



Safeguarding Action plan

Progress Report

July 2021- March 2022



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**



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Executive summary

Introduction

Based on the [Independent Child Safeguarding Review \(ICSR\)](#) report, published in May 2021, we reflected on previous safeguarding failures and the fundamental changes necessary within our organization to **create an environment of safety, respect and well-being** for children, young people, staff, volunteers and everyone we come into contact with. The ICSR report underscored the need to **adopt a holistic approach to safeguarding by shaping the organization's culture and addressing the root causes of past failures**. This means we reduce the risk of harm, are accountable for failures if they occur, and support anyone harmed.

To achieve a holistic safeguarding environment, we committed to implementing a comprehensive Safeguarding Action Plan comprising 24 actions, to be executed over a period of four years (2021 - 2024). It addresses all ICSR recommendations and places safeguarding at the centre of everything we do. These actions also reflect our **learnings over the past 15 years**, since the introduction of our Child Protection Policy in 2008. Many of the actions have already been incorporated into our ongoing safeguarding work. The report covers progress across all 24 actions over the past nine months. It follows our [interim progress report](#) released in October 2021 that focused on eight prioritized actions.

As an organization, we continue to address the crucial learnings from our past failures. Last year we publicly apologized (see the [statement by the SOS Children's Villages International CEO](#)). And we committed to repairing harm where we can, supporting healing and creating an environment where people are empowered to live our values and uphold our safeguarding commitments. We promised to believe all the courageous individuals who come forward and provide individualized, realistic and empowering support to those affected by abuse. It may include medical, mental health, psychosocial and legal assistance as well as support to improve individual living situations.

Since the public commitment we made in May 2021 to respond to all past safeguarding cases, **many people have stepped forward via our global whistleblowing channel and social media, or contacted staff and representatives** across national associations, the General Secretariat and governing bodies. It is a demonstration of courage of those individuals who have come forward. It is also an important indication of the perceived shift in the organization's culture and willingness to address safeguarding from all angles. An overview of all child safeguarding cases, past and present, reported in 2021 will be included in our upcoming annual child safeguarding report.

Overview of findings

There has been a tremendous amount of **energy and effort** put into the Safeguarding Action Plan implementation, and we have made **good progress with 16 of the 24 actions**. For example, 10 out of 25 countries participating in the project to strengthen child safeguarding in high-risk environments are expected to fully implement their risk mitigation plans by the end of 2022. Next steps have been identified for the remaining eight actions. For some actions, we have refined some of our goals and strengthened our approaches based on the guidance from external experts. The status and progress of each action is described in this report.

Immediate support for those affected by abuse is one of our eight prioritized actions. It addresses the ICSR report recommendations on prioritizing the best interest of victim-survivors of abuse, including historical



abuse, and assuring appropriate support. Since the announcement in May 2021, a large part of our resources has been dedicated to ensuring those affected are supported towards healing, recovery, reconciliation and self-reliance. To date, 16 national associations have received approval for additional international funding for individualized support of the victim-survivors of abuse. According to the information provided by these national associations, so far **427 individuals who experienced abuse in the past have received or will receive support** through this project in 2022.

Following expert consultations, our initial plans to directly implement an interim global ombudsperson have changed in favour of a bottom-up implementation approach. This is to ensure better effectiveness, accessibility and sustainability of the ombudsperson model for victim-survivors and whistleblowers across the globe. The implementation is led by external child protection consultants who are contributing their independent views towards an ombudsperson model that would complement existing safeguarding processes. National ombudsperson pilots will kick off in Benin and Uruguay in May as planned, while Sierra Leone will start only at the end of the year. The pilots will form the basis for further roll-out at national, regional and global levels. A global ombudsperson will be installed in 2023. The development of the ombuds mechanism is being informed by inputs from children and young people in the pilot countries and from the [International Youth Coalition](#), our youth advisory body.

The [Independent Special Commission](#) has been established to address past failings and strengthen governance and accountability. The Commission has adopted its terms of reference and is developing an independent, secure system for confidential reporting. A supporting team of experts was set up in December 2021, and an investigations unit was set up in March 2022 to review findings from the ICSR and other relevant reports.

The first nine months of our 4-year plan have provided us with valuable insights on how to further strengthen the implementation of the actions. They are:

- **Develop a holistic safeguarding framework to support prioritization of the many actions**
- **Provide more staffing for incident management at all levels**
- **Strengthen safeguarding compliance at all levels**
- **Ensure child and youth participation in safeguarding and governance**
- **Improve monitoring and evaluation of actions**
- **Prioritize working conditions and learning & development for child and youth care practitioners**

This Safeguarding Action Plan reflects our commitment to taking sustained and determined action over four years. Some actions, however, will realistically take longer than four years for successful implementation across the entire federation. This is the result of deepened understanding of the underlying needs of the actions and the requirements for sustainable implementation. We want all our actions to succeed and achieve their desired impact. This means that for some actions, we have had to slow down our pace, to first get the basics right. Regardless, our conviction for holistic safeguarding remains firm. Across the federation, we are observing an openness to changing how we run our operations, how we tackle compliance and accountability and how we interact with each other. Equally, we acknowledge that a strong safeguarding culture must start with the **organization's governance and leadership** if it is to be sustainable. The commitment of leaders at all levels of the federation is required to transform the norms, values and attitudes which undermine that culture. Safeguarding has become a **standing item on the agenda of the Executive Board, General Secretariat leadership and International Senate meetings**. We recognize that it is our duty to offer a safe environment where everyone can speak up and be assured that action will be taken. We will continue to hold ourselves accountable as we progress towards fulfilling the Safeguarding Action Plan.



Note on KPI target count

There are 137 SOS Children's Villages entities operating at the national level. This includes 121 formal members and 16 legally dependent entities operated by SOS Children's Villages International. The target count for most key performance indicators (KPIs) presented is set at 137 entities which we call national associations in this report; in some instances, however, this number differs due to variability in the scope of individual actions. The rationale for the reduced scope of specific actions will be explained under "Further Information."



Progress against plan

A. Holistic support, justice and incident management

Action 1 (priority):

Immediate support for those who have experienced abuse

To ensure those affected are supported towards healing, reconciliation, and becoming self-reliant

- Since May 2021, 16 national associations have received approval for additional international funding for individualized support. These resources have been earmarked.
- 427 individuals who experienced abuse in the past have received or will receive support in 2022. Further victim-survivors of abuse will be identified for support within the frame of this project.
- The General Secretariat has received many reports through its anonymous global whistleblowing channel and social media. National associations have also received reports of past cases.
- By 2024, all national associations outside Western Europe and North America are expected to implement a new global guide, *Listening and Responding to Individuals Experiences of Past Child Abuse*. The guide explains how to respond to allegations of past abuse and spells out minimum standards for individualized support.
- A full overview of the child safeguarding incidents reported in 2021 will be provided in the **Child Safeguarding Annual Report**, to be published in November. Our latest annual statistics can be found at [Child Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/2021](#).

KPI

106

National associations implement global user guide, *Listening and Responding to Individuals Experiences of Past Child Abuse*, including minimum standards for individualized support, by December 2024

Status

On track

Actual 2021: 34

Further information

No data has been received from national associations in Western Europe and North America. Hence, the region has been left out of the target count, bringing the total to 106 national associations. With more people coming forward to report on safeguarding cases since May 2021, the demand for additional staffing dedicated to safeguarding at all levels has surged.



Action 2 (priority): Ombudsperson

To represent the rights of children, young people and others affected by abuse

- Members of our youth advisory body, the International Youth Coalition, and around 300 children and young people from Benin, Sierra Leone and Uruguay have been consulted. Their expectations towards an ombudsperson have directly shaped the ombuds model.
- After consultations with external experts including from the UN and the International Ombuds association, our consulting partner, Protekñon Foundation, advised against installing a global ombudsperson at the outset.
- We will implement a bottom-up ombuds model that will complement existing safeguarding processes and start at the program level, so that the model is more responsive and more accessible for victim-survivors and whistleblowers.
- **Three national ombudspersons** and **two regional ombudspersons** will be installed in 2022.
- Implementation of the national ombudsperson pilots in Benin and Uruguay will begin in May 2022. Implementation in Sierra Leone has been postponed until the 4th quarter of 2022 due to the need for well-informed steps that consider the local situation. Learnings from the pilots will inform the scaling up to another six national associations in 2022.
- Latin America and Western, Central and Northern Africa will pilot the regional ombuds model in December 2022. **The implementation of a global ombudsperson will begin in 2023.**

KPIs (updated)

Status



Global ombudsperson for the federation by December 2023

(This replaces the previous indicator: Interim ombudsperson in GSC by end Sep 2021)

On track

137 national associations covered by system by December 2023

Off track

Further information

An additional six national associations will start preparations for installing ombudspersons in the first half of 2023. Based on the learnings of 2022, new targets will be set for 2023 and 2024. The implementation of the new approach will continue beyond 2024. [A statement from Proteknon Foundation.](#)



Action 3 (priority): Incident management system for persons that have experienced abuse

Consistently implemented across the entire federation

- To improve child safeguarding incident management processes and to close the information gap at the General Secretariat of incidents reported in SOS Children's Villages programmes, a new web-based, global incident management system is being developed.
- This incident management system will also include other types of safeguarding incidents, including those involving asset safeguarding, sexual misconduct or HR-related incidents. These categories of incidents will be gradually introduced into the system.
- Implementation of the system will begin in 2023 upon conclusion of the system's development.
- The incident management system will maintain strict confidentiality of all personal and sensitive information. The system is linked to a real-time reporting platform. Basic anonymized data on reported incidents and the status of the incident management will be available on the real-time reporting platform.
- The real-time reporting platform originally focused only on child safeguarding incidents. It has since grown to include other types of safeguarding incidents, including those involving asset safeguarding, sexual misconduct, and HR complaints. It is currently being piloted in West, Central and Northern Africa. Other regions will follow.
- We have initiated external assessments of the implementation of child safeguarding policies in several countries to address complaints on organizational responses to past abuse. The findings will inform action plans to improve safeguarding practices, particularly incident management.
- As of February 2022, 2060 employees completed an introductory online course on our child safeguarding approach, which also covers incident management.

KPIs (updated)

Status



Real-time reporting platform on child safeguarding incidents of abusive behaviour developed by the end of 2021

(This replaces the previous indicator: Urgent gaps filled by end of 2021)

Completed

137

national associations implement the incident management system by December 2023

Not started

To start in 2023

Further Information: The development of this platform was a response to the urgent gap in communication flow on reported child safeguarding incidents among various stakeholders in the federation.



B. Participation of children and young people in shaping safeguarding measures and understanding their rights

Action 4 (priority): Child and youth empowerment

Ensure children and young people are involved in decisions regarding their care, prevent peer-to-peer violence and abuse, and give them a stronger voice in safeguarding

- [Applying Safe Behaviours](#), a 2-year EU co-funded project (2021-2023) that will focus on preventing and responding to peer violence, will be rolled out in five national associations in Europe (Belgium, France, Italy, Romania, and Spain). Preparation is currently underway.
- The project aims to enable child and youth care practitioners to respond appropriately to peer violence among children. It will also help increase awareness in surrounding communities.
- In addition, 30 national associations in Asia and Europe are implementing another training programme, Protective Behaviours, which teaches personal safety skills to care practitioners, children and young people.ⁱ
- Protective Behaviours has been rolled out organically based on the growing interest of national associations through various knowledge exchange networks.

KPIs

30 national associations implement Protective Behaviours by December 2023

(This replaces the previous indicator: 100% of programmes implement Protective Behaviours by end of 2023)

Status

On track

ⁱ In 2020/21, the programme was rolled out with the financial support of a corporate partner in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia. Care practitioners, children and young people received further training in Laos, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Nepal, Mongolia and the Philippines.



Action 5: Youth development and participation

To ensure young people are empowered to participate in decisions affecting their care and development, and are supported in the leaving care process

- We have developed a global youth development guide and e-learning course. They provide guidance on youth development work within local contexts
- Since December 2021, 64 national associations have implemented our global youth employability initiative YouthCan! or other employability projects. To date, YouthCan! has reached approximately 14,845 young people in 42 countries.

KPIs

Status

106

national associations implement a locally contextualized youth development concept by December 2024

On track

Actual 2021: 22

20,000

young people reached through global youth employability initiative by 2024

On track

Actual 2021: 14,845

106

national associations involve children and young people in training activities and shaping child safeguarding measures by December 2024

On track

Actual 2021: 91

Further information

No data has been received from national associations in Western Europe and North America to date, so the region has been left out of the target count, bringing the total to 106 national associations.



Case study

Child and youth participation in setting up an ombuds mechanism



The consultations with children and youth on the ombuds mechanism focused on barriers to reporting, among which the participants named fear, stigma, lack of confidentiality, and conflicts of interest. One contributor cited delays and limited response: "Sometimes the problem may be simple and [the organization's management] may take it lightly. Not giving proper or quick action has been leading to some destruction."

The children and young people also shared their views on the qualities they would like to see in an ombudsperson. According to a participant, "[The ombudsperson] should not be afraid to disagree. They should have that courage ... to speak up to the national director or to others."

The findings of the consultations have influenced the design of the ombuds approach: they inspired the development of a child- and youth-friendly version of the ombuds master charter, and the participants' suggestions were incorporated in the ombudsperson's job description.



C. Child and youth care practitioner working conditions, role, wellbeing, learning and development

Action 6: Working conditions for child and youth care practitioners

To improve the working conditions and strengthen learning and development of child and youth care practitioners

- National associations are required to adhere to the compensation and benefits requirements for child and youth care practitioners defined in the SOS Parent Profession User Guide.
- National associations are currently applying these requirements to local contexts to improve the working conditions of this particular group of practitioners.

KPI

Status

101

national associations contextualize and implement the *SOS Parent Profession User Guide*, including filling pension and compensation gaps, by December 2024

On track

Actual 2021: 37

Further information

No data has been received from national associations in Western Europe and North America to date, so the region has been left out of the target count. In addition, five national associations will start contextualizing the guide only in 2024 due to other project commitments. This brings the target to 101 national associations.

Based on a recent analysis, the compensation gap between care practitioners and non-care employees has been widening over the years. However, funding to close this gap remains a challenge.

Action 7: Research on gender equality

To improve understanding of attitudes and beliefs around gender and women's rights, experiences of discrimination, differentials in pay and conditions, and gender balance in leadership

- In 2021, the standard practice of gender audits continued: 17 national associations completed gender audits or assessments and developed action plans, and 9 started implementing their action plans.
- As reported previously, a global gender advisor has been recruited to provide strategic leadership and to foster collaboration.



- Independent research on gender equality with a particular focus on child and youth care practitioners will start in early 2023, with findings and recommendations expected by the end of 2024. In 2022, the focus will be on defining the scope and securing the funding.

KPI

Status



Research findings including recommendations available by December 2024

On track

Action 8: Learning and development for care practitioners

To provide opportunities for individual, face-to-face, and digital training

- A newly developed Learning & Development (L&D) Framework for child and youth care practitioners has been piloted in nine national associations. The framework provides guidance on the competencies required to provide quality care.
- During the pilot phase, 14 L&D coaches and 11 L&D facilitators were certified, and 120 child and youth care practitioners were trained in 11 workshops.
- In 2021, a Digital Learning Hub was launched to support learning and development of care practitioners.
- The digital assistant, Rafiki, has been piloted in Eastern and Southern Africa.

KPI

Status

106

national associations ensure access to learning and development opportunities for all child and youth care practitioners

On track

Actual 2021: 77

Further information

No data has been received from national associations in Western Europe and North America to date, so the region has been left out of the target count.



Case study

Rafiki



Rafiki is a digital care assistant – a chatbot powered by artificial intelligence that can answer questions on parenting skills, safeguarding, mental health, self-care and other topics, simulating the knowledge of a human.

Between August and December 2021, Rafiki was piloted with 67 users in Malawi, Nigeria and South Africa. All the participants said they would recommend Rafiki to a colleague; 55% rated improvement in their skills as 10 out of 10, and 42%, as 5 to 9.

For example, according to one of the participants, Rafiki had made them *“a better professional worker ... more motivated at work”*; some of the participants reported a better understanding of the different forms of child abuse.

In 2022, Rafiki will be implemented in seven more countries. A local-language version in Somaliland is being developed. Rafiki will also be used in English and Italian to support mental health workers.



D. People, culture and human resources practices for safeguarding

Action 9: Federation culture development

To build a safeguarding environment through practical, targeted initiatives

- We have focused on three targeted initiatives to support federation culture development towards holistic safeguarding. They are:
 - i) A *Safe and Caring Environment* survey was disseminated among General Secretariat staff in February 2022. The survey was completed by 388 of 629 members of staff (62%).
 - (ii) We have developed *Courageous Conversations*, a dialogue series that provides a safe space to speak up on sensitive topics, which will help build trust and enable leadership to respond to feedback. The sessions will start in the second quarter of 2022.
 - (iii) We have designed toolkits for the engagement of boards and senior managers in creating a safe environment. Awareness-raising across the federation will start in the third quarter of 2022.

KPIs	Status
3 targeted initiatives for federation culture development on holistic safeguarding developed by December 2023	On track
80% of safeguarding survey respondents at the General Secretariat evaluate work environment as positive overall by December 2024	On track
80% of all federation leadership, including board representatives, reached with safeguarding awareness raising and training by December 2024	On track

Further information

In the third indicator, federation leadership refers to the management and boards of national associations and the management of the General Secretariat's international and regional offices.



Action 10 (priority): Code of Conduct / values-based conduct

To ensure the mandatory, global code is fully embedded across the federation; it will address bullying, power imbalances, and gender disparities

- Three senior staff have been recruited to drive initiative that enable safeguarding (the PSHEA lead, the global gender advisor, and the safeguarding environment lead).
- Proteknôn Foundation was commissioned to revise the Code of Conduct. The new Code of Conduct will reflect internal learnings and international best practice in the sector.
- Awareness-raising and training activities; a monitoring, evaluation, assessment and learning system; and key performance indicators will follow.
- Global training-of-trainer sessions on the revised Code of Conduct will start at the end of 2022. A full roll-out across the federation will begin in 2023.

KPIs

Status



New Code of Conduct established by January 2023

On track

100%

of the General Secretariat staff trained on new Code of Conduct by December 2023

On track

3

senior staff added to drive Code of Conduct and initiatives in support of enabling a safeguarding environment by September 2021

Completed



Action 11: Human resources values-based competency framework

To demonstrate how staff can live our organizational values in our day-to-day work and integrate them into recruitment, performance management, and development

- The development of the values-based competency framework started in March 2021. The final draft of the framework will be presented to the International Senate (Leadership Selection Committee) in May 2022.
- In April 2022, an expert seconded from a corporate partner, will help develop a communication strategy and toolkit to support implementation.
- In addition, its implementation will be supported by webinars, training material.
- Respective KPIs will be developed with regional counterparts to allow for appropriate monitoring of its implementation.

KPIs

Status



Values-based competency framework finalized by end 2021

Off track



Values-based competency framework integrated into all key HR processes by December 2023

On track



Action 12: Review of all human resources policies

To ensure safeguarding is reflected and mandatory

- The work has been delayed pending the recruitment of a project lead.

KPI

Status



A review of existing federation HR frameworks and policies by the General Secretariat completed by the first quarter of 2023

Not started

Action 13: Safe recruitment regulation

To ensure consistent and mandatory steps are taken to ensure the necessary safeguarding element in the recruitment process

- The *Safer Recruitment Guidance* has been drafted.
- It will help manage safeguarding risks throughout all phases of recruitment, from advertisement to induction.
- Trainings and discussions on the Safer Recruitment Guidance started in November 2021. The guidance will be part of the roll-out of the regulation on the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse.
- Based on this guidance, a mandatory regulation will be developed by 2024.

KPI

Status



Recruitment regulation ready for implementation in national associations by December 2024

On track



Action 14: Strategy for safeguarding capacity building

To ensure we have the right learning and development systems to support all our people, including child and youth care practitioners, support staff, managers and leaders

- The work will begin in June 2022.

KPI

137

national associations implement continuous safeguarding capacity-building programmes by December 2024

Status

Not started

Action 15: New global human resources policy with binding standards

An umbrella policy to ensure clarity and consistency across the entire federation

- The work has been delayed until 2023. A policy advisor to lead the project has not yet been recruited.

KPI

137

national associations implement global HR policy by December 2024

Status

Not started



Action 16 (priority): Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) regulation implementation

To fully implement the regulation already adopted by the International Senate, to promote awareness and prevention and to implement reporting and responding

- Implementation includes assignment of PSHEA leads in the General Secretariat and every national association, training for all employees and reporting and responding mechanisms in the General Secretariat and all national associations.
- Pilot countries have been selected to implement the PSHEA regulation in all General Secretariat offices and ten national associations (Senegal, Benin, Niger, Guinea, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania).
- Safeguarding and integrity teams have been formed in the pilot countries, regional offices and the international office.
- Training-of-trainers sessions in the ten pilot countries are ongoing. Additional training on gender and sexual harassment for safeguarding and integrity teams in the pilot countries took place in January 2022.
- A toolkit and risk assessments in programme design are in development.
- Action plans have been completed for eight pilot countries.

KPI



PSHEA regulation implemented in 100% of federation (national associations, regional offices and the international office) by December 2024

Status

On track



Case study

Contextualizing change



SOS Children's Villages in Uganda is following a phased approach to implementing the regulation on the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, recognizing the crucial role of awareness and dialogue.

The national team reports that, to many, the concept still feels foreign, and there are mixed feelings about its potential impact on social interactions, so the team strongly believes in working through the myths and misconceptions right at the start and sees its main task in adapting training sessions to reflect local realities. Designated PSHEA leads are being considered to help disseminate knowledge among staff and partners. To place the regulation in the national legal context, the team is planning to involve law enforcement representatives in the training.



E. Oversight, leadership, governance and accountability for safeguarding

Action 17 (priority): Independent Special Commission

To take up past and contemporary cases of failings, including child abuse, corruption, and breaches of regulations

- The Independent Special Commission has begun its work, and information about its members was provided on [our international website](#) on 5 October 2021.
- The Commission has adopted its terms of reference and is developing an independent, secure system for confidential reporting. Standard Operating Procedures and Standard Investigative Procedures have been finalised.
- A supporting team of experts was set up in December 2021.
- An investigations unit was set up in March 2022 to review the findings of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review report and other relevant reports.

KPI

Status



Commission established by end May 2021

Completed

Established 1 October 2021:
preparation required additional
time



Action 18: Alignment of integrity, compliance and safeguarding

To ensure our processes and procedures are working together effectively, including improved and integrated reporting and responding procedures

- Proteknôn Foundation is developing an aligned reporting and responding mechanism across integrity, compliance and safeguarding for SOS Children’s Villages.
- By February 2022, relevant SOS Children’s Villages policies and procedures were reviewed and focus groups and key informant interviews conducted
- By May 2022, a draft reporting and responding procedure will be developed, after which an investigations guide will be produced and training of trainers organized.
- The full roll-out of the aligned reporting and responding mechanisms (including capacity building) is planned to begin in the third quarter of 2022.

KPI



Aligned reporting, responding and investigation procedures implemented across the federation by December 2023

Status

On track

Further information

There is a need for more dedicated resources, better coordination and oversight so that processes can be streamlined and decisions can be made more efficiently. This requires the commitment of all the organization’s stakeholders.

Action 19: Child safeguarding policy update

To ensure ICSR recommendations and current best practice are reflected

- The Child Protection Policy, introduced in 2008, will be updated to become the Child Safeguarding Regulation. The regulation will remain binding for all national associations.
- The update will include topics such as new child safeguarding procedures, the incident management system and the ombudsperson approach, among others.
- The revision will start in the third quarter of 2022 and is expected to conclude in 2023.
- Implementation will start in 2023 and continue till 2024. It will take into consideration how knowledge is effectively consumed and applied to ensure depth of understanding.



KPI

137

national associations achieve at least 90% compliance with child safeguarding minimum requirements by December 2024

Status

Not started

Action 20 (priority): Child safeguarding strengthening in high-risk environments



To provide extra financial and management support to 25 national associations with a high risk profile or operating in high-risk environments

- An online course on child safeguarding was launched in June 2021 and made available to all national associations.
- As part of the project, ten countries completed child safeguarding risk assessments, developed risk mitigation plans and started the implementation of their plans in 2021. The ten national associations will fully implement their risk mitigation plans by the end of 2022. A total of €189,600 has been allocated to supporting five national associations in Eastern and Southern Africa.
- Another 15 national associations will receive support in 2022.ⁱⁱ
- Based on outcomes of a federation-wide safeguarding risk assessment, the findings of child safeguarding audits and reported child safeguarding incidents, other national associations will be identified to receive support in 2023–2024.

KPI

25

national associations implement the project process and are audited by December 2024

Status

On track

Actual 2021: 10



Case study

Child-led risk assessment



During an annual assessment of child safeguarding risks, children complained that they were uncomfortable sharing their views in front of the entire group, including adult facilitators.

The children suggested an online child-led process with minimal adult involvement. They developed the questions and filled out the questionnaire with the help of an ICT instructor of their choice. Those who could not read or write had neutral adults to support them.

As a result, the children reported a more positive experience overall. Over 85% of the children were happy with the approach and saw improvements in the way their concerns were addressed.

The national team is planning to adopt the child-led risk assessment process in all programmes in the country.



Action 21: Early warning system

To ensure safeguarding risks are monitored and escalated appropriately

- A tool to better understand the child safeguarding risk profile of national associations has been developed.
- The tool helps national associations identify internal and external safeguarding risks to their operations and assess their overall risk profile (high – medium – low). This allows national associations to plan targeted risk mitigating actions and the General Secretariat to provide national associations with targeted support.
- The tool was integrated into the annual child safeguarding survey and rolled out to all national associations in January 2022.

KPI

137

national associations complete the first annual assessment of the tool to assess their risk profile and define mitigating actions to address their internal and external risks by December 2022

Status

On track

Action 22: Safeguarding resources in institutional donor projects

To ensure appropriate resources are in budgets

- A dedicated budget will be allocated in all institutional donor projects for all project teams to complete compulsory training on implementing safeguarding actions in their project.
- All staff involved in a grant-funded project will be required to attend a PSHEA course.
- A complete proposal on how to implement this action in all projects will be developed in the coming months.

KPI



All institutional funding applications include child safeguarding risk analysis and budgets by December 2022

Status

Not started

Further discussion required



F. Investment for high quality programmes across the federation

Action 23: Increased investment in 70+ programmes to fix quality gaps

Including monitoring, ensuring the necessary financial investment is made to improve quality in 70–100 programme locations

- Strategies for larger programme change investments are currently in development for subsidy-receiving national associations (national associations who receive international funding from other national associations). They will ensure relevance, efficiency and sustainability of programmes within local child care and protection systems.
- Future plans include improving staffing ratios in alternative care and family strengthening, transforming youth facilities to smaller-scale, individualized care services, and better aligning of our service portfolio with local government priorities and the needs of our target group.

KPI

98

subsidy-receiving national associations have a strategy to ensure relevance, efficiency and sustainability of programmes by December 2024

Status

On track

Actual 2021: 25

Action 24: Increased support for national associations to implement the SOS Care Promise

including regular self-assessment and continuous improvement in areas such as programme admission standards

National associations have been taking locally relevant steps to improve programme quality in line with our programme policy, the [SOS Care Promise](#). A particular focus has been placed on the following:

- Prevention of unnecessary or unsuitable care placements: associations without a well-defined national gatekeeping mechanism have committed to developing national gatekeeping guidelines and fully implementing them by 2024.
- Social integration: national associations are making changes so that family-like settings are better integrated into local communities, for example, by using community-integrated housing or by encouraging opportunities for social interactions.



- Access to mental health services: a global expert group on mental health and psychosocial support, piloted in 2020–2021, has provided training for evidence-based psychological support in six national associations in Eastern and Southern Africa. In 2022–2024, the group aims to extend its services to other regions

KPIs	Status
91 national associations have board-approved national gatekeeping guidelines	On track Actual 2021: 45
106 national associations implement a range of locally relevant measures to improve social integration	On track Actual 2021: 53
106 national associations include specific actions in their national plans to integrate mental health and psychosocial support into their programme work	On track Actual 2021: 35

Further information

National associations operating within well-defined state gatekeeping systems are excluded from the target count. For such national associations, national legal requirements override board-approved national gatekeeping guidelines.

National associations in Western Europe and North America have been left out of the target count for social integration and mental health since they have not provided any data.

ⁱⁱ Assessment of risks; embedding of reporting mechanisms; involvement of external partners; training for management, boards and practitioners; and more frequent safeguarding audits. Includes targeted prevention and holistic mental health support in each programme location.



Case study

Problem Management Plus (PM+)



During its pilot year, the expert group on mental health and psychosocial support provided training on [\(PM+\)](#), a psychological intervention for people over the age of 16.

There have been encouraging results. The initial group of PM+ participants showed a clinically significant decrease in symptoms of depression and anxiety. A worker trained as a PM+ facilitator shared one of the success stories: *"PM+ changed the life of the girl I [have been supporting] for the better. She suffered from insomnia and experienced feelings of profound inadequacy. She felt that something was wrong, but she was having a hard time expressing herself. We have made a beautiful journey together. ... Now she feels much better: she has found a job and feels safer."*



Key learnings

Working hard these past nine months to implement the 24 actions, we have also acquired new learnings, some via external experts, that must inform our work moving forward and contribute to transformative change. These learnings are accompanied by recommendations made to the organisation's highest supervisory body, SOS Children's Villages' International Senate. While internally focused, these learnings and recommendations also serve as relevant insights for other international non-governmental organizations who are looking to improve their safeguarding and governance structures.

Develop a holistic safeguarding framework to support prioritization of the many actions

Following an intense period of nine months in which we developed many individual implementations and projects to realize the actions of this plan, we realize that we now need to bring them together more strongly. Safeguarding is often understood as child safeguarding. We need to expand the understanding of safeguarding across the organization, among partners, and the programme participants to include the *safeguarding of children, adults, and assets*.

A strong safeguarding culture must be embedded at the level of the organization's governance and leadership. Holistic safeguarding requires addressing and transforming norms, values and attitudes that are the root causes of safeguarding risks such as power dynamics and gender inequality.

The lack of a **holistic framework** has led to inefficient decision-making, insufficient coordination and unclear prioritization in relation to other federation strategies. Underscoring this is the need for a definition of safeguarding (including children, adults and assets) which encompasses the principles of safeguarding, and relevant policies, regulations, processes and procedures. The introduction of such a holistic framework will provide better oversight, enable faster decision-making, and help prioritize the many projects and activities that are currently under way, also in relation to other federation strategies.

Insufficient decision-making and inefficient coordination will negatively impact, those that need our support most at this moment. The implementation of the organization-wide framework requires the commitment of all of the organization's stakeholders, starting with alignment of the reporting and responding procedures.

Recommendation

Increase efforts to build a shared understanding of what holistic safeguarding encompasses. Leadership at all levels of the federation promote and engage in initiatives which address the root causes of safeguarding risks, including organizational culture, power dynamics and gender roles.

The introduction of a holistic decision-making, coordination and alignment framework which encompasses a definition of safeguarding, the principles of safeguarding and the relevant policies, regulations, processes and procedures is needed. The framework should be reflected in the organizational structure of the SOS Children's Villages.



In the development of the framework, the streamlined and aligned reporting and responding mechanisms are a top priority.

Provide more staffing for incident management at all levels

People who have experienced harassment, exploitation or abuse and the protection of assets are at the centre of our incident management and reporting systems and procedures. Speed and thoroughness of the procedures and actions are crucial.

With more people coming forward to report safeguarding incidents since May 2021, the demand for additional staffing dedicated to managing incidents at all levels has surged. Further, owing to the amount of time that has passed for some cases, more work is required to address them. We recognize that failing to fulfill the staffing demands without unnecessary delay will have consequences for our ability to bridge the critical gaps in safeguarding incident management and overall programme quality.

It is equally important to mitigate existing and potential safeguarding risks, strengthen prevention and raise awareness. This includes topics such as assessing safeguarding risks, organizing relevant trainings and other capacity-building activities for children, young people, and staff, and regularly reviewing the compliance of the national association or the General Secretariat office with the minimum safeguarding requirements included in the federation binding policies.

The child safeguarding and incident management teams at the international and regional offices are being enlarged with nine full-time positions (six positions in the regional offices and three in the international office) with a particular focus on incident management. We also need to review staffing in national associations so that we can identify potential gaps.

Recommendation

National associations with multiple programmes require sufficient resources to implement incident management and to work on preventive, capacity-building activities, especially in national associations. Ensure allocation of sufficient resources to address prevention and awareness-raising activities, especially in national associations.

Map safeguarding staffing across all national associations and address potential gaps.

Strengthen safeguarding compliance at all levels

At federation level, no accountability or mechanisms are in place for cases of non-compliance by all federation entities, including the International Senate, the General Secretariat, and all national associations. The only measures that the federation can take under the SOS Children's Villages International Statutes are the suspension of membership or of membership rights, which should only be the measures of last resort.

Past incidents have demonstrated that the federation must better ensure that obligations under the Statutes are upheld by all federation entities. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important to put in place appropriate federation-wide mechanisms to enforce compliance, also in cases involving the board of a national association. It is the General Secretariat's role to monitor a national association's compliance with the organization's legal and policy framework. It remains a challenge to enforce compliance and to ensure implementation of action plans where there is reluctance from the national association's leadership, including the board.



Recommendation

The International Senate and other federation bodies shall reflect on governance and accountability mechanisms and close the existing gaps. A proposal for a mechanism to address integrity, safeguarding and compliance challenges will be presented for discussion to the International Senate. This is part of the revision of the Statutes, which will be put forward for decision to the General Assembly, the federation's highest governing body, in 2023.

Ensure child and youth participation in safeguarding and governance

The implementation of several safeguarding actions has highlighted the importance of strengthening participation as a central component of safeguarding. Consultations with 300 children and young people in the ombudsperson pilots led to the realization that their involvement in all future recruitment and feedback processes was essential.

Representative and meaningful participation by children and young people as part of the organization's national and federation governance has commenced. This includes recent meetings of SOS Children's Villages International management and the International Senate where steps were taken to engage with representative groups of young people to design a future participation approach together.

Recommendation

Child and youth participation together with youth development requires increased focus. A strengthened strategic federation project is needed to drive and mainstream this as a natural part of the organization's work. Children and young people must have more channels and opportunities to support their individual development and to speak up, represent their peers and put their solutions into action.

Improve monitoring and evaluation of actions

Monitoring and evaluation of specific actions at the programme level remains a challenge due to limitations in our tools and systems; a lack of resources; and a lack of standard, cross-functional processes for on-site monitoring and programme audits. We are facing gaps in the data available at the programme level, which makes it difficult to monitor the full extent and quality of the implementation of actions. This lack of visibility at the local level is a missed opportunity to gather insights on programme improvement at scale.

Equally, many national associations from Western Europe and North America are currently not providing data which also makes for incomplete analysis of actions and insights for further improvements.

Recommendation

Ensure key data points for performance indicators can be gathered at programme and national levels. Data points should encompass the full breadth of the Safeguarding Action Plan, including human resources indicators and real-time incident data from national associations.

Ensure all national associations have the same obligation to provide key data points for performance indicators, including those in Western Europe and North America.



Prioritize working conditions and learning & development structures for child and youth care practitioners

The lack of adequate working conditions and modern learning & development opportunities for child and youth care practitioners contributes directly to an increased safeguarding risk. Only by selecting the most suitable people, preparing them well for their role, providing decent working conditions and ongoing learning and development opportunities can we create the required environment for them to support and empower children, young people and families.

A stronger focus and investment is urgently needed to improve working conditions and learning & development structures for this core group of people who are working directly with children and young people. Underpinning this is a caregiver-centred approach that is participative and builds on care experiences. Relevant stakeholders are currently evaluating how to tackle this challenge in a sustainable way.

Recommendation

Ensure that improved working conditions and learning & developments structures for child and youth care practitioners is a strategic priority for the federation. A three-to-four year implementation plan, anchored in every national strategy, is urgently needed to ensure that suitable structures are in place for the years ahead.

Increase federation support in terms of resources to scale existing federation projects that address this pertinent challenge, and build on relevant experience.

Prioritize strengthened HR practices and learning & development measures for and with child and youth care practitioners to build competence and improve the working conditions.