding activities. In the past year, we also continued to train our global pool of child safeguarding investigators with a focus on how to interview children. Not only is it important to thoroughly investigate allegations of abuse, but it is also essential to ensure that the process is safe for children, reporters, and witnesses, and that we respect the rights of those who are investigated.

The learnings and implications of the past year's developments set markers for our child safeguarding journey. Looking ahead, it is clear that we need to do more to orientate and train line managers and national boards on their specific role in child safeguarding. In addition, we must improve assessments and procedures in countries/places where there are doubts about the integrity and/or competence of police or authorities -- where reporting criminal acts could lead to harm of the child or young person.

## 2 The pillars of our work

It is essential that we ensure that children in our programmes are safe and protected against any form of violence and abuse at all times. Every single failure in this respect is a failure on our mission. This is reflected in commitment 4 of the [SOS Care Promise](#):

*We commit to create a safe environment for children in all our programmes at all times by implementing child safeguarding measures and procedures in line with our child protection policy, international standards and best practices.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup>[SOS Care Promise](#). 2018. P.16.

Children in alternative care often experience trauma because of violence, abuse and neglect within their own families or previous care placements. As an unfortunate consequence, children within our target group are more vulnerable to further violence or abuse. In general, alternative care service providers have a higher child safeguarding risk profile, and from experience we know that also SOS Children's Villages is not immune to these risks. We therefore put measures in place in order to:

- 1) Manage our child safeguarding risks. This we do through child safeguarding risk assessments and mitigation actions including awareness raising and prevention.
- 2) Manage child safeguarding incidents. This we do through clearly defined reporting and responding procedures.



To achieve the above, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team at the International Office, the global and regional care networks and child safeguarding networks, and other teams in the General Secretariat work closely together to strengthen member associations in their efforts to manage child safeguarding risks and incidents when they occur. We develop guiding documents and tools; promote exchange, practice sharing and learning; facilitate trainings through the global and regional networks, and ensure that SOS Children's Villages complies with and further develops our child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures. We also provide technical support and guidance to departments and teams in the General Secretariat so they can manage and mitigate the child safeguarding risks in their work.

### 3 Care networks and child safeguarding networks

Our child safeguarding work is strongly anchored in cross-regional collaboration within the SOS Children's Villages federation. Strengthening the regional care networks and the child safeguarding networks remained a key priority throughout the year. These networks are instrumental in driving our prevention of child abuse and child safeguarding work in the regions and member associations.

Responding to the child safeguarding needs of member associations and driving various priority topics globally and across regions is a task that requires much commitment and a heavy workload from the national, regional and international child safeguarding focal persons and from the national, regional and international programme staff responsible for prevention topics. Along with the increasing support needs of member associations (trainings, workshops, technical child safeguarding support, development of guidelines, complying with reporting and responding procedures including investigations, and responding to incidents), the changing environment in the sector has led to new reporting requirements and information requests by our own management, SOS promoting and supporting associations (PSAs), donors, governments and partner organisations (see Introduction).

#### 3.1 Regional care networks

The regional care networks are lively communities of practice that meet virtually and face-to-face on a regular basis with the aim of strengthening and building the capacity of care professionals. Care staff (SOS parents, youth care staff, family strengthening staff) and their support staff on programme level and from the national office (trainers, advisors and others) discuss vital child care topics, exchange on their work experiences, gain insights and learn new tools in the networks. These activities are expected to yield a positive impact on the care and protection that caregivers provide and reduce the risk of children and young people experiencing harm in care.

The regional care networks are coordinated and guided by regional programme development advisors, who are also responsible for other topics, which vary from region to region. Thus, the resources that are available to lead the care networks and support member associations in carrying out prevention activities in their programmes differs. In three regions, the coordinators focus also on other topics such as working conditions and/or training and development for care professionals.

During the 2018/19 reporting year, face-to-face regional care network meetings were held with member associations in five of the six regions. They covered crucial care and prevention topics that were determined based on the needs communicated by member associations, lessons learned in care professionals' day-to-day work experience, results of the annual child safeguarding survey and strategic considerations.

- **Western and Central Africa:** positive parenting and positive discipline
- **Eastern and Southern Africa:** working conditions of SOS parents
- **Latin America:** SOS parents' role and responsibilities
- **CEE/CIS:**<sup>3</sup> work with biological parents of children in alternative care and their reintegration
- **Middle East and North Africa:** learning & development of care professionals

The International Office (IO) Child Care and Safeguarding Team coordinates the global exchange between the regional care network coordinators and supports in organising staff trainings on relevant prevention and care capacity building topics, which regularly form part of the regional care network meetings (see 2018/19 examples in chapter 5 on Positive Discipline, Protective Behaviour and prevention of child-to-child abuse).

In addition to the virtual exchanges, which took place on regular basis throughout the reporting year, the IO Child Care and Safeguarding Team facilitated the 2019 face-to-face Regional Care Network Coordinators Meeting, lasting five days. This year's meeting focused on discussing and providing input to the draft SOS Parents User Guide, covering vital prevention topics such as the role and responsibility of SOS parents to create safe, caring and nurturing environments for children in their care. The meeting also focused on how the different regional care networks are run and which topics they have been focusing on. This exchange helped the regional coordinators learn from each other's experience to lead exchange and learning in member associations and proved to be particularly valuable for the two new regional care network coordinators. We welcome the planned focus in 2020 on care professional capacity building and including the investment to support the roll-out of the SOS Parents User Guide.

### 3.2 Child safeguarding networks

The global and regional child safeguarding networks coordinate, support and monitor the implementation of the SOS Child Protection Policy and related policy support documents in member associations and in the General Secretariat. They develop tools and provide guidance, promote practice sharing and exchange between member associations and regions, and facilitate relevant child safeguarding trainings. Next to ongoing support and virtual meetings which occur on a regular basis several times a year, the regional and global child safeguarding networks' annual face-to-face meetings provide an important platform to fulfil this mandate.

The Global Child Safeguarding Network Meeting of 2019, consisting of the regional child safeguarding focal persons, focused on differentiated approaches of dealing with child-to-child abuse, actions to mitigate child safeguarding risks in different functions and on all levels of the organisation, lessons learned from recently conducted child safeguarding audits, and streamlining the information flow across the federation on child safeguarding incidents.

Critical child safeguarding issues specific to individual regions were addressed at regional child safeguarding network meetings in five of the six regions (Asia, Middle East and North Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, Western and Central Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean) during the reporting year 2018/19. The meetings were facilitated by the respective regional child safeguarding focal person and saw the participation of the national child safeguarding focal persons from the member associations supported by the respective regional office.

### 3.3 External networks

SOS Children's Villages is actively participating in the Joining Forces Safeguarding Group. Joining Forces is an alliance of the six largest child-focused international NGOs (Child Fund, Plan International,

<sup>3</sup> Central Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States. Internally the region is also known as EUCB.

Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages, Terre des Hommes and World Vision) who decided to come together to accelerate progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals for children with a particular focus to end violence against children and to promote children's rights. SOS Children's Villages International was elected to chair the group in 2019. The purpose of the Joining Forces Safeguarding Group is to provide technical support and recommend solutions to a range of Joining Forces activities, including governance structure and safeguarding policy, procedures and practices amongst the six agencies, plus by implication those of any partners at country or international level. For SOS Children's Villages, the Joining Forces Safeguarding Group is also a valuable external network for sharing safeguarding practices and tools within the sector. Two work packages were prioritised for the first half of 2019:

- The safeguarding assessment to assess the safeguarding readiness amongst the Joining Forces child-focused NGOs in the countries
- The inter-agency protocol for reporting and responding to incidents, with guidelines on appropriate sharing of information and reporting requirements.

SOS Children's Villages International also benefits from the networking opportunities that are facilitated through the Keeping Children Safe Coalition. These opportunities are valuable to keep abreast of the latest external safeguarding trends and developments. For example, during Keeping Children Safe's membership conference that was held in May 2019, topics that were in focus included: 'What does a survivor centred approach mean for organisations' and 'How to support partners with child safeguarding'. This provides opportunities to benchmark our practices and identify areas to strengthen further.

## 4 Roles and responsibilities

There are various stakeholders who have very specific roles and responsibilities in relation to child safeguarding. If stakeholders understand their roles, act with integrity and are accountable for their actions, we can ensure that children, staff and associates, and the organisation are protected. In this report, we focus on the roles of line managers, board members and child safeguarding focal persons.

### 4.1 Role of the line managers

Every line manager – whether at the programme, national, regional or international level -- plays a crucial role in SOS Children's Villages' child safeguarding work. Line managers act as role models and drivers of child safeguarding processes, both when it comes to preventative actions and responding to reported child safeguarding incidents. This includes ensuring that child safeguarding allegations are followed up in line with our internal procedures. It also includes the responsibility to ensure human and financial resources match the child safeguarding risks. Line managers supervise child safeguarding actions and case management and follow up on identified challenges. This requires close cooperation between the line manager and the national and/or regional child safeguarding focal person who coordinates, supports and monitors the implementation of the different actions and who does the child safeguarding case management.

Learnings collected from child safeguarding incidents in the past year show that while significant improvements were made over the years, challenges remain in ensuring compliance with standard procedure, given instances in which line managers do not act according to their mandate and role. For example:

- **A line manager rejects abuse allegations as baseless and doesn't follow procedure and refer it to the child safeguarding focal person for assessment and further follow-up.** This potentially puts alleged victims, alleged perpetrators, reporters, the line manager as well as the organisation at risk and is particularly problematic if the allegations are possibly criminal acts. A child safeguarding focal person doing an initial assessment may come to the conclusion that an allegation must be referred to the police. A subsequent police investigation may find that based on the evidence collected, allegations are substantiated or not substantiated. Without this process, the victim, the line manager and the organisation are vulnerable to the fact that there was not a proper follow-up.
- **A line manager is not attentive as to when to recuse him or herself from an investigation process and when to escalate it to the next appropriate level.** In particular this relates to situations when line managers are themselves alleged not to have responded appropriately to allegations. Their continued involvement constitutes a conflict of interest and compromises the



credibility of an investigation process or any remediation actions. Again, this puts any alleged victim, alleged perpetrator, a reporter, the line manager and the organisation at risk.

- **A line manager does not ensure that recommendations from investigations are translated into actions and that the implementation of these actions is followed up.** This may lead to the situation in which appropriate support for victims and necessary programme improvements are not fully implemented. It may also be that there are good reasons not to implement certain investigation recommendations. When that happens, outlining the reasons why such a decision was taken must be well documented and communicated to oversight bodies. Without these steps, line managers and the organisation risk failing to respond appropriately or to follow-up on an investigation, causing victims/survivors to go through potentially re-traumatising experiences.

The orientation of line managers on their specific role in child safeguarding must remain a priority going forward.

## 4.2 Role of the national boards in child safeguarding

The national board is the legal representative of a member association and as such has specific oversight and legal responsibilities, which also extend to child safeguarding matters. In particular, it holds the national management to account. The national director is required to submit an annual child safeguarding report to the board.<sup>4</sup> The report must include reported child safeguarding incidents, collected lessons learned and recommendations for prevention and programme improvements. National directors must also inform their national board how they are responding to child safeguarding incidents of a criminal nature and whether a conflict of interest has been identified. Learnings collected from child safeguarding incidents in the past year show that while improvements have been made over the years there are still some gaps in how some board members understand their role in ensuring a proper child safeguarding process. Here are some illustrations of situations we have observed in the past:

- **A board member gets directly in contact with reporters, alleged victims or alleged perpetrators** to “establish the facts” without referring the incident to the appropriate child safeguarding channels for further assessment and follow-up by trained staff. This potentially puts any alleged victim, alleged perpetrator, reporter, board member as well as the organisation at risk. It also further compromises the board member’s important oversight role to ensure that the member association’s child safeguarding response is in line with national laws and organisational policies and procedures.
- **A board member oversteps his or her role by taking decisions that interfere with investigation processes** before the investigation process is closed and any conclusions are drawn. Not only do such actions put board members at risk of being accused of interfering with investigation processes, the actions also compromise the integrity of the investigation process and any future remediation actions.

The orientation of board members on their specific role in child safeguarding must remain a priority going forward.

## 4.3 Child safeguarding focal persons

Every member association is required to assign a child safeguarding focal person who is responsible for coordinating the implementation of child safeguarding activities, following up on reported complaints and incidents and pointing out child safeguarding gaps in other teams. Depending on the child safeguarding risk profile of the member association, the focal person can be a full-time or part-time position. In 2018, 133 member associations designated a national child safeguarding focal person. Only three member associations (Italy, Luxembourg Monde, and Iceland) did not have an assigned co-worker to this position. At the General Secretariat, all regional offices and the International Office had a child safeguarding focal person in place.

National child safeguarding focal persons play an important role in providing technical support to teams on how to incorporate child safeguarding in their day-to-day work. This role includes supporting and monitoring teams to ensure that all identified risks are adequately mitigated. Child safeguarding focal persons are responsible for child safeguarding incident management in line with our internal procedures and according to national law. This includes:

- registering new complaints

<sup>4</sup> See Child Protection Policy support document [Child Safety is Everybody's Business. Child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures in member associations](#). 2016.

- doing initial assessments
- reporting to national authorities
- setting up child safeguarding investigations
- keeping national management informed
- writing internal child safeguarding incident reports to line management
- supporting the development of remediation action plans
- monitoring the implementation of remediation plans
- updating the child safeguarding incident register
- recommending incident closures.

To monitor the implementation process of the Child Protection Policy and related child safeguarding activities, child safeguarding focal persons are also tasked to conduct regular child safeguarding audits. It is recommended that every programme undergoes a child safeguarding audit every three years. For more details on the child safeguarding audits, see section 7.1 below.

Regional child safeguarding focal persons organise regular virtual and annual face-to-face meetings of the national child safeguarding focal persons to ensure exchange of lessons learned across the member associations and finding solutions to challenging topics in their region based on their context and local realities (see chapter 3). They are also responsible for identifying and supporting those member associations that require more child safeguarding assistance. Regional child safeguarding focal person also bring relevant topics and questions to the global child safeguarding network to improve SOS Children's Villages global child safeguarding procedures and tools and for exchange and learning. They are also responsible for child safeguarding incident management for those incidents where the General Secretariat gets involved.

Learnings collected from child safeguarding incidents in the past year show that challenges remain in ensuring compliance to standard procedures in which child safeguarding focal persons do not understand their role or are unable to fulfil their role. For example, we have observed:

- **A child safeguarding focal person not being able to conduct proper child safeguarding incident management as the child safeguarding responsibilities are on top of their existing responsibilities.** As a result, there are gaps in maintaining the child safeguarding incident register, completing child safeguarding incident reports, set-up of child safeguarding investigations and monitoring of the implementation of remediation plans. This compromises the integrity of the child safeguarding process and puts victims, the child safeguarding focal person and the organisation at risk.

The resources allocated to child safeguarding must match the child safeguarding risks in a country or region.

## 5 Managing child safeguarding risks

A key component of SOS Children's Villages' child safeguarding approach is managing child safeguarding risks. The SOS Care Promise states:

*We put in place tailored measures to assess, analyse and reduce child safeguarding risks associated with each care option, partnership and community, as well as with functional areas of the organisation such as human resources, communications or fundraising.*<sup>5</sup>

As was the case in previous years, 2018/19 has confirmed that SOS Children's Villages has a higher safeguarding risk profile than other child-focused, humanitarian or development organisations. As an alternative care service provider, our staff provides direct care to children and young people 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Children living in alternative care placements and those who are supported through our family strengthening or emergency programmes have often suffered from violence, abuse or neglect in their families, their community or previous care placements. As a consequence of experiencing trauma, many develop dissociative coping mechanisms that make them again vulnerable to abuse and that require individualised, professional support. As an unfortunate consequence, children in our target group are more vulnerable to experiencing further violence and/or abuse.

Although great strides have been made on preventing children in our programmes from experiencing harm (prevention), it is also our experience that resources are fully exhausted by reactive safeguarding work. Much more needs to be done to ensure that all our programmes, operations and functions

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<sup>5</sup> [SOS Care Promise](#). 2018. P.16

incorporate prevention in their day-to-day work. On all levels of the organisation, decision makers have to carefully reflect whether the safeguarding resource allocations match our safeguarding risk profile. Accordingly, SOS Children's Villages has to proactively identify regions, countries and locations with a high child safeguarding risk profile and put measures and associated resources in place that mitigate child safeguarding risks, including context-specific prevention measures and stronger oversight.

## 5.1 Child safeguarding risk assessments

Child safeguarding risk assessments were introduced across the federation in 2016. They require that every member association identifies the risks in its operations – for example in SOS family-like care, other alternative care programmes, family strengthening, emergency response, as well as in its functional areas such as human resources or sponsorship. Once identified, member associations should mitigate the risks by making immediate structural, managerial or programmatic changes, including risk mitigating actions in the design and implementation of new projects or implementing targeted actions via their annual plans. National boards should oversee the process and receive annual child safeguarding reports from the national director. The regional office should support member associations to carry out risk assessments, develop and implement mitigating actions, as well as comply with their reporting requirements.<sup>6</sup>

Child safeguarding risk assessments should not be seen as a burdensome paperwork. They are a tool that – if used correctly – allows member associations to truly understand the risks children and youth areas face and to plan for actions that reduce the risks.

Risks to children's safety that member associations can reduce were identified during a workshop in Jordan in 2019. They include:

- Thorough assessments of the situation in families of origin are not carried out prior to a child's reintegration.
- Police, reference and ID card checks are not carried out when interviewing volunteers.
- High acceptance and prevalence of corporal punishment in society.

The Individual Giving department, which among other responsibilities manages the international sponsorship programme, is the first department at the International Office to follow the recommendation that General Secretariat functions also carry out child safeguarding risk assessments.<sup>7</sup> Risks to children's safety resulting from sponsorship activities might relate to sharing sensitive information about a child or family that could violate a child's right to privacy or dignity. Some examples:

- Children or their caregivers are asked inappropriate questions about traumatic experiences during programme visits.
- Sponsors request to take the child they are supporting out of school for the day because they are visiting or ask to spend holidays in the SOS family they support.
- Visitors post selfies with children supported by SOS Children's Villages on social media in a way that violates the child's right to dignity and privacy.
- Sponsorship staff including photos in sponsorship letters that show children in the privacy of their bedrooms, swimming or washing their clothes.

Sponsorships can only be a successful product if all sponsorship stakeholders (children, sponsors, donors and staff) understand the rights and duties they have to minimise the risk that sponsorship activities harm children. While guidelines for all these topics are in place, they need reinforcement.<sup>8</sup>

For SOS Children's Villages to be able to confidently present itself as a child safe organisation, it is not only vital that all member associations and functions of the General Secretariat carry out risk assessments on a regular basis, but also particularly important that global fundraising, partnerships, advocacy or programmatic projects, particularly those in which children or young people are directly involved, carry out thorough analyses of their child safeguarding risk when planning and implementing new projects.

Our annual child safeguarding survey shows that in 2018, 71 member associations (52 percent of member associations participating in the survey) had a functioning child safeguarding risk assessment

<sup>6</sup> See Child Protection Policy support document [Child Safety is Everybody's Business. Child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures in member associations](#). 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> See Policy Support Documents: "Providing Quality Sponsorship Services. A joint effort of the international sponsorship network" and [Protecting Children's Privacy](#). 2019.

process in place in their national offices and in their programmes. This is 15 percent more than in 2017. At the same time, the results show that more work remains to be done next year to achieve full roll-out, as 25 member associations (18 percent) did not carry out child safeguarding risk assessments, or selected 'not applicable'. The remaining 40 member associations (29 percent) *partially* fulfilled the requirement of having a child safeguarding risk assessment process in place.

## 5.2 Awareness raising

Awareness-raising activities help to raise awareness of child safeguarding in general and encourage staff members to reflect on child safeguarding in their daily work. The Child Care and Safeguarding Team and the regional offices use a range of approaches to raise awareness such as through trainings, articles on the Collaboration Platform (our intranet), webinars, publications, and discussions in meetings and relevant networks. Member associations raise awareness of prevention of child abuse topics that are relevant within their local context. As it is not possible to reflect on all those rich experiences in this report, focus is placed on those awareness topics that were driven and supported through the regional care and child safeguarding networks. Here are a few examples:

SOS Children's Villages' [Hermann Gmeiner Academy](#) hosts the Introduction Days for new colleagues, where staff learn about the SOS Children's Villages vision, mission, brand and strategy, as well as the structure and different entities in the federation. They learn more about child abuse, the Child Protection Policy and the procedures for reporting child safeguarding concerns.

A total of 59 participants took part in the Introduction Days on two occasions during 2018/19. Twelve participants were from the International Office,<sup>9</sup> nine from different regional offices<sup>10</sup> and 38 from various member associations, with the vast majority coming from European member associations. Participants were orientated on how to identify child safeguarding risks in their day-to-day work and discussed the child safeguarding risks and mitigating actions in their particular line of work, such as communications, human resource development, international programmes or fund development. Participants were also orientated on what they can do when they have a child safeguarding concern, such as discussing it and finding a suitable solution within their team, and which concerns must be reported through the appropriate child safeguarding reporting channels within their member association or regional office.

### 5.2.1 Code of Conduct roll-out

In 2011, the Code of Conduct was officially approved by the then Secretary General and since then it has been rolled out in the General Secretariat and member associations. The document set the frame for SOS staff who commit to a professional conduct prescribed by SOS Children's Villages to keep children safe from harm and to the responsible use of power and position, resources and information.

Based on internal and external learnings, it has become evident that the Code of Conduct lacks some of the important topics related to the work of SOS Children's Villages. This includes e.g. power imbalance and abuse of power or sexual exploitation and abuse. These safeguarding risks are inherent to our work as we work with vulnerable children, young people and families who are in one way or another dependant on the support provided by the organisation. At the same time, in many cases there is a power imbalance between predominantly male management and female staff including SOS mothers. Experiences from other humanitarian and aid organisations including UN agencies confirm that these risks must be always considered and there is a need for a clear organisational policy addressing these risks. In addition, there are further risks coming up in the past years as a result of the overall development in the society, namely risks associated with IT technologies and social media. This includes cyber abuse and cyber bullying.

It is mandatory that all SOS staff from member associations (including promoting and supporting associations) and the General Secretariat – as well as board members, consultants or anyone who works for or on behalf of SOS Children's Villages – sign the Code of Conduct. In addition, all member associations and General Secretariat offices should provide a training course to ensure staff are thoroughly orientated. By signing the Code of Conduct, staff commit to a professional conduct prescribed by SOS Children's Villages to keep children safe from harm and to the responsible use of power and position, resources and information. The recent reports of abuse in the aid and development sector as well as our own internal experiences, confirm the importance that all SOS staff are well trained

<sup>9</sup> Five co-workers from IO Vienna, five co-workers from IO Innsbruck and two co-workers from IO Brussels.

<sup>10</sup> Eastern and Southern Africa, Central Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States, Middle East North Africa and Western and Central Africa



and aware of what constitutes appropriate behaviour towards children and young people in our care and in the wider community, and what their specific roles and responsibilities are.

To close these gaps SOS Children's Villages is in the process of developing an internal regulation on Sexual Exploitation, Harassment and Abuse and is planning to update the Code of Conduct in 2020.

## 5.3 Prevention

Most member associations implement actions to prevent children and youths who are supported through their programmes from experiencing harm. As child safeguarding is a cross-cutting topic in SOS Children's Villages, prevention activities are best anchored within the programmes, member associations, regions and functions who are responsible for managing the child safeguarding risks in their area of work. Targeted prevention measures aimed at children, young people and care professionals are particularly relevant. Such measures include capacity building to help them recognise abuse as well as equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to respond to risky situations or abuse. The International Office Child Care and Safeguarding Team also supports in coordinating relevant trainings which regularly form part of the regional care network meetings.

### 5.3.1 Quality care: The foundation for a safe environment

Every child has the right to quality care. The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children<sup>11</sup> provides orientation for governmental and non-governmental service providers to deliver quality in alternative care programmes and in family strengthening programmes. The SOS Care Promise<sup>12</sup> describes SOS Children's Villages organisational commitment to do just that – consistently provide quality care to every single child in our programmes, across all member associations and the General Secretariat, in diverse and often challenging environments. It calls for continuous programme improvements by learning from our own, our partners', and children's experience. It also calls for an immediate organisational response and concrete actions when failures in delivering care quality become known.

Our experience has repeatedly shown that child abuse and neglect seldom happen in isolation in otherwise well-functioning programmes. Child safeguarding incidents, particularly serious incidents and those that occur more frequently in a programme location or member association, are often an indication of critical gaps in the quality of care that children receive. After the organisation has taken the necessary steps in responding to the child safeguarding incidents (support to victims, disciplinary and legal action against perpetrators), it is important that it addresses the underlying reasons that contributed to the abuse occurring in the first place.

The connection between programme quality and child safeguarding emerged strongly during one of the learning workshops that took place as part of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review (more information is in section 7.3). When asked what is important to feel safe, both current and former programme participants emphasised the need for:

- regular training of caregivers
- real child and youth participation (no tokenism)
- access to accredited education courses
- support to secure birth certificates
- better social integration
- reliable complaint mechanisms
- leaving care and after-care support
- regular monitoring and oversight of the programme by the national office and the General Secretariat to make sure the children receive proper care and support.

This shows how providing quality care is the foundation for a safe environment for children supported by our programmes. Achieving a basic quality level must remain a key priority for all member associations within the SOS Children's Villages federation.

Quality care depends on the caregivers providing it. SOS care workers, particularly SOS parents and youth care workers, are often responsible for children 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They often face challenging situations where some children frequently display problematic behaviour, such as aggressive or sexualised behaviour towards other children or their caregivers. To empower SOS care

<sup>11</sup> [Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. A United Nation framework](#), 2010.

<sup>12</sup> [SOS Care Promise](#), 2018.

workers to be able to provide children and youths with the care that addresses their needs and allows them to prosper, SOS Children's Villages needs to invest in improving care workers' recruitment, orientation and pre-service training, working conditions (number of children in their care, adequate compensation and benefits, self-care opportunities), availability of support offers through a multi-disciplinary team (such as supervision), as well as ongoing learning and development opportunities. The mental health, general well-being, thorough qualification of the caregiver, and their ability to ask and receive support where required are vital factors for the quality of care provided.

Important observations can be made when it comes to the mechanism through which programme and care quality concerns can be addressed. Recent years have seen a substantial increase in the number of complaints made through our child safeguarding reporting channels that, upon closer assessment, relate to care quality, leaving care and after-care concerns and support requests, and are less of a child safeguarding concern. For example, complaints that member associations do not want to support a young person's further education or individual income generating project. Such complaints and support requests particularly emanate from countries that face severe socio-economic challenges and/or where member associations struggle to provide adequate quality care through a well trained, supported and capacitated workforce, to prepare youth for leaving care and to have a system of after-care support in place. It is not appropriate to respond to this type of complaint and support request through the regular child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures as these are designed to respond to singular incidents of rights violations and abuse within our programmes rather than structural issues in programme design and delivery. Doing so also risks overburdening already thinly stretched child safeguarding resources.

Other channels for feedback on programme quality do exist, for example on our [international website](#), but the fact that the child safeguarding channels are often misused illustrates the need for stronger complaints mechanisms to deal with programme and care quality concerns that define clear responsibilities in member associations and in the General Secretariat. It also highlights the need for strong guidance on proper record keeping of the response to those concerns and to after-care support requests. Most importantly, this illustrates the need for systematic and targeted support and investments that enable children to receive and caregivers to provide quality care. If not addressed, these issues create an environment in which the risk of abuse and serious rights violations increases.

### **5.3.2 Positive discipline**

All children have the right to physical and emotional integrity and to be protected against all forms of violence. This requires caregivers to raise children in a respectful, kind and firm way, where children's behaviour is addressed, and not that they themselves are questioned or punished. Physical and emotional abuse constitutes 65 percent of all confirmed critical child safeguarding incidents across SOS Children's Villages' programmes (more detail is in section 8). Children in our target group often experienced or are experiencing trauma from violence, abuse or neglect. The resulting coping mechanisms to deal with such trauma can manifest itself in problematic or abusive behaviour that requires individualised support and strong positive parenting skills. This reinforces the importance that SOS Children's Villages prioritises preventive measures such as positive discipline trainings in all member associations and programmes. They can help care staff (SOS parents and youth care workers), technical staff and families of origin to care for children in a way that fosters safety, emotional connection and a sense of belonging, and can help children better understand and manage their emotions.

### Positive discipline training in Western and Central Africa

The Western and Central Africa SOS Care Network is called *Saawara*, which describes a type of gathering in West African culture in Anii, a language spoken in the North of Benin, where wise people share advice and guidance to improve community life. *Saawara* is an exchange and sharing platform for SOS care professionals and their support staff in the region.

The 2018/19 Western and Central Africa SOS Care Network meeting took place in the SOS training centre in Benin in October 2018. It provided a training on positive parenting and positive discipline techniques to 26 stakeholders from 17 member associations. They were mainly programme level alternative care coordinators who had been identified as being skilled to train other local alternative care coordinators, SOS parents and other care professionals, youth care workers and social workers, once they returned to their member association. Since the training took place, participants went on to train 660 staff in twelve member associations, thus proving it to be a hugely impactful training.

Asked to put themselves into the shoes of parents, the participants had to consider why a child behaves badly. They discussed how caregivers often do not understand the actual needs of children; how it is important to understand the specific personal history of each child and young person and to provide stability in their lives so that they receive the right care and support; how positive parenting and positive discipline approaches require highly sensitive and emotionally stable caregivers who are properly trained and supported to understand and effectively respond to the needs and behaviour of children and young people.

Following West African tradition, the *Saawara* meeting ended with each participant making commitments showing how a positive discipline approach can be applied to their own lives and how important it is for staff who support care workers to be self-reflective and role models. The commitments included:

- Lead positive change in the life of children and parents.
- Be more sensitive to the concerns of children and caregivers.
- Provide training, regular follow up and support so that positive parenting and positive discipline techniques are part of SOS parents' daily life.
- Implement positive parenting and positive discipline in own lives, with own children.

The training could draw on the experience of Latin American regional office and their Positive Discipline Guide<sup>a</sup>, which outlines how caregivers, other care professionals and families of origin can use positive discipline methods to raise children. This cooperation between the Western and Central African and Latin American regional offices is a good example of why having regular exchanges on care and prevention topics between the regional care networks is so valuable.

<sup>a</sup> [Kindness, boundaries and consciousness. Positive discipline in SOS Children's Villages Programmes LAAM](#). October 2017.

### 5.3.3 Protective Behaviours

Protective Behaviours is an internationally recognised personal safety programme aiming to empower children, young people and adults with strategies to promote safety and resilience. The trainings' messages can be delivered in a clear, simple and non-confrontational way by using fun and engaging activities, developed in accordance with children's age and developmental stages – at home, in educational settings and throughout the wider community.

Protective Behaviours teaches and promotes concepts of emotional literacy, empowerment, assertiveness, problem solving and an understanding of safety. In teaching these concepts and strategies, the training aims to prevent abuse, increase safety, and reduce violence.

It strengthens children and people around two main themes:

- 1) *We all have the right to feel safe at all times* - feelings, early warning signs (the physical sensations we experience in our body when feeling unsafe or excited), and the safety continuum (safe/fun to feel scared, risking on purpose, unsafe).

- 2) *We can talk with someone about anything, no matter what it is* - safe and unsafe secrets, networks (identifying adults we can talk with and ask for help if we feel unsafe or scared), persistence expectation (persisting until you feel safe again), and body awareness and ownership.

For Protective Behaviours, two levels of training are available: Level 1 trains people to become Protective Behaviour practitioners. With this level of qualification, one can deliver the 16 sessions to children and young people and inform caregivers about the Protective Behaviours programme. Level 2/3 qualifies experienced practitioners to become trainers, which means that they can train practitioners themselves. Level 2/3 can only be completed if the person has delivered the full programme to children and young people at least twice and can show their capacity to become a trainer (this is the level 3 which is done on the last day of level 2/3). There are also defined criteria for maintaining the qualification.

The success of the Protective Behaviours global roll-out today can be traced back to the care network meeting of the Eastern and Southern Africa Region in 2016. One of the trainers introduced the training that had been rolled out in South Africa to the meeting participants coming from all other member associations in the region. Since then, other regions followed suit. As of 2018, the training has been organised in SOS Children's Villages member associations in Eastern and Southern Africa, Asia, Western and Central Africa, Middle East and North Africa and most recently in Central Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS). To date, 2,054 care professionals and 6,625 children and young people have taken part in the training. The training materials are available in English, French, Arabic, Spanish and Russian. In most regions, plans are in place to do the second and third level of the trainings in 2020 which will allow trainers to train practitioners (i.e. care professionals such as SOS parents or youth care workers) in their member association and thus make the programme sustainable, without need further external support.

#### **Example Protective Behaviours in Liberia: "My body belongs to me!"**

In 2018, Liberia organised Protective Behaviours training sessions for stakeholders, both in the villages in Monrovia and Juah Town as well as in the communities where family strengthening activities have been implemented. Meanwhile, more than 400 persons were trained in Liberia - children and youth, SOS parents, and kindergarten educators. Participants agreed: This programme is practical and designed to suit the essential needs of children.

Most important for participants was the body awareness and ownership session, which teaches children to name their body parts appropriately. It also explains to children the public and private parts of their body, and to take ownership of them. All topics are tailored to the children's age and this has enabled them to understand messages easily.

Talking about body awareness and ownership, personal space, safe and unsafe secrets, early warning signs and safe networks has significantly impacted children's interaction with people. It is now common and acceptable for girls to complain about a male classmate or schoolmate who tries to touch their buttocks. This level of awareness was never experienced until children started learning about body awareness and ownership.

For the adults, protective behaviours is a great relief as well, because it is designed to directly empower children and young people to take ownership of their own safety. Furthermore, the Protective Behaviours programme enabled adults to conduct sex education discussions with their own children as an essential component of child care. As a result of this openness in discussions about sex, it is common for many adults to see their daughter freely ask for help when they see their monthly period or when they face challenges like menstruation pain.

For Nehmah Yeanay, Protective Behaviours trainer at SOS Children's Villages Liberia, Protective Behaviours has become a priority: "Based on what I learned from the workshop, especially from the session on being a good safe network member for children, I have made it a priority, and thus I respectfully listen to a child when he/she has something to say. Protective Behaviours has improved my work and the quality of support that I give to programme participants and staff, especially when we want to position SOS Children's Village as a leading child care and protection organisation."

### **5.3.4 Prevention of child-to-child abuse in Latin America**

Child-to-child abuse, primarily child-to-child sexual abuse, has received significant attention in the member associations in the Latin America Region since 2014/2015. In 2015, together with the Chilean NGO 'Paicabi', the regional office developed the Guide to Problematic Sexual Behaviour and Abusive



Sexual Practices'<sup>13</sup> that was subsequently rolled out in all member associations of the region. With this document at hand and with a strong support from the regional office, member associations worked hard to address some of the root causes for the high prevalence of child-to-child sexual abuse incidents. This included organising trainings and workshops in twelve member associations for staff including SOS parents, but also intense work with children and young people supported by SOS Children's Villages so they understand the principles of healthy sexual behaviour and know how to deal with problematic or even abusive sexual behaviour. As part of this process, evaluation criteria for sexual behaviour were developed so staff and SOS parents can assess the behaviour and decide whether it is a healthy behaviour, non-abusive problematic behaviour, or abusive sexual behaviour. The psychological and physical development of children must be considered, so for this reason there are two sets of criteria, for children under the age of twelve and then for children and young people above twelve. The approach furthermore takes the individual, his or her family, and the overall context into account (Three-Dimensional Shared Responsibility).

Based on the collected lessons learned and the need for further work on this topic, member associations in the Latin American region together with the NGO 'Paicabi' developed two more documents addressing the topic of child-to-child sexual abuse. In 2016, the document 'Sexual abuse among children and problematic sexual behaviour'<sup>14</sup> was developed. In 2018, they developed the document 'Family Intervention in Situations of Sexual Abusive Practices and Problematic Sexual Behaviours of Children and Adolescents: Prevention and Family Approach'<sup>15</sup>. An increase in the number of child safeguarding incidents reported is often an indication that awareness raising on certain child safeguarding topics and improvements to reporting procedures were effective. This was also the case in the Latin American region where the strong focus on the topic of problematic and abusive behaviour of children and young people led to an increased number of this type of child safeguarding incident reported. That is reflected in in section 8.3 of this report.

## 6 Managing child safeguarding incidents

Managing child safeguarding incidents is the second pillar of SOS Children's Villages safeguarding work. The SOS Care Promise states:

*We define clear expectations and responsibilities for child safeguarding and establish reporting and whistleblowing mechanisms which enable children, staff and other stakeholders to raise concerns and make complaints. If abuse occurs, we know what to do. We respond quickly and effectively through clearly defined procedures. This includes reporting to the responsible authorities whenever appropriate. We provide support and counselling to the affected children based on their individual needs. We expect the same from our partners and support them in these processes.*<sup>16</sup>

During 2018/19, the global and regional child safeguarding networks continued to further strengthen and improve how we report and respond to child safeguarding incidents. New milestones were achieved which are presented in more detail below. Managing child safeguarding incidents remains a challenge for all stakeholders involved. Staff whose work includes child safeguarding responsibilities require strong support to deal with the pressures that are associated with this line of work.

### 6.1 Child safeguarding incidents in which the General Secretariat gets involved

Member associations are responsible to follow up on child safeguarding incidents that occur in their association. Their response is guided by the national legislation of their country and SOS Children's Villages' Child Protection Policy and policy support documents. After an initial child safeguarding incident assessment has taken place, the General Secretariat is required to get involved if any of the following criteria are met:

- Maltreatment, neglect, abuse or any other harmful activity led to severe health consequences, attempted suicide or death of a child or young person participating in one of our programmes.
- There is a conflict of interest of the management of a member association or within a General Secretariat office.

<sup>13</sup> [Guide to Problematic Sexual Behaviours and Abusive Sexual Practices](#), 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Sexual abuse among children and problematic sexual behaviour. Suggestions for understanding the prevention and differentiated approach. 2016

<sup>15</sup> Family Intervention in Situations of Sexual Abusive Practices and Problematic Sexual Behaviours of Children and Adolescents: Prevention and Family Approach. 2018.

<sup>16</sup> [SOS Care Promise](#). 2018. P.16.

- There is evidence of negligence on part of the responsible member association or General Secretariat office to comply with the organisational procedures as set out in the policy support documents.
- A child safeguarding incident was escalated from the same member association to the General Secretariat in the past five years. This includes for example incidents that are recurring and which prompted government intervention or media attention at the time.
- There is media, donor, public and/or government interest in the matter.

The reason for introducing this mechanism in 2015 was to identify those child safeguarding incidents in which the General Secretariat needs to support member associations or to intervene directly. For example, member associations may require direct guidance from the relevant regional office child safeguarding focal person to ensure compliance with our child safeguarding requirements or support from crisis communication staff from the regional office to draft incident papers. It also enables General Secretariat line managers to monitor the member association's response more closely and, where required, intervene to ensure an appropriate response. In such cases, the responsibility of regional office and International Office child safeguarding focal persons is to support line managers with their response and interventions.

Between September 2018 and August 2019, 21 new child safeguarding incidents in which the General Secretariat got involved were reported to the Management Team (consisting of the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Operating Officer). Thirty-one more incidents were carried over from the previous reporting period. During this time, a total of 15 child safeguarding incidents were re-assessed, 17 were closed and 20 were still open at the time of the writing of the report. The nature of these incidents varies from neglect to sexual coercion and abuse.

The child safeguarding incidents that are escalated to the General Secretariat are sometimes challenging and very demanding for all the stakeholders involved. The policy support document on reporting and responding procedures in the General Secretariat was implemented in 2013. The improvements that SOS Children's Villages has made since then to improve compliance to these procedures are significant and continued in 2018/19. They include, amongst others, better support to victims of abuse, more thorough follow-up on investigation findings, improved record keeping as well as ensuring that follow-up by member associations is in line with local legislation and organisational child safeguarding policies and procedures. Because of the challenging nature of these child safeguarding incidents, they offer a number of learnings for member associations and the federation. Some of those learnings are reflected in section 4.

## 6.2 Child safeguarding incidents reporting platform

Given the particular challenges relating to child safeguarding incidents in which the General Secretariat gets involved, there is a need for up-to-date information on the status of these incidents within the federation. For this reason and following a recommendation of the International Senate's Programme Audit Committee in October 2018, a new child safeguarding incidents platform was launched in June 2019. Selected stakeholders are informed of the child safeguarding incidents in which the General Secretariat gets involved, whether in a monitoring and supportive role or if the incident has been escalated from the member association to the respective regional office.

For child safeguarding incidents in which the General Secretariat gets involved, an incident paper is drafted by the respective member association or regional office. The incident paper is provided as soon as possible after the incident was reported or when there are significant developments in managing the incident (for example, conclusion of investigation, support actions for victims are implemented, incident closure). At a minimum, a new version of the report is provided to the incident platform every three months.

When an incident paper is uploaded to the platform, stakeholders with access to the platform receive an automatic email alert notifying them about it. The incident papers are strictly anonymised. Only the staff who were granted access to the platform are able to view the incident papers. When the platform was launched, there were 16 incident papers. As of August 2019, two more incident papers had been uploaded to the platform.

## 6.3 Real-time reporting system

During the past year and a half, SOS Children's Villages' internal and external stakeholders developed a heightened awareness and understanding of the child safeguarding risks inherent in the work in our sector. This led institutional, corporate and individual donors to increasingly request information on child

safeguarding incidents reported across SOS Children's Villages' programmes. It also led to the realisation that our current reporting procedures could not provide the requested information in a timely and efficient manner. For this reason, the Global Child Safeguarding Network was tasked to develop a real-time reporting system that would improve internal reporting, facilitate a simplified information flow, and ensure faster reporting to external stakeholders such as donors on all child safeguarding incidents occurring across the federation.

The system will be used to register the following categories of safeguarding incidents:

- Child safeguarding incidents (adult-to-child and child-to-child)
- Sexual harassment incidents (staff-to-staff)
- Sexual exploitation and coercion incidents towards adults in the community (staff-to-external adult).

The real-time reporting system will enable high-level information sharing on all safeguarding incidents reported across the federation, anonymised and almost in real-time, as they are reported and responded to. It will allow SOS Children's Villages to have a real-time overview of the child safeguarding incidents in which the General Secretariat gets involved, such as sexual coercion and abuse incidents. It will also allow SOS Children's Villages to monitor and meet institutional donors' information requests on child safeguarding incidents in a more timely fashion. The project is on track and scheduled to be launched by the end of 2019. Full roll-out to member associations is expected during 2020.

#### 6.4 E-learning on child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures

At the end of July 2017, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team launched the first child safeguarding e-learning course on reporting and responding procedures in member associations. After completing this course, learners should know what they need to do when they have concerns about children's safety or when abuse allegations are reported, and what their responsibilities are. The course was first launched in English and made available in Arabic, French, Russian, Portuguese and Spanish in 2018. The course is hosted by SOS Virtual, the e-learning platform maintained by the Latin American regional office. This enables the Child Care and Safeguarding Team to monitor who attended and completed the course.

During the last year, 3,849 persons successfully passed the e-learning course. This brings the total of persons who successfully passed the course since it was launched to 7,689. As a result, 20 percent of the SOS staff globally have successfully completed the course. At the time of reporting, a further 986 persons were enrolled in the course working towards completion. Most participants used the English version (6,142 users), followed by Spanish (881), Russian (865), French (467) and Arabic (320). Countries with highest number of enrolled participants who successfully passed the course are India (696 users), Ethiopia (498), Kenya (411), Ghana (347) and Philippines (337).

#### 6.5 Child safeguarding investigation training

Child safeguarding investigations can be led only by a person who is trained to do investigations. Conducting a child safeguarding investigation without proper training can cause serious harm to the victim, witnesses and those who are accused of misconduct. For this reason SOS Children's Villages invested in the training of investigators. For child safeguarding investigations, two levels of training are available: Level 1 is the initial training, based on the initial training curriculum, for investigators who can conduct investigations only in their member association. Level 2 training is for certified investigators who receive more advanced training based on the complete investigation curriculum established by [Keeping Children Safe](#), a global authority on child safeguarding.

Several level 1 investigation trainings are now being organised for staff who already received training but who need refreshers and for staff who have been newly nominated as child safeguarding investigators. During this process, candidates who do well in the Level 1 training and show potential to specialise in investigations, will be identified to join the global pool of certified child safeguarding investigators. As of August 2019, SOS Children's Villages has 20 internal certified child safeguarding investigators in the global pool. Since 2015, this pool of investigators received regular training on various topics related to the investigation process to enable them to lead challenging investigations. Based on individual assessments, the global pool of 20 investigators will be strengthened. Good performing investigators and candidates with potential will be invited to join. Members of the global pool are also used to provide training to Level 1 investigators.

All child safeguarding investigations commissioned by the General Secretariat must be led by an internal investigator drawn from the global pool of certified child safeguarding investigators. In April 2019, the global pool received training on interviewing children and remote interviewing. Based on lessons learned

during the year, the group also worked on further improvements of the investigation "How-to" guide. Apart from the face-to-face trainings, regular virtual meetings are organised to enable them to share lessons from their actual experiences. The latter is an important process to improve the quality of the investigations.

## 7 Child safeguarding monitoring and learning

SOS Children's Villages can only ensure the reliability and effectiveness of its reporting and responding procedures and our overall child safeguarding work if it is subjected to internal and external monitoring, audits and reviews on a regular basis, and if the outcomes of these processes are used to learn, take corrective action when necessary and thus strengthen our child safeguarding work overall. The SOS Care Promise highlights this necessity.

*We regularly perform internal and external child safeguarding audits, in line with accepted international standards.<sup>17</sup>*

### 7.1 Child safeguarding audits

In 2017, SOS Children's Villages introduced child safeguarding audits as a tool to monitor compliance to the Child Protection Policy and related policy support documents. It helps determine whether the relevant documents and procedures are in place and well implemented. Child safeguarding audits are also intended to provide recommendations and advice, support knowledge exchange and offer other services designed to add value and improve member associations' operations in the area of child safeguarding.

The audit can focus on all programmes of a member association or on a particular location. Ideally, member associations should conduct a child safeguarding audit in every programme every three years. Such an audit can be conducted by the national office or included in a cross-functional internal audit commissioned by the regional office. If a child safeguarding audit is commissioned by the regional office, the audit also always covers the national office.<sup>18</sup>

Based on lessons learned, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team further improved the methodology of child safeguarding audits, developed tools and templates, and made them available to member associations and regional offices in March 2019. A webinar was organised to introduce the adjusted methodology to participants from member associations and the General Secretariat.

Regional offices plan to conduct at least three child safeguarding audits per year. As of August 2019, child safeguarding audits were conducted in Zambia, Bangladesh and Lebanon.

### 7.2 Child safeguarding annual survey 2018

Carried out for the first time in 2009, the annual child safeguarding survey monitors the compliance of member associations to the SOS Child Protection Policy, related procedures and the International Child Safeguarding Standards. It covers the following areas:

**Table 1: The focus areas of the annual child safeguarding survey**

Putting the policy into practice	Organising staff	Planning	Implementing	Monitoring and review
A safe environment is created for children and young people in SOS programmes.	Capacity building is done, roles and responsibilities of staff are clear for child safeguarding.	Local mapping and risk assessments are done, child safeguarding measures planned.	Resources are available for child safeguarding activities, and reporting and responding procedures.	Learning and monitoring is done of day-to-day child safeguarding work and incidents, and oversight ensured.

<sup>17</sup> [SOS Care Promise](#), 2018. P.16

<sup>18</sup> A child safeguarding audit commissioned by a regional office can either cover one or more programmes along with the national office or focus only on the national office.



In total, 136 member associations completed the 2018 child safeguarding survey, the most ever. Promoting and Supporting Associations in Europe and North America without domestic operations answered a questionnaire which excluded questions relating the programme level. 127 member associations answered the full survey, which is five more than in 2017. Member associations and organisations affiliated to SOS Children's Villages that have not completed the survey are Australia, China, French Polynesia, Shreyas Balgram (in India), South Korea, Taiwan, and Aide à l'Enfance du Vietnam.

Compared to the 2017 survey results, the 2018 results show that member associations made progress in implementing the Child Protection Policy and complying with the International Child Safeguarding Standards<sup>19</sup> (developed and maintained by Keeping Children Safe) in almost all survey categories. At the global level, only two indicators in the whole survey recorded a decrease since 2017:

- Planning: Inputs from children and young people participating in SOS programmes were taken less into account in the annual planning of child safeguarding activities (from 39 percent to 35 percent)
- Implementing: Fewer member associations had trained child safeguarding investigators in place (from 55 percent of member associations to 54 percent). However, in absolute figures, there was an increase from 72 to 74 member associations fully meeting this requirement.

Some of the most important achievements and challenges are described in the respective sections throughout this report.

Based on the answers provided in the child safeguarding annual survey, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team calculated the overall percentage of compliance to the minimum SOS requirements and global child safeguarding standards per country, region and globally. It used the same methodology that Keeping Children Safe uses for its certification process, i.e. questions answered as 'Met' are rated with one point, 'Partly Met' with 0.5 point and 'Not Met' zero points. Answers marked as 'Not applicable' are not reflected in the overall calculation. Accordingly, the maximum number of points applicable to a member association can be lower than the number of answers in the survey.

There are six member associations that reported full compliance: Pakistan, Croatia, Alsace-France, Germany, Colombia and El Salvador.

Among the five focus areas of the annual child safeguarding survey, highest global compliance was identified in 'Implementing' (87 percent) and 'Organising staff' (85 percent). On the other hand, the child safeguarding annual survey shows that there are still challenges in particular in regard to 'Planning' (70 percent) and 'Monitoring and Review' (80 percent). The survey findings also confirm that there is a need to pay particular attention to the implementation and further improvement of child safeguarding procedures and policies in member associations without domestic operations.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the results of the annual child safeguarding survey are outcomes of a self-assessment. Given the challenges in child safeguarding that are known in some member associations, it is important to conduct regular and independent child safeguarding audits.

### 7.3 Independent Child Safeguarding Review

SOS Children's Villages established the Independent Child Safeguarding Review (ICSR) to review a number of historical child safeguarding cases and to ensure that our child safeguarding practices today are robust and efficient, and in line with best practice. The review focuses on understanding historical cases and the circumstances that contributed to the occurrence of child abuse, so that the organisation can reduce risks in programmes today and strengthen our child safeguarding work. The review not only considers what SOS Children's Villages has already achieved, but also identifies challenges that the organisation still needs to address to protect children from harm. To ensure an objective and high quality review that can stand independent scrutiny, the child safeguarding organisation [Keeping Children Safe](#) was commissioned to independently conduct the review.

As the implementation of the review progresses, the set-up and research frame which was updated in 2018 has been proving itself in practice. Most notably, the research frame enables the complexities of the four historical abuse cases being reviewed to be untangled, examined and presented in all their facets. The updated review set-up has also strengthened the learning focus of the project. The two learning workshops that have taken place so far have increased the validity and internal buy-in to the review results and provided a safe space for programme, national, regional and international office staff, as well as current and former programme participants, to examine and discuss the underlying causes

<sup>19</sup> [The Keeping Children Safe, Child Safeguarding Standards and how to implement them. 2014.](#)

and the consequences of the abuse that had occurred, as well as the remaining gaps in the organisational response.

The review has revealed critical shortcomings in the organisational response to the respective historical abuse cases and has directed the attention of International Office, regional office and member associations towards taking pending action. In one case, it became clear that the action plan to support some of the young people affected by abuse and neglect was only partially implemented, which was a major source of discontent among the young people. At the same time, the underlying factors that contributed to the abuse occurring in the first place remained to some extent prevalent some years later. This included weak national board and regional office oversight, an under-capacitated national office, insufficiently functioning reporting structures, staff's fear of speaking out and fear of losing their job in a tense political and economic environment, a somewhat indifferent attitude by some individuals towards children in care, and overburdened and under-capacitated SOS parents. The review so far has shown that responding to critical child safeguarding incidents, especially those that occur over an extended period of time, requires the organisational response to be broader and not only provide immediate support to victims but also take disciplinary action against those responsible. These insights are contributing strongly to the response that is currently ongoing.

To scale the learning effect and make the insights gained as accessible as possible to a broader stakeholder group across SOS Children's Villages, the learnings from the historical abuse cases reviewed are currently being brought together with other lessons learned from our ongoing child safeguarding work. A series of articles is being published on internal channels, whereby each article presents the learnings on one topical area. Once all articles have been published, they will be made available as a comprehensive learning document that will be complemented as the review progresses. The series of articles will also form the basis for trainings with selected stakeholder groups across the federation, starting with the National Director and Board Chair Meeting of Western and Central Africa in October 2019.

Despite these successes, the project continues to be challenging. Delays in project implementation were caused by:

- changes in the consultants used by Keeping Children Safe
- the complexities of the historical abuse cases
- significant support needs in following up on issues identified in the process
- the sheer volume of work.

These delays have had a domino effect on the remaining project implementation. Next to the four individual country case review reports, the project deliverables include the Independent Child Safeguarding Review Global Report, in which Keeping Children Safe will bring together the most relevant findings from the four reviews and provide a global perspective on these historical abuse cases. To provide SOS Children's Villages' own perspective and present the important lessons we learned from the process, we will develop our own report, which will be made available publicly, together with the Global ICSR report. The project will conclude by the end of 2020.

## **8 Child safeguarding incident analysis**

When looking at child safeguarding incidents in SOS Children's Villages, it is important to understand them in the context of the programme settings in which they occurred, as well as the overall number of children participating in these programmes. Children and young people in SOS families, youth programmes, SOS foster families and transit homes are in direct care of SOS Children's Villages. In other words, they are cared for by care professionals in an alternative care setting 24 hours and seven days a week. The majority of the children and young people supported through our family strengthening and emergency interventions are cared for by their families of origin or extended families.

**Table 2: number of programme participants and single services provided in 2018<sup>20</sup>**

Programme setting	Number of programme participants (children)
SOS families	45,500
Youth programmes	24,400
Foster families & transit homes	3,900
Family strengthening <sup>21</sup>	496,300
Education programmes	139,700

Programme setting	Number of single services provided
Health services	698,200
Emergency services	1,178,158

A child safeguarding incident is defined as a situation in which a child is harmed or is reported to possibly have been harmed as a result of an action by a staff member, associate or SOS Children's Villages' operation. A child safeguarding incident may involve multiple perpetrators and/or multiple victims.

In this chapter we focus on two types of incidents. Firstly, child safeguarding incidents in which SOS Children's Villages staff were perpetrators. In these incidents, the children who are harmed or possibly harmed may or may not be participants in SOS Children's Villages programmes. Secondly, this chapter focuses on child safeguarding incidents in which children or young people in direct care of SOS Children's Villages displayed problematic or abusive behaviour towards other children. The data presented in this chapter was collected through our annual Child Safeguarding Survey. It therefore reflects only those child safeguarding incidents that were reported in 2018. Our experience and that of other child care organisations shows that there is a risk of underreporting: not all child safeguarding incidents that occur end up being reported. Reasons are widespread, and include victims' dependence on the abuser, fear of stigma, and social consequences should the abuse become known.<sup>22</sup>

## 8.1 Child safeguarding incidents with staff as perpetrators

We define a child safeguarding incident in which a SOS Children's Villages staff member is the alleged perpetrator to be a **critical incident** if any one of the following criteria is met:

- 1) The incident is a criminal act according to national law. It should therefore be reported to the relevant authority, such as police, court and/or child welfare authority.
- 2) Disciplinary action was taken by SOS Children's Villages against the perpetrator. This includes issuing a warning letter or dismissal.

It is important to note that 70 percent of reported and confirmed incidents are non-critical. Such non-critical incidents are best illustrated with the following example: An SOS mother and teenager argue about house rules over dinner in the SOS family. In the process, the SOS mother loses her temper. She shouts at the teenager and aggressively tries to remove the teenager's headphones. During the assessment, it is established that a healthy bond between the SOS mother and the child exists. The SOS mother acknowledges that she overreacted and the teenager agrees that she has broken a standing rule in the SOS family. Both agree to work on their relationship and how they react to mutual disagreements.

When such non-critical child safeguarding incidents happen in an alternative care setting, SOS Children's Villages is often required to keep record or report it to the authorities. SOS Children's Villages should also seek to learn from incidents to avoid recurrence or escalation into a critical situation that has a detrimental impact on the child's well-being and development.

In 2018, in total of 307 critical child safeguarding incidents involving staff as perpetrators were reported and later confirmed in SOS Children's Villages programmes. This represents a global increase by ten percent compared to 2017. It is important to note that given the likelihood of underreporting (both current

<sup>20</sup> SOS Children's Villages International, [International Annual Report 2018](#).

<sup>21</sup> As interventions in family strengthening programmes often work through a child's parents and not only target children but other family members as well, all members of a household are counted in this category.

<sup>22</sup> International Development Committee. [Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in the Aid Sector](#). 2018.

and historical), the conclusions that can be drawn from increases or decreases in the number of reported incidents are limited. In fact, an increase in the number of reported and even confirmed incidents can be an indication of improved reporting and responding procedures and of heightened awareness of child safeguarding.

**Table 3: Critical child safeguarding incident reported and confirmed in 2018**

Region	No. of staff perpetrators	% of total
Asia	22	7 %
CEE/CIS <sup>23</sup>	21	7 %
Europe and North America	18	6 %
Latin America	142	46 %
Middle East and North Africa	36	12 %
Eastern and Southern Africa	31	10 %
Western and Central Africa	37	12 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Disaggregating the total number of critical child safeguarding incidents where staff were perpetrators by programme setting, shows that the majority of reported and confirmed child safeguarding incidents in 2018 occurred in SOS families, as table 4 illustrates.

**Table 4: Staff perpetrators in confirmed critical child safeguarding incidents in 2018, disaggregated by the programme setting**

Programme setting	No. staff perpetrators	% of total
SOS families	259	84 %
Youth programmes	14	5 %
Family strengthening	3	1 %
Education	9	3 %
Health	7	2 %
Emergency	15	5 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100 %</b>

When looking at the confirmed incidents in table 4, it is important to keep the total number of children who are supported by SOS Children's Villages in the various programme settings in mind (see table 2 above).

In 2018, 45,500 children were directly cared for in SOS families in member associations across the world. During the same period, our global child safeguarding systems registered and confirmed that 259 staff members were perpetrators of critical child safeguarding incidents. This number is concerning and makes a compelling case that SOS Children's Villages continues to invest in improving programme quality, raising awareness, emphasising prevention activities and strengthening reporting and responding procedures.

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that SOS families are a family-like alternative care setting in which children are cared for 24 hours per day, seven days a week. Whilst this situation increases the safeguarding risk profile, it also enables staff, including care professionals and other programme staff, to identify, report, respond and closely monitor children's safety and focus on interventions that minimise the risk that children are harmed. This is arguably more easily done in SOS families than in other programme settings such as family strengthening programmes, where SOS staff only periodically visit the family and children. A higher number of confirmed child safeguarding incidents in SOS families therefore give some indication that our child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures are functional. It shows that when children are harmed, these incidents are firstly reported

<sup>23</sup> Central Eastern Europe/ Commonwealth of Independent States



and secondly responded to. They thus don't necessarily reflect on the quality of care that children receive in SOS families.

In 2018, SOS Children's Villages care for 24,400 young people in youth programmes in member associations across the world. During the same period, 14 staff members were perpetrators of critical child safeguarding incidents. This low number is concerning because we believe it is an indication for underreporting and that more needs to be done to mitigate child safeguarding risks in our youth programmes, for example, in terms of improving programme quality, raising awareness and focusing on prevention, and strengthening our child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures. Some young people in our youth programmes are over 18 years of age and are considered adults. Regardless, allegations of abuse of young people who are cared for or supported through SOS Children's Villages must be followed-up in line with our child safeguarding procedures.

In 2018, SOS Children's Villages supported 496,300 people through our family strengthening programmes. As family strengthening programme interventions often work through a child's parents or other caregivers and not only target children but other family members as well, all members of a household are counted in this category. During the same period, only three staff members were perpetrators of critical child safeguarding incidents in family strengthening programmes. Given that SOS Children's Villages has so far focused more on establishing a robust child safeguarding approach in programmes where it is directly responsible for the care of children (predominantly SOS families), the low numbers of incidents in family strengthening programmes are more likely to be due to underreporting.

In 2018, SOS Children's Villages provided 1,178,158 single emergency response services to children and adults in member associations across the world. These included providing safe environments through interim alternative care and child friendly spaces, reuniting unaccompanied or separated children with their families, mental health and psychosocial support as well as education and other direct services to prevent family separation.

During the same period of time, 15 staff members were perpetrators of critical child safeguarding incidents. Again, this is a strong indication for significant underreporting and requires SOS Children's Villages to invest more in strengthening awareness, prevention, reporting and responding in these programmes.

Table 5 breaks down the **number of staff perpetrators** in confirmed critical child safeguarding incidents<sup>24</sup> according to the type of abuse. Half of these incidents were physical abuse, which mostly involved acts of corporal punishment by SOS parents and aunts. The next largest group are incidents of neglect and negligent treatment, which mostly involved acts of failing to provide adequate supervision, nutrition, clothing or meeting a child's education and safety needs. This is followed by emotional abuse, which mostly involved behaviour, speech and actions that had a negative impact on a child's emotional state and development. Sexual coercion and abuse by staff accounted for approximately eight percent, or 23 incidents, reported and confirmed in 2018. Finally, there was one critical incident in which a child's privacy was violated.

**Table 5: Number of staff perpetrators in confirmed critical child safeguarding incidents in 2018**

Type of abuse	No. staff perpetrators	% of total
Physical abuse	154	50 %
Neglect & negligent treatment	82	27 %
Emotional abuse	47	15 %
Sexual coercion and abuse	23	7 %
Violation of privacy	1	<1 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Out of the 307 confirmed critical child safeguarding incidents in which staff were perpetrators, in 74 percent of the incidents SOS parents and aunts -- i.e. staff providing direct care to children and young people in SOS families -- were the perpetrators (226 perpetrators). The most common form of abuse committed by **SOS parents** was physical abuse (61 percent or 137 perpetrators), followed by neglect

<sup>24</sup> These incidents were reported to the authorities as per national law and/or disciplinary action was taken against the perpetrators.

and negligent treatment (19 percent or 44 perpetrators), emotional abuse (19 percent or 42 perpetrators), and sexual coercion and abuse (one percent or three perpetrators).

In 2018, staff who are in a family strengthening, teacher, medical, administrative, maintenance, security or driver role were involved in 81 confirmed critical child safeguarding incidents. In comparison to SOS parents, there is a higher ratio of incidents of sexual coercion and abuse involving other SOS staff. Member association must put a stronger emphasis on assessing the child safeguarding risks associated with the roles and functions of this group of staff and put mitigating measures in place to reduce those risks. This especially concerns sexual coercion and abuse.

## 8.2 Sexual coercion and abuse in which staff were perpetrators

During 2018, 23 incidents of sexual coercion and abuse in which staff were perpetrators were reported globally. One incident was reported in member associations in the regions CEE/CIS<sup>25</sup>, Western Europe, and North Africa and Middle East. Three incidents were reported in member associations in the Asia region. Four incidents were reported in member associations in the Eastern and Southern Africa region. Five incidents were reported in member associations in the Western and Central Africa region and eight incidents were reported in member associations in the Latin America region. 26 children were confirmed as victims in these incidents. As a direct consequence, 20 staff members were dismissed. One staff member was on suspension pending the outcome of a legal process which could lead to a dismissal. One staff member resigned<sup>26</sup> before action to dismiss could be initiated. One staff member, who is seconded to an SOS facility from the authorities, received a warning following an investigation by the authorities for an inappropriate action.

Table 6 further breaks down the type of sexual coercion and abuse incidents involving staff perpetrators that were confirmed in 2018.

**Table 6: The number of staff perpetrators and the number of child victims according to the type of confirmed sexual coercion and abuse incidents in 2018**

Type of sexual coercion and abuse incidents	No. staff perpetrators	No. child victims
Indecent exposure	0	0
Recording of inappropriate and/or sexually degrading imagery of children / young people	1	1
Exposing children/youth to pornography	0	0
Attempted rape	1	1
Rape	4	4
Harassment / inappropriate touching	15	18
Child/Young person manipulated and/or coerced to sexual acts <sup>27</sup>	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>

Some important observations can be made from the 23 sexual coercion and abuse incidents:

- 1) Staff who work directly with children were the perpetrators in seven incidents.
- 2) Staff who work in non-care services were the perpetrators in 16 incidents. They held teacher, maintenance, gardener, security guard or driver positions.
- 3) Men were the perpetrators in 19 incidents (eleven non-care staff, three care staff, one programme staff and four teachers), and women were the perpetrators in four incidents (one SOS parent, two SOS aunts and one youth care co-worker).
- 4) According to national legislation in the respective countries, 19 incidents were a crime. Out of these, ten incidents were reported to police or prosecuting authorities.

<sup>25</sup> Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States

<sup>26</sup> SOS Children's Villages position is not to accept resignations depending the outcomes of a disciplinary process.

<sup>27</sup> Incidents where a staff member exerts his or her power to coerce or manipulate a young person into sexual acts. This particularly applies to incidents where the victim has reached the age of consent. In some cases, such incidents initially appear to be a "consensual relationship".

The reasons for not reporting the other nine incidents to authorities require a careful, closer look. In three of the incidents, careful assessment by the responsible staff showed that pressing charges would have violated the best interest of the child. This related to doubts about the integrity and/or competence of the authorities handling the case, social stigma, religious norms and possible punitive actions against victims that would have put the victims' safety and privacy at risk. Irrespective of these highly challenging limitations, SOS Children's Villages was able to offer support to the victims and carry out the necessary disciplinary action against the perpetrators.

In five of the incidents, the children's legal guardians decided not to press charges. SOS Children's Villages provides support to children not only through direct care such as in SOS families or in youth programmes, but also through other programmes such as family strengthening, emergency response, schools or vocational training centres. In many if not most of these programmes, the child's legal guardian is not SOS Children's Villages, but for example the child's parents or next of kin. When a child safeguarding incident occurs, next to the child itself, the legal guardian must decide whether and how they are going to report a child safeguarding incident to the authorities. In such situations, authorities are unable to pursue charges further. In the case of the five incidents, for reasons that might be similar to the ones stated above, the legal guardians, who were not SOS Children's Villages' staff, took the decision not to report. In such cases, SOS Children's Villages' scope for taking action is limited. However, this does not prevent the organisation from offering support to the victim and taking disciplinary action, which also happened in the incidents at hand.

In one incident, the member association did not follow the child safeguarding procedures. The relevant regional office is looking into the matter to determine next steps.

Recent developments in the aid and development sector increased the awareness of the need to cast the safeguarding net more widely to include vulnerable women in communities and the workplace. This is currently a gap also in SOS Children's Villages. Reports centred on the unbalanced power relations between:

- aid workers and vulnerable population groups
- male employees in higher positions, and female employees in lower positions
- employees in Western headquarters and in other offices around the world.

As such, there is a strong push for organisations to develop clear guidelines on how such power imbalances can be prevented, identified and penalised in the aid sector. Power imbalances certainly played a role in the 23 incidents of sexual coercion and abuse in which children and young people were targeted. There is a need to widen the safeguarding net within SOS Children's Villages to include incidents of exploitation and abuse of adult beneficiaries within the communities we work in and staff. SOS parents (predominantly women) are particularly vulnerable to power imbalances. The work that the International Office is undertaking to develop the required policy and procedural framework is particularly welcomed.

### **8.3 Child-to-child abuse incidents**

As an alternative care service provider, SOS Children's Villages provides care and support to children without adequate parental care. Children without adequate parental care often experienced trauma as a result of neglect, violence and abuse within their families of origin or previous care placements. Early exposure to toxic stress and adversity negatively affect the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills. Children with a history of abuse or neglect may therefore be more vulnerable to repeatedly becoming victims of harmful behaviour or enacting such behaviour towards other children. Situations in which boundary violations between children take place can be complex, and care professionals often experience pressure to respond effectively. They should therefore be equipped and empowered to respond to such situations in a balanced, safe and caring manner, ensuring the best interest of every child.

Boundary violations happen when one child violates the integrity of another child emotionally, physically or sexually. This may include direct or indirect acts of aggression, inappropriate sexual behaviour and other harmful and disrespectful ways of treating another child. Boundary violations may be harmful or potentially harmful, but they are not always abusive. It is not only the behaviour in and of itself that will determine whether the behaviour is expected, problematic or abusive, but also the context within which it occurs. Every situation should be assessed carefully and take into account various contextual factors. Boundary violations that occur between children can be emotional, physical or sexual. Some harmful behaviour can however be self-directed and may include self-injury and suicide. In table 7, the difference

between expected, problematic and abusive behaviours as well as the appropriate response to the behaviour are briefly explained.

**Table 7: Differentiating between expected, problematic and abusive behaviour**

	Expected behaviour	Problematic behaviour	Abusive behaviour
Characteristics	There is no recognisable or significant power imbalance between the children involved. The behaviour is appropriate or expected for their developmental level.	There is no recognisable or significant power imbalance between the children. The behaviour is not age appropriate and even when addressed, the behaviour may persist. The behaviour may be harmful or potentially harmful.	A recognisable and significant power imbalance exists between the children involved and actions are intended to cause discomfort, hurt or pain. The behaviour is harmful and usually involves the violation of human rights and may even be illegal.
Response	Conflict or aggression can usually be resolved without adult intervention. When needed, adult intervention resolves the situation.	When needed, adult intervention resolves the situation or professional support is secured for the involved children.	The child safeguarding procedures apply and professional support is secured for the involved children.

In 2018, globally, 923 incidents were registered in which children in the direct care of SOS Children's Villages displayed problematic behaviour. A total of 128 incidents were registered as critical child safeguarding incidents, where children in direct care displayed abusive behaviour towards other children. Globally, the number of children in direct care who displayed problematic behaviours increased by seven percent compared to 2017. The number of children in direct care who displayed abusive behaviour increased by one percent compared to 2017. Member associations in the Latin American region registered notably higher number of such incidents than other regions. This is likely to be the result of the strong focus that has been placed since 2016 on building the capacity of care professionals and programme staff to be able to respond appropriately to children who display problematic and abusive behaviour.

**Table 8: Children in direct care who displayed abusive behaviours in critical child safeguarding incidents in 2018**

Region	No. of children in direct care who displayed problematic behaviour	No. of children in direct care who displayed abusive behaviour
Asia	223	3
CEE/CIS <sup>28</sup>	136	8
Europe and North America	45	15
Latin America and the Caribbean	352	55
Middle East and North Africa	52	8
Eastern and Southern Africa	69	30
Western and Central Africa	46	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>128</b>

<sup>28</sup> Central Eastern Europe/ Commonwealth of Independent States



It must be noted that there is a risk of an underreporting of incidents where children display problematic and abusive behaviour for various reasons, including:

- fear of further bullying or abuse if children with abusive behaviours are reported
- a detachment from external networks
- poorly trained staff who are unable to identify or distinguish between problematic and abusive behaviour of children
- being part of a culture of non-disclosure.

More work is required globally to enable care professionals and programme staff to prevent and identify such behaviour and to respond appropriately when it occurs.

Disaggregating the 923 reported and confirmed incidents where children displayed problematic behaviour and the 128 reported and confirmed incidents where children displayed abusive behaviour per programme setting shows that approximately 90 percent of the reported and confirmed incidents occurred in SOS families. Only 7 percent occurred in youth programmes and the remaining 3 percent, in a community, school or other setting. Again, it is important to put these figures in relation to the total number of children supported in member associations across the world, which were 45,500 children in SOS families and 24,400 young people in youth programmes. It is difficult to draw any conclusions on these figures without further research. What is clear, however, is that reporting child-to-child abuse must be encouraged as it is a first and important step to respond appropriately to problematic and abusive behaviour of children and invest in prevention work to prevent it from occurring in future. The low number of reports in youth programmes show that a strong focus is required to improve programme quality, raise awareness, increase prevention activities and strengthen reporting and responding procedures in our youth programmes.

Table 9 illustrates the breakdown by the type of critical child safeguarding incidents involving children in direct care who displayed problematic and abusive behaviour. In terms of physical boundary violations, there were 582 problematic behaviour incidents and 50 abusive behaviour incidents that were assessed to be critical child safeguarding incidents. Some incidents in this category may also involve bullying. In terms of sexual boundary violations, there were 245 incidents of problematic behaviours and 77 abusive behaviours incidents that were assessed to be critical child safeguarding incidents. In terms of emotional boundary violations there were 94 incidents registered and only one incident of abusive behaviour. It must be noted that some incidents in this category could also possibly involve bullying.

**Table 9: Number of incidents where children in direct care displayed problematic or abusive behaviour towards other children in 2018**

Type of abuse	No. of children in direct care who displayed problematic behaviour	% of total	No. of children in direct care who displayed abusive behaviour	% of total
Physical boundary violations	582	63 %	50	39 %
Emotional boundary violations	94	10 %	1	1 %
Sexual boundary violations	245	27 %	77	60 %
Violation of privacy	2	<1 %	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100 %</b>

#### 8.4 Death incidents

Table 10 illustrates the number of death incidents of children in direct care reported globally during 2018. Sadly, in comparison to the previous year there is a 35 percent increase in the number of deaths from 17 to 26 deaths. There are seven more deaths as a result of accidents in comparison to the previous year, the majority of deaths as a result of road accidents. One of the deaths was a child from a neighbouring community who died on SOS premises after receiving a blow to the head while playing. The ten deaths that are a result of illness relate mostly to HIV/AIDS related illnesses, as well as cancer.

There were three deaths as a result of drowning. After one of the incidents of drowning, the enquiry found that not all precautions were taken by the staff on duty. There is one less death as a result of suicide in comparison to the previous year. Regrettably, two suicides were registered in Asia and one in the Eastern and Southern Africa region.

**Table 10: Number of death incidents reported in the period January to December 31<sup>st</sup>**

Cause of death incident	SOS family (including other alternative family based care options)	Youth programme
Illness	9	1
Suicide	1	2
Accident	5	5
Drowning	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>

## 9 Key recommendations

Based on the experience, learnings and data described in this report, the Child Care and Safeguarding Team makes the following recommendations. Some are carried over from the previous year; others are new. They are consistent and aligned to the priorities for changes required in the next three years. Unless stated otherwise, the recommendations are made for the period 2020-2022.

- 1) Continue to invest in improving the working conditions of care professionals, putting support systems in place and building their capacity to enable them to provide quality care to children and young people in our target group. This includes topics that help reduce child safeguarding risks, such as trauma-informed care, positive discipline, how to respond to problematic and abusive behaviour, and protective behaviours.
- 2) The organisational principles which inform our response to reported misconduct remain the same, regardless of whether it is a child safeguarding, a sexual harassment of an adult, or a corruption concern. Our various approaches, procedures and structures for managing integrity, safeguarding and compliance should therefore be aligned in 2020 by a cross-functional team, with roll out anticipated in 2021 and 2022.
- 3) Continue to orientate and train line managers and national boards on their specific roles and responsibilities in child safeguarding.
- 4) Improve assessments and procedures in countries and programme locations where there are doubts about the integrity and/or competence of police or authorities, where reporting incidents could have the unintended consequence of the rights of the child being violated or that his or her best interest is not upheld. Reconfirm that SOS Children's Villages' default position in all member associations is to immediately report child safeguarding incidents that are a crime to the authorities who are responsible to investigate.
- 5) The available human and financial resources in regional offices must match the specific child safeguarding risks in the member associations they support. This will require each regional management team to assess their safeguarding risks and their need for awareness raising, training and capacity building, case management as well as additional donor reporting and make the necessary resource adjustments for 2020.
- 6) Integrate child safeguarding risk management across all organisational functions and teams in the International Office and regional offices of the General Secretariat, including human resources, fund development, communication and brand, and information and communication technology.
- 7) Strengthen child safeguarding and prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse of young people in youth programmes. Young people in our care are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, and for this reason, attention must be paid to improve programme quality, raise awareness, increase prevention activities and strengthen reporting and responding procedures in youth programmes.

- 8) Strengthen child safeguarding and prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse of children, young people and vulnerable adults in family strengthening programmes and emergency response programmes. Particular attention must be paid to raise awareness and to introduce community-based reporting and responding procedures that are safe and accessible for members of the community and participants of our emergency programmes.
- 9) Based on the learnings of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review and other child safeguarding work such as audits, start work to update the child protection policy and related child safeguarding user guides.

## 10 Glossary

**General Secretariat** – This is the international entity that is responsible for implementing strategic decisions taken by the SOS Children’s Villages General Assembly and the International Senate, developing and monitoring federation quality standards, and representing the federation in international communications and forums. It consists of the International Office, based in Austria, and six regional offices.

**Member association** – An autonomous entity of the SOS Children’s Villages federation, usually operating on a national level. Such member associations deliver programmes in their respective country and raise money for their own operations. Member associations also include the promoting and supporting associations (see below).

**Management Council** – The Management Council defines the global targets of SOS Children’s Villages, approves work plans developed by the Management Team and makes recommendations to the International Senate.

**Promoting and supporting associations (PSAs)** – Member associations in Europe and North America that raise funds for programmes internationally. They are represented in the International Office by the department known as EUNA Relations.

**Reporter** – Any individual who reports a child safeguarding concern through any channel.

**SOS parent** – An SOS Children’s Villages staff member providing family-like care in an SOS family.

**SOS aunt** – An SOS Children’s Villages staff member supporting the primary caregiver in an SOS family.

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