

SOS CARE PROMISE

HOW SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES ENSURES THE BEST CARE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
INTERNATIONAL



SOS CARE
PROMISE



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PREFACE

SOS Children's Villages is committed to ensuring that all children throughout the world have the quality care that is their right. In 1949, Hermann Gmeiner established the first SOS Children's Village in the face of strong opposition. Our organisation was founded on the belief and recognition – revolutionary at the time – that the most vulnerable children need emotional and physical stability in a family and a community environment to develop to their potential.

In today's world, just as in the post-war European context of our founding, the most vulnerable children are those without parents or at risk of losing parental care. Our conservative estimations show that one in ten children find themselves in such unacceptable situations.¹

With seven decades of experience informing our work, SOS Children's Villages focuses on the problem of children at risk. We commit to identify the most suitable care option for every child according to the child's best interests and in close partnerships with the responsible authorities. We care for vulnerable children in various forms of alternative care. We strengthen families to prevent the abandonment and neglect of children. We also advocate for the rights of all children without parental care, or at risk of losing it, and the rights of their families. Today, the SOS Children's Village represents our brand and is no longer limited to a physical village of SOS families.

SOS Children's Villages believes that achieving its mission requires a commitment to a range of approaches,



Siddhartha Kaul
 President

¹SOS Children's Villages International, *Child at Risk: The Most Vulnerable Children; Who They Are and Why They Are at Risk* (2016).

²The *SOS Care Promise* was unanimously approved by the International Senate in April 2018. It is a policy that articulates both what we do and how we do it via the principles and values that form the foundation of our work, the care solutions through which we

which means directly addressing the immediate needs of vulnerable children and their families as well as working on preventing the root causes of family breakdown. In doing so, we continuously support and promote quality care.

CARE...

...is defined as "parenting children and young people". It covers both care in families of origin and care in an alternative setting.

The SOS Care Promise defines our commitment to quality care for every single child in our programmes.² Following a child-centred approach, the SOS Care Promise builds on existing initiatives that promote the quality of our work. It positions the SOS Children's Village as a modern programme for child care and protection with services that evolve according to the changing situation of children in the local context. Thus, the SOS Care Promise provides the foundation for ensuring consistent quality around the world, in highly diverse and often very challenging environments.

It is an active promise which we live out daily, as the drive towards quality is never over. We seek continuous improvement and learn from our experience, our partners and the children themselves. When we identify failure to deliver on our promise, we respond immediately and take concrete actions to restore quality care and ensure it for the future.



Norbert Meder
 Chief Executive Officer

implement our mission, and our commitments to quality care. It is a policy with which all member associations of SOS Children's Villages must comply and to which they must dedicate themselves. It is the policy under which all other programme-related policies, guidelines and tools are subordinate. It is based on our foundations: "Who we are", the SOS Children's Villages International Statutes and Strategy 2030.

CARE FOUNDATIONS

THE CARE EFFECT

We believe that no child should grow up alone and that every child should live in a stable and caring family as part of a supportive community. This gives them an opportunity to simply be a child. However, the fact remains that at least one in ten children worldwide has already lost, or is at risk of losing, the loving care of their parents.

When children grow up “alone”, without the love and support of a parent or another stable caregiver, they face a greater risk of discrimination, neglect, abuse and abandonment. They are more likely to be deprived of opportunities to learn, mature and develop life skills, and so they find it more difficult to become contributing members of society. If they have their own children, they may be unable to adequately support their children’s development, and so the harmful effects may be passed on to the next generation. Wider society also suffers, as a greater strain is placed on welfare and health systems.

But we can turn this situation around.

Children growing up in a stable and caring family in a supportive community have a greater chance to realise their full potential and lead an independent life. They better develop basic life skills such as

communication, cooperation, problem-solving and setting personal goals. They also build self-confidence, determination and resilience. Their caregivers ensure they attend school and access relevant healthcare services. Children are also better able to develop social networks, which can be a source of support in everyday life. Ultimately, they have healthy relationships, find decent jobs and transform their communities for the better.

The key is quality care, and investment into it has a multiplying effect as children receive enriching care, flourish and realise their potential from generation to generation. It all starts with ensuring that children have the quality care of a parent or another caregiver from a very young age until they are ready to start a career. Care for children makes the world a better place. *That is the care effect.*



Relationships matter

“Children develop within an environment of relationships that begins in the family but also involves other adults who play important roles in their lives. This can include extended family members, providers of early care and education, nurses, social workers, coaches, and neighbors. These relationships affect virtually all aspects of development – intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and behavioral – and their quality and stability in the early years lay the foundation that supports a wide range of later outcomes.”

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, *From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families* (2016), p. 8.



INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS GUIDING CARE

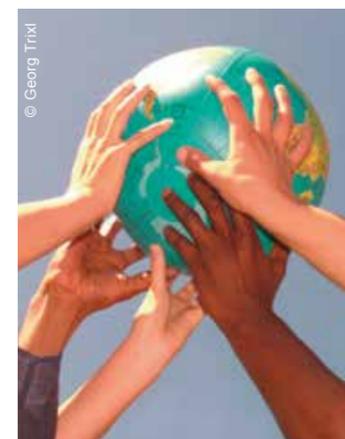
Our work is primarily guided by three very important international frameworks specifically relating to children. The care commitments described in this document are in accordance with the principles, standards and goals set forth in these frameworks.

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**, adopted in 1989, sets out the rights children are entitled to in all aspects of their lives. It recognises that a caring and protective family is central to a child’s development. Nearly every government on earth has signed the convention, and SOS Children’s Villages partners with governments to help them deliver on their obligations under the UNCRC.

The **UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children**, adopted in 2009, provide a framework for ensuring that governments can fulfil children’s right to quality care in families of origin and in alternative care. Their principles state that alternative care must be both necessary and suitable, and it is also highlighted that children need a safe and continuous attachment to a stable caregiver. The Guidelines also

emphasise the importance of promoting parental care and preventing family separation. The spirit of the Guidelines is ingrained in our care commitments.

The **UN Sustainable Development Goals** are another important framework for our work. Adopted in 2015 and valid until 2030, they are accompanied by a pledge to “leave no one behind”. Vulnerable children and families are most often the first ones to be left behind, excluded from society as countries develop socially and economically. Our work as defined in our Strategy 2030 contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals with a special focus on our target group, which includes improving national social protection systems, fighting inequalities, promoting access to quality education, strengthening youth employability and ending violence against children.



A leading promoter of the UN Guidelines

SOS Children’s Villages played a leading role in the development of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, notably by co-founding an international working group that developed the first draft. Since the welcoming of the Guidelines in 2009 by the UN General Assembly, member associations across the globe have been at the forefront of bringing the Guidelines to life on country level. Internationally, SOS Children’s Villages has been actively engaged in partnership initiatives to promote their implementation, for instance by supporting the development of an open-access online course.

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

SOS Children's Villages Principles

We have a wealth of experience based on four principles in caring for children. With these principles as a foundation, people around the world drive positive change and ensure that many more children grow up in a loving family. In today's context these four principles have evolved into the following.



CHILD: Every child is unique and respected

We recognise children's potential, guiding and accompanying them on their path to becoming independent and contributing members of their society.



PARENT: Every child needs a caring and stable parent

We work to ensure that children can experience a reliable relationship with a caregiver based on love, respect and security.



FAMILY: Every child grows up in a supportive family

We support families to stay together. If children cannot grow up with their family of origin, we support them to form lifelong bonds in an alternative family environment while ensuring that siblings stay together.



COMMUNITY: Every child is part of a safe and supportive community

We assist families to connect across their community, share experiences, support one another and work together in order to create a positive environment for children and young people to develop.



Empowering children

"I can't decide for you. I can help you find out what you truly want and guide you, but decisions are yours to make!"

Ana loves to tell this story about how her mum Irine helped her find her way. The 22-year-old studies psychology and social work, which she enjoys and at which she excels. Ana grew up in an SOS family in Georgia, where she was placed at the age of eight. When she talks about her mum, she is referring to Irine, her SOS mother.

SOS Children's Villages Values



COURAGE: We take action

We continuously innovate our work for children and respond to the differing realities of local communities and individual children.



COMMITMENT: We keep our promises

We make a long-term commitment to children and their communities and deliver quality services that support them to succeed in life.



TRUST: We believe in each other

We work with all stakeholders in a spirit of teamwork, giving and receiving trust to achieve our mission.



ACCOUNTABILITY: We are reliable partners

We are accountable to children, communities, partners and donors. Our greatest responsibility is to ensure quality care.



CARE SOLUTIONS

We are driven by our mission: to build families for children in need, to help them shape their own futures and to share in the development of their communities.

In many parts of the world, political, economic and social root causes lead to high levels of child vulnerability and put families at risk of breaking down. We have learned that these root causes can often be addressed with early interventions and can thus be avoided. In an effort to address the situation of children in these vulnerable circumstances, SOS Children's Villages offers a range of complementary services responding to both their care needs and the root causes of their situation.

Our solutions are always aligned to:

- the best interests of each individual child
- the needs of the local community, which are met through locally-led programme adaptations
- the international frameworks guiding our work
- the experience and expertise of our organisation

Accordingly, our care solutions include alternative care, family strengthening, and advocacy and partnership for quality care.

Alternative care

When it is in the best interests of the child and in agreement with the relevant authorities, we provide alternative care. We have 70 years of experience in offering longer-term alternative care based on a family-like care model, which we call SOS family care, and in other alternative forms of care such as foster care and small group homes. To find the best possible alternative care option for each individual child, we constantly innovate and improve our work with SOS families and use our experience and competence to explore relevant care solutions, together with partners. If it is in the best interests of a child to return to the family of origin, we actively support and carefully accompany this process. No other organisation has our depth of experience in providing alternative care, and this experience informs our family strengthening and advocacy work.



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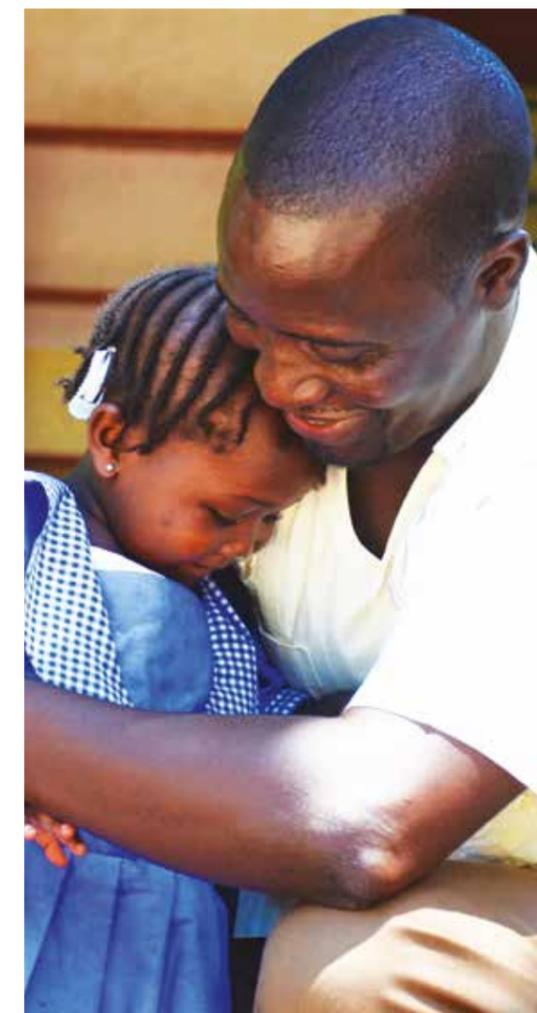
Family strengthening

It is in a child's best interests to remain with the family of origin as long as the family is providing adequate care. In partnership with community organisations and governments, we work to strengthen vulnerable families in order to prevent family breakdown and separation of children from their families. In family strengthening, we also work with kinship care, where children are supported to live with their extended family. Where necessary we partner with the state and other stakeholders to provide access to basic healthcare and quality education to support children and families to become self-reliant. Humanitarian emergency situations invariably lead to family separation and loss of security and livelihood. In such situations, we provide protection for unaccompanied children and young people, we

actively support family reunification, and we assist families to overcome trauma and rebuild their lives. For children who cannot be reunified with their family, we work with authorities to find a suitable care placement.

Advocacy and partnership for quality care

We call upon governments and communities to fulfil their commitments for children without parents or at risk of losing parental care, and we support them in their efforts. This work is guided by the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and is in the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We advocate for measures to prevent the loss of parental care. We also support the development and implementation of alternative care quality standards and demand continuous monitoring of these standards. This includes appropriate support for gatekeeping, reintegration, social workforce development and the leaving care process. In our advocacy, we draw on evidence gained through our work in alternative care and family strengthening.



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CARE COMMITMENTS

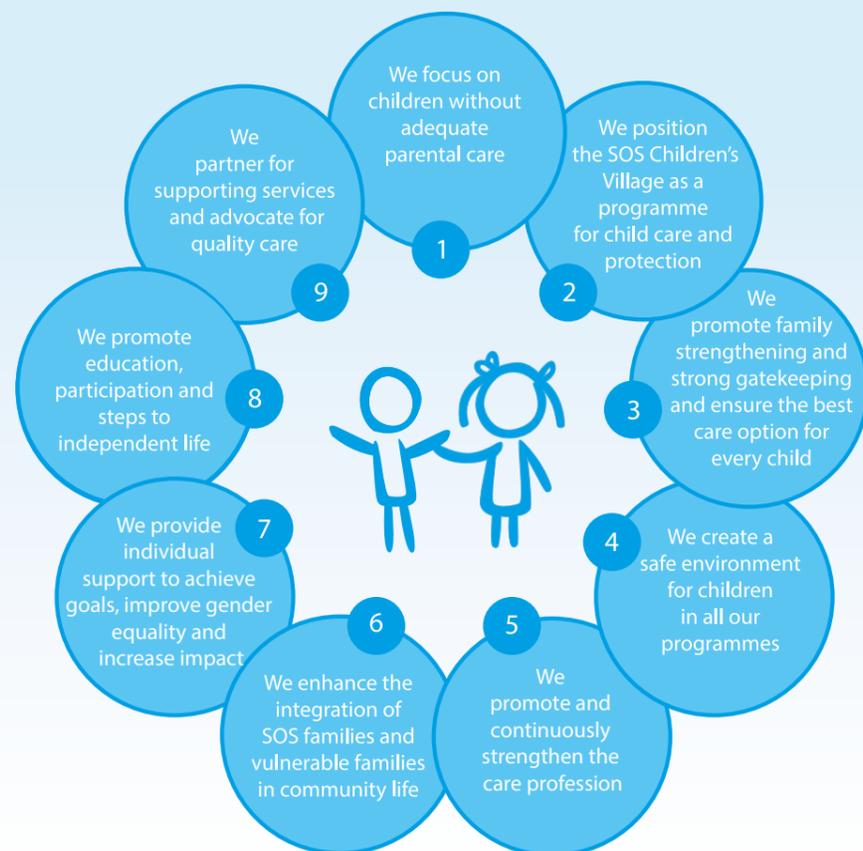


Figure 1: Our care commitments

1 WE FOCUS ON CHILDREN WITHOUT ADEQUATE PARENTAL CARE

We commit to focus our efforts on our target group: children without parental care or at risk of losing it who are living in vulnerable circumstances.

Unfortunately, many children live in situations where they are not adequately cared for and as a result experience various forms of vulnerability. We aim to reach out to these children. They are our target group. At the national level we define our target group in consultation with judicial and child protection authorities.

When identifying which groups of children are within our target group, we look at three key aspects of their

care situation: the long-term presence of a caregiver, the capacity and resources of the caregiver and the stability of care. We reflect on whether children are living with their parents (or other caregivers); whether their caregivers are able to provide adequate care; and whether the children are at risk of being separated from their parents (or other caregivers). By doing so, we can see how vulnerable a child's care situation is.

What our target group looks like varies from place to place, according to the specific factors that put children and their families at risk. Therefore, in each programme we identify and regularly review which groups of children belong to our target group, based on a careful assessment of the local context, taking into account families' perspectives and in agreement with the relevant authorities. In emergency situations, we focus on unaccompanied and separated children and families at risk of breaking down.

When identifying which children are within our target group, we do not discriminate on the basis of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation or special needs. At the same time, we do recognise that we are not always the best organisation to work with certain groups of children, such as child soldiers, long-term street children or children with special needs who may require lifelong care. Children in these circumstances often require specialised services for which we do not have the required expertise. As far as possible, we assist in finding suitable care solutions for them.

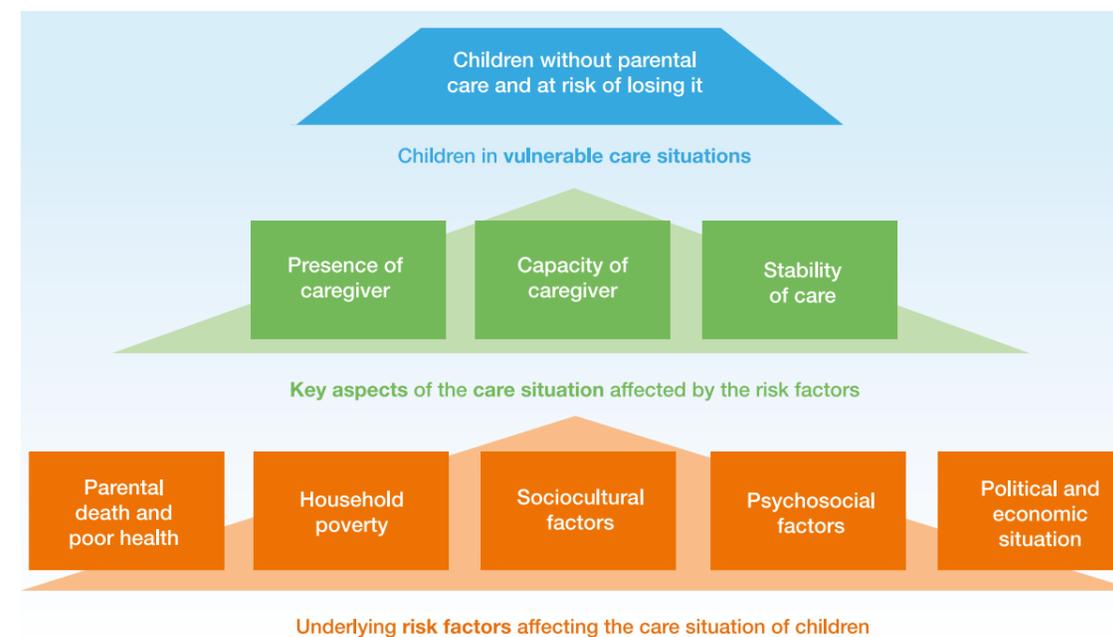


Figure 2: Identifying our target group



Peru: Identifying the most vulnerable families

SOS Children's Villages Peru has defined different family profiles to distinguish between families with different levels of risk. This allows them to identify families at high risk of breaking down and more effectively reach out to families that need support most urgently. Often, children in these families are not only living in extreme poverty but also face other acute problems, such as domestic violence, addiction issues or chronically ill family members. For their work in supporting families to overcome high-risk situations during 2017, SOS Children's Villages Cajamarca and Cusco were recognised by the Peruvian government.

2 WE POSITION THE SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGE AS A PROGRAMME FOR CHILD CARE AND PROTECTION

We commit to a long-term presence and locally adapted services in the communities where we work. Each of our programmes provides and promotes a range of quality alternative care options and family strengthening services. When necessary to meet otherwise unaddressed needs of our target group, we also provide healthcare, education and humanitarian emergency assistance.

Our programme is a centre of competence, resources and innovation in care. Through it, we maintain a visible and sustainable presence in communities and offer various services which best respond to the situation of our target group. Our programme is an open space from which we promote care and protection, acting as a catalyst for wider development. Children, families and partners such as community-based organisations receive support from our programme to build strong and vibrant networks.

Each programme is called an ‘‘SOS Children’s Village’’. It represents the totality of services provided in one community or across communities. We tailor these services to the local context and continuously improve them.

Whenever there is a need, we offer SOS family care, where children who are likely to need longer-term care can grow up in a family-like environment. SOS families always live in close proximity to each other so that they can form a mutual support network.

We also offer family strengthening services to prevent children from being separated from their parents or from their extended family, if they are in kinship care. We aim to improve families’ abilities to provide quality care for their children by working with them directly or empowering communities to do so.

We also consider other alternative care options when they are relevant and where a suitable legal framework exists. These may include foster family care, small group homes or other care options. We work with existing providers and help them to improve the quality of care, in line with the care commitments outlined in this document. If we have the required



Figure 3: Characteristics of an SOS Children's Village

expertise and resources available locally, we may provide these care options directly.

In humanitarian emergency situations caused by natural or man-made disasters, our programme also provides and promotes child care and protection. We step in during emergencies to prevent family separation and to reunify children who have been separated from their family. We also offer short-term care when needed.

Through our evidence-based advocacy efforts, we call on communities and governments to make a range of locally relevant care options available. We also work with them to fight the root causes of family breakdown.

Any form of care that institutionalises children and violates their rights is never a suitable care option. Children should grow up in individualised quality care

that responds to their needs and rights and should be well-integrated into their communities and society at large. We therefore actively promote the UN

Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children as a key reference point for care reform and de-institutionalisation.

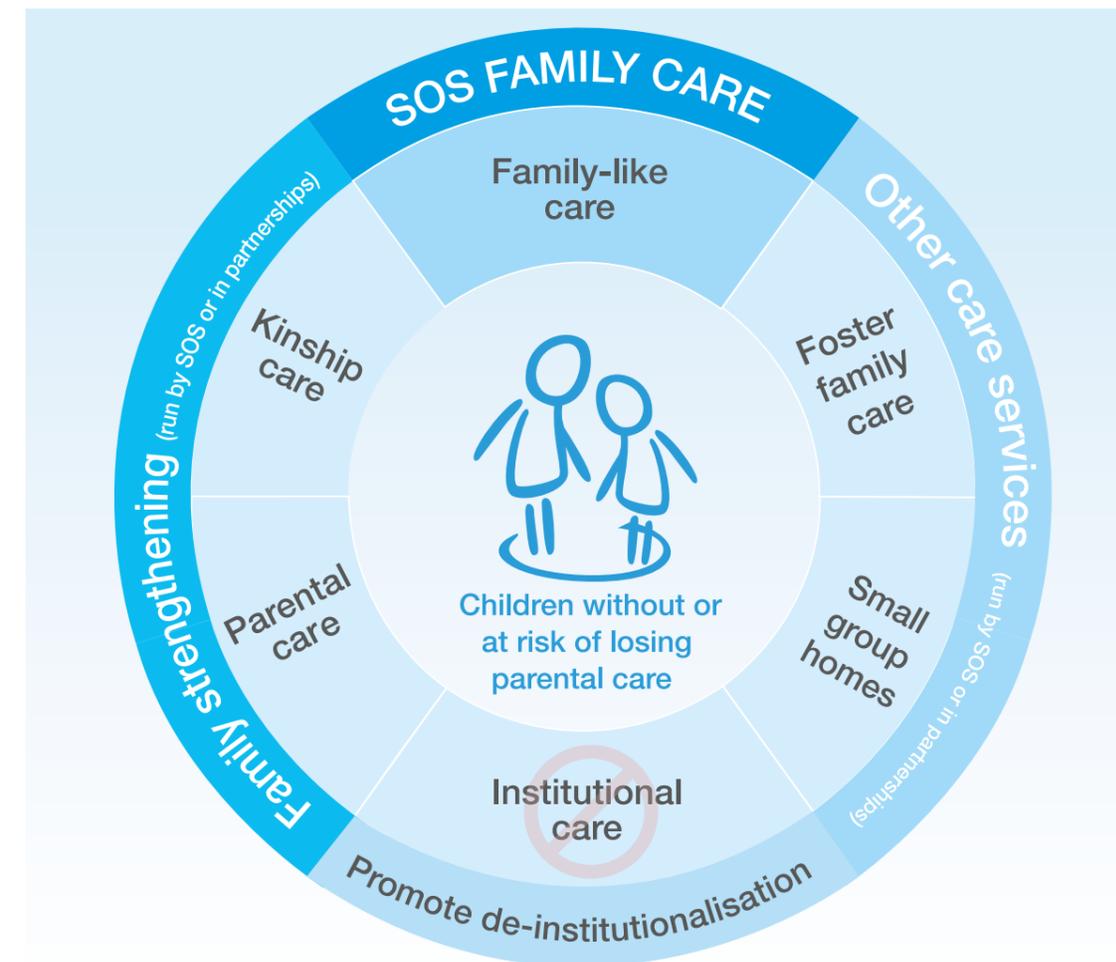


Figure 4: Promoting and providing a locally relevant range of care options



Philippines: Adapting services in a challenging context

When a devastating typhoon hit the Philippine city of Tacloban in 2013, SOS Children’s Villages set up an emergency response programme. Having provided SOS family care for several decades in this location, SOS Children’s Villages was a trusted NGO with well-established working relationships with the government and other partners. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, child-friendly spaces brought some normality to the lives of children in otherwise chaotic circumstances. SOS Children’s Villages also tailored its longer-term responses to the changing situation of the target group. As there were hundreds of children who had lost their parents in the typhoon but could find a new home with their extended family, the programme started to support kinship care.



Austria: Innovating services in the best interests of children

SOS Children's Village Imst has successfully implemented a range of alternative care services to meet the best interests of each individual child and to adapt to a changing environment. While introducing new services, the programme always works to ensure stable relationships and a loving home for children. Today, fewer families are led by SOS mothers, and other forms of families are supported. Furthermore, the connection between children and their biological parents is promoted by offering family counselling and crisis intervention as well as by enabling parents to take an active role in the life and upbringing of their children. SOS Children's Village Imst also strengthens vulnerable families in the community. More recently, the programme has started working with refugee families, enabling children and young people to live with their biological relatives and to receive professional support if necessary.

3 WE PROMOTE FAMILY STRENGTHENING AND STRONG GATEKEEPING AND ENSURE THE BEST CARE OPTION FOR EVERY CHILD

We commit to identify the most suitable care option for every child according to the child's best interests and in close collaboration with the responsible authorities.

The family of origin is the best place for a child to grow up. We support vulnerable families to stay together through our locally contextualised family strengthening services. When families break down and are unable to offer quality care to their children, we explore possibilities of kinship care as well as alternative care, choosing the most suitable care option.

We support the authorities in the assessment and decision-making process. We promote age-appropriate participation of both the child and the family. This is done in a way that does not expose the child to harm or cause further trauma. We make every effort to find a solution where siblings can grow up together and consider factors such as age, gender, faith, special needs, health status, geographic location and expected placement duration.

Whilst a child is in alternative care, we encourage strong links between children and their family of

origin, as long as it does not harm the well-being of the child. We review the placement on a regular basis, exploring all care options based on the best interests of the child. This includes supporting and guiding reintegration with their family of origin, if suitable.

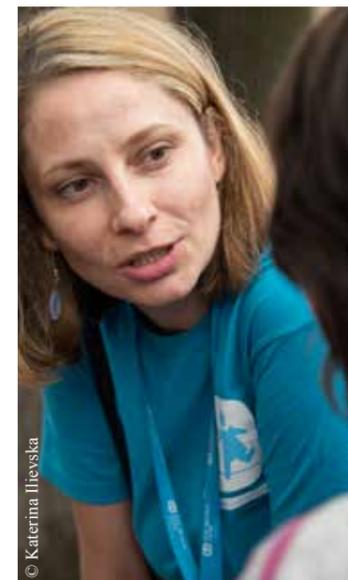


Figure 5: Finding the best care option



Russia: Preventing the need for alternative care

Five-year old Andrej lived in a cramped room in Saint Petersburg with his mother Nika, his grandmother and his three sisters. The conditions in the overcrowded, cold and mouldy apartment led local authorities to suggest that the children should be placed in alternative care. The SOS Children's Villages family strengthening team convinced the child welfare authorities to give the family some time to implement the necessary changes. They worked with the family to create a healthier living environment and supported Nika in finding a new job, as the long hours of her old job put a strain on her relationship with the children. Psychological counselling improved her parenting skills. The child welfare authorities acknowledged that Nika was able to take care of Andrej and his sisters and that there was no longer a need to place them in alternative care.



Sri Lanka: Strong gatekeeping to ensure the best care option

At SOS Children's Villages Sri Lanka, children are placed in alternative care by the relevant judicial authorities. A team involving all SOS Children's Village directors and the national board has developed internal child admission criteria based on the country's social and legal context. The final set of criteria has been communicated to courts and other authorities. When considering care options offered by SOS Children's Villages, the authorities give priority to children who fall in the SOS Children's Villages target group. Once an SOS Children's Village is informed about a possible child placement, the programme's child admission committee analyses the case and decides whether the placement is in fact suitable for the child.



4 WE CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN IN ALL OUR PROGRAMMES

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. We also insist that our partners do the same.

We listen to children to understand what child safety and a safe environment mean for them in their day-to-day lives with their families, peers, caregivers and communities. We take children's views seriously and consider their inputs when planning and implementing child safeguarding measures.

We design prevention and awareness measures to equip children, parents, caregivers, educators, families of origin and community members with the knowledge and skills necessary to protect children against dangerous, risky, violent and abusive situations. A strong focus is put on preventing violence against children, including gender-based violence, sexual coercion, abuse and exploitation, abusive disciplinary practices, and other forms of discrimination.

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. We regularly perform internal and external child safe-

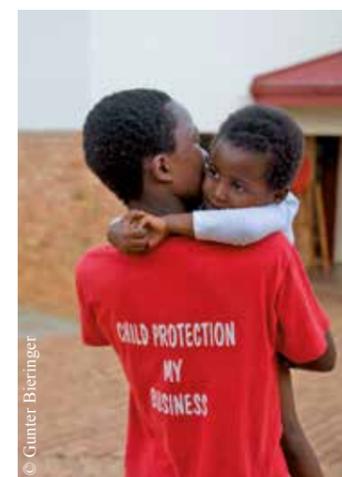
guarding audits, in line with accepted international standards as promoted and audited by Keeping Children Safe.

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.

Furthermore, within communities we advocate that neglect and abuse be recognised as unacceptable. We create awareness of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect and demand that people speak up when they witness them. We also strengthen existing community-based child safeguarding systems for our target group.



Figure 6: Ensuring child safeguarding



Child safety is everybody's business

The SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy was approved in 2008 by the International Senate and outlines in detail our commitment to keeping children safe. It sends the strong message that "child safety is everybody's business".

SOS Children's Villages is also a member of Keeping Children Safe, a coalition promoting child safeguarding within child care organisations. Keeping Children Safe has launched a certification scheme where child care organisations and service providers are assessed against its international child safeguarding standards. SOS Children's Villages achieved level 1 child safeguarding certification in 2017 and is working intensively to reach level 2 in the future.

5 WE PROMOTE AND CONTINUOUSLY STRENGTHEN THE CARE PROFESSION

We commit to promote the crucial role of care professionals. We nurture both passion for and dedication to the profession, and encourage skills development. We do this because children have a right to quality care and need a caring and trustworthy relationship with someone they can rely on, every single day.

The trusting and reliable relationship between a child and a caregiver that enables the child to experience love and security is the essence of our work. To achieve this goal, we need to ensure that children have a stable caregiver with the right knowledge and skills to create a caring family environment, both in alternative care and in family strengthening.

A quality recruitment process is followed for all care professionals: SOS mothers, SOS parents, youth care workers and family strengthening field workers. We make sure that we select people who have a genuine commitment to child care, identify with our mission and can act as role models for children and young people.

For all care professionals, we ensure fair working conditions and adequate compensation and benefits which are fair and transparent. Through ongoing training, development and counselling opportuni-

ties, we make sure they have the right set of skills, knowledge and attitudes. We also encourage networking to share good practices and learning.

Given the demands of their work, we help care professionals to balance their professional and private lives, respecting their partners and their own biological children. We recognise their efforts and challenges and support them to progress in their professional development.

We constantly work to improve the status and reputation of care professionals in society. We achieve this by promoting legal recognition and fostering networks of care professionals.

In all our work with care professionals, we integrate a gender equality perspective and eliminate gender-based discrimination.



Figure 7: Strengthening the care profession

6 WE ENHANCE THE INTEGRATION OF SOS FAMILIES AND VULNERABLE FAMILIES IN COMMUNITY LIFE

We commit to enhance the integration of SOS families and vulnerable families into community life. The aim is for children and young people to build strong social networks that can support them throughout their life.

In SOS family care, we promote the social integration of SOS families by ensuring the highest possible degree of autonomy, so that they can create a caring and nurturing family environment. They can also easily interact with neighbours and the wider community without having to overcome unnatural, organisational barriers. In adapting living standards to the local context, we further facilitate community integration and reduce the risk of SOS families being seen as different.

In addition to social integration, we support the physical integration of SOS families according to local experience and context. In this case, SOS families live directly in the community, side by side with other families. When doing so, it is important that SOS families live in close proximity to each other, offering mutual support and contributing to a safe and secure environment.

The SOS Children's Village opens its services and facilities to the wider community. This includes parenting skills training, psychosocial counselling, schools and kindergartens. In this way, the SOS Children's Village becomes a catalyst for development in the community.

We also make sure that SOS families and vulnerable families have access to existing services in the community, for instance education, healthcare, psychosocial support or career counselling. We also encourage children and young people to participate in community initiatives such as cultural events or sports activities to foster their integration into society.

“The kids are good teachers”

“At SOS Children's Villages, it was possible for me to work, to earn some money, and in addition to do the training as an SOS mother. It was great to be able to work in my job right away and not to spend several years in training first and only then to get first-hand practical experience. So I worked with children from day one, and the kids were good teachers for me, very good. When I'm off, I'm not in the SOS family; instead, I go to my own apartment. I meet my circle of friends; I like to read; I visit my parents and sometimes my brother; I like to go to the cinema or just to chat with friends over coffee. I like that.”

An SOS mother, SOS Children's Village Vienna, Austria

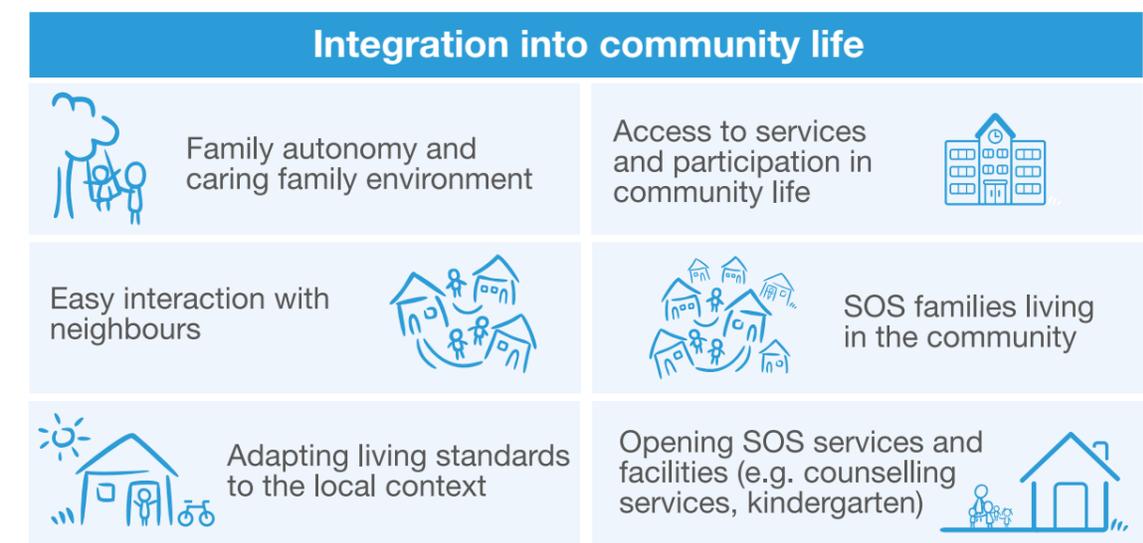
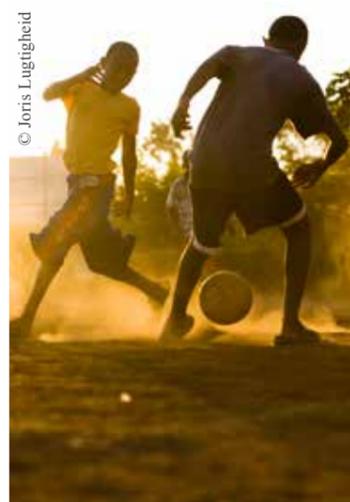


Figure 8: Integration into community life



© Joris Lugtigheid

Ethiopia: Community integration is about friendships

Yadeta's favourite part of the day is when he plays football with his friends after school. Yadeta is 12 years old. He lives in an SOS family at SOS Children's Village Jimma in Ethiopia. At school, he has made good friends with children from the neighbouring community. They spend most of their leisure time together playing outside or going to community events. Yadeta also loves going over to his friends' homes, for example when he is invited to birthday celebrations.

On Saturdays his friends sometimes come over to watch big football matches on a screen in the SOS Children's Village and dream of being as good as their favourite stars one day.

7 WE PROVIDE INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT TO ACHIEVE GOALS, IMPROVE GENDER EQUALITY AND INCREASE IMPACT

We commit to support children and families on their journey to self-reliance. We do this through child and family development planning, addressing all aspects of life. We put a special focus on ensuring equal opportunities for girls and boys and thus on improving gender equality.

In alternative care, we empower children and young people in various aspects of their individual development, so that they are able to become self-reliant and contributing members of society. This process begins with a special focus on early childhood development and ends with quality aftercare support. In family strengthening, we empower families towards self-reliance, so that by the time they leave the programme they are able to effectively protect and care for their children.

Throughout the child and family development process, we build on each child's, young person's and family's unique set of strengths, skills and knowledge. We do this through the ongoing participation of children and families. They are always at the centre of their own development. Parents play a leading role in guiding and supporting the development of children, with the children taking increasing responsibility as they grow older.

We pay particular attention to promoting equal opportunities for girls and boys. We are aware that gender stereotypes often start in the family and the community. Through the development planning process we consistently work towards gender equality.

We achieve all of the above with a professionally structured development plan, initiated as soon as a child or family enters our programme. Each plan starts with a thorough assessment and is tailored to the situation and the specific needs of the individual child or family. We also invite other relevant stakeholders such as social workers, teachers and psychologists to participate. We monitor the implementation of the plan on an ongoing basis and update it at least annually.

Through individual planning and monitoring we focus on and learn about the results we achieve. This helps us to continuously adapt and improve our work. As a result, we succeed in achieving sustainable results for each child, family and community.



Figure 9: Building self-reliance of children and families



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Côte d'Ivoire: Creating opportunities through education

"I was lucky to be brought to SOS. I sometimes wonder if I would even be alive today if I had not been taken in by SOS. But even if I had been alive, I doubt that I would have been able to get the kind of education that I got while I was with SOS. Schooling is expensive, and most Ivorians don't go to university. Without my degree I would not have my current job and the prospects for the future that I have."

A young person who grew up in an SOS family in Côte d'Ivoire and who is now living independently

8 WE PROMOTE EDUCATION, PARTICIPATION AND STEPS TO INDEPENDENT LIFE

We commit to support every child and young person in our programme in taking steps towards an independent life. This means securing access to quality education and supporting them to develop appropriate skills and work ethic to succeed in life.

For children who are in alternative care, our support starts from the moment of admission and lasts until they leave care. In family strengthening, we work with families to create the right conditions to meet their children's development needs. We aim to build parents' capacities so that they can support their children's journey towards independent life, even after the family has left the programme. At all stages of children's development, we actively

promote age-appropriate participation and listen to their voices.

We know that the first years in a child's life are crucial for their future development. Therefore, we pay particular attention to early childhood development. We work to ensure that all young children in our programme receive appropriate care, stimulation and support to overcome traumas from their past and build resilience.

We also ensure that children and young people have access to quality education. According to their age and stage of development, we support them to acquire a wide variety of skills to prepare them for responsible independent life in society and strengthen their employability. In doing so, we promote equal access, addressing any discrimination based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, faith, health status, sexual orientation or special needs.

Education is not limited to schooling, and we also empower caregivers to support the educational development of their children. This support includes encouraging their children to develop life skills and values. As children grow to become young adults, they learn to take increasing responsibility for the decisions in their lives.

We also promote the employability of young people in our target group by engaging with public authorities, decision makers and partners. We make sure that those in our programme can benefit from a range of support measures such as career coaching or internships.

For children in alternative care, we make the transition from alternative care to independent life as smooth as possible through a tailored and participatory leaving care process. Whether a young person moves to youth accommodation or stays within an SOS family, the decision is made in a participatory process involving the SOS parent and the young person. The choice is considered from every angle and based on the maturity, aspirations and best interests of the young person.

Once a young person has left alternative care, we offer clearly defined aftercare support for relevant areas of their life. We also recognise that not all young people need aftercare support and that we cannot support young people forever. Thus, aftercare support will be limited to specific areas of need and will decrease over time. We also make sure that young people can maintain lifelong family ties and seek support from their SOS families after they have left care.



Figure 10: Support areas for an independent life



Costa Rica: United for youth employability

Sofia is a young mother living with her baby in San José, Costa Rica. She is venturing into the working world through the YouthCan! programme. In this global initiative, SOS Children's Villages and its partners jointly create opportunities for young people to gain relevant practical experience, skills and knowledge and so improve their employability. Sofia's mentor, Daniela, has been working in the laundry service of an international hotel for over 20 years. She shares her professional experience with Sofia, enabling her to gain insights into the responsibilities and challenges that come with the job. This mentorship is helping Sofia to gain self-confidence and experience, preparing her for the job market, so that she can build a secure future for herself and her child.

9 WE PARTNER FOR SUPPORTING SERVICES AND ADVOCATE FOR QUALITY CARE

We commit to focus on our care expertise and partner for supporting services such as education, healthcare and economic empowerment. We also engage with governments and other decision makers to promote quality care.

Children and their families need access to various services to support their healthy development. Throughout our work, we focus on what we do best – care – and we partner with specialised organisations to provide supporting services for our target group. Whenever we can, we offer our expertise to build their capacity.

In exceptional situations where neither the government nor other partners can provide supporting services for our target group, but we are able to do so, we step in to fill the gap. We do so for a defined period only and continuously engage with the government and specialised organisations so that they can take over.

We consider ourselves an integral part of national

child welfare systems. We work closely with authorities and other agencies, taking advantage of all available skills and resources to focus on the improvement of the situation of children, especially on ensuring quality across alternative care options and preventing family separation. In addition, we engage and support the efforts of like-minded organisations to advocate for policies and practices which counter the root causes of child vulnerability. We firmly believe that evidence-based and targeted advocacy will, in time, lead to a society which better protects and provides for its children, thus contributing to the realisation of our organisation's vision and mission.

With every action we ensure that the voices of children of our target group are heard.



Figure 11: Partnerships and advocacy



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A young person's voice

With his emotional story, 17-year-old Franco from Chile called on global leaders in July 2017 to recognise how important family strengthening is. "Parents need to be given support so that they can support their children and prevent suffering and separation," Franco stated. "It is a cycle. If the parents suffer, their children suffer too. If we resolve this problem, we can resolve it for future generations." Franco was representing Chilean youth at an event in New York, where he asked the world's leaders to listen to young people more and to promote their rights in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The 17-year-old also stressed the need for greater awareness of the challenges faced by children growing up in alternative care. Franco is living in an SOS family in Chile.

Palestine: A joint effort to protect girls

Muna is a 16-year-old Palestinian girl. When her father abandoned their family, Muna's life changed dramatically. Her mother was overburdened, and Muna and her two sisters struggled to access essential services. Muna dropped out of school and went into commercial sex work to provide for the family. She was arrested by the authorities, who informed her father. This put Muna's life in immediate danger, as according to strict custom, young girls like her are often killed to get rid of the shame brought to the family.

When SOS Children's Villages learnt of the situation, they acted immediately and mobilised their network of partners. Together they worked with the Ministry of Social Affairs to protect the girl. Muna went to a safe house, where she was protected and rehabilitated and where she received an education. SOS Children's Villages continued to support her family through family strengthening.



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ANNEX

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
alternative care	An arrangement in which a child is provided full-time care by a caregiver outside the child's family of origin.
care	Parenting children and young people, which includes protecting them, providing for their well-being and nurturing their development. Care can take place in a child's family of origin or within an alternative care setting.
caregiver	The person who is responsible for the upbringing and daily care of the child.
care option	A particular setting in which a child receives care.
de-institutionalisation	Child care and protection reform processes with the aim of ending institutional care, which includes providing for quality alternative care options and strengthening families.
family-like care	An alternative care option where one or more professional caregivers provide care in largely autonomous small groups of children in a setting that is specifically created for this purpose and resembles a family environment.
family of origin	The family into which a child is born, including the immediate family and the extended family.
family strengthening	A service aimed at preventing family breakdown and promoting quality care within families of origin.
family reintegration	The event of a child returning to the care of his or her family of origin.
foster family care, foster care	An alternative care option where care is provided by a caregiver selected, qualified, approved and supervised by the government or an authorised agency. The care is typically provided in the caregiver's own home.
gatekeeping	The process of referring children and families to appropriate services or care arrangements with the aim of preventing unnecessary alternative care and finding the most suitable alternative care option when needed.
institutional care	Alternative care provided in large residential facilities that fail to provide children with a stable caregiver, isolate them from the outside world and have rigid, impersonal regimes that have a severe, and often lifelong, detrimental effect on children's psychological and emotional well-being and ability to function.
kinship care	A care option where care is provided by members of the child's extended family or other caregivers close to the family and known to the child. In the SOS Children's Villages context, support for kinship care is part of family strengthening.
programme	Synonym of "SOS Children's Village".

Term	Definition
service	Organised activities that are designed to address specific needs of children and/or their families. The main services provided by SOS Children's Villages typically include SOS family care, family strengthening and sometimes also other care options.
small group home	An alternative care option where care is provided to a small group of children or young people by professional child and youth care workers working on shift or rotational basis.
SOS Children's Village	A set of interrelated services managed by an SOS Children's Villages member association in a specific location (village, community or area with several communities) with a clearly defined target group and a shared overall goal.
SOS family care	Family-like care offered by SOS Children's Villages where SOS parents (who may include SOS mothers or fathers or married couples) live with and are primarily responsible for the upbringing and development of a small group of children, who grow together like siblings. SOS parents are supported by other programme staff.
target group	The group of children SOS Children's Villages seeks to reach through its programmes.





SOS Children's Villages Principles



CHILD

Every child is unique and respected

PARENT

Every child needs a caring and stable parent

FAMILY

Every child grows up in a supportive family

COMMUNITY

Every child is part of a safe and supportive community