

# SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES EMERGENCY POLICY



SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES  
INTERNATIONAL

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## PROTECTING CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES



CORE POLICY

This policy expresses the organisation's stand on emergency activities and sets an action framework for the SOS Children's Villages organisation. It has been elaborated in accordance with SOS Children's Villages' roots, vision, mission and values ("Who we are") and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has followed a consultative development process with participation and feedback from member associations, and in consideration of the views of children and young people.



#### SEPARATED CHILDREN

Children who are victims of emergency situations may be designated as "separated" if they are separated from a previous legal or customary caregiver, but who may nevertheless be accompanied **by another relative** (UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2009).

#### UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

Children who are victims of emergency situations may be designated as "unaccompanied" if they are not cared for by another relative or an adult who by law or custom is responsible for doing so (UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, 2009).

### WHAT WE STAND FOR: POLICY STATEMENT

When children are exposed to emergencies, be it as a result of armed conflict or natural disaster, we take action:

- (1) To bring them as quickly as possible from the emergency situation into a caring family environment where their development as individuals is supported.
- (2) To prevent family separation during all phases of an emergency.

We achieve this by:

- First and foremost ensuring that unaccompanied and separated children are safe, protected and cared for during the emergency.
- Making every effort to reunify them with family members.
- Identifying suitable alternative care placement in the best interests of the children when reunification is not possible.
- Supporting families and communities with children who are at risk of losing parental care.

## INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

Around the world the frequency and severity of emergencies are rising dramatically and, increasingly, emergencies result from a combination of causes. They occur against the background of the global economic crisis, the planet's continuous environmental degradation, conflicts and the impact of climate change. Particularly in developing countries, rapid population growth and urbanisation are often coupled with limited resources, poor physical infrastructure and weak social systems. This growing complexity exacerbates the effects of disasters on the lives of children and on the livelihoods of their families. It reduces the resilience of families and communities, and it increases the vulnerability of entire populations.

**EVERY CHILD GROWS WITH SECURITY:**  
Children are protected from abuse, neglect and exploitation and are kept safe during natural disaster and war. "Who we are"

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/RES/44/25) articulates children's rights to survival, development, participation and protection in all circumstances. During emergencies, the risk of violation of these rights increases; children are particularly vulnerable to the loss of parental care and protection in the time when they need it most. Unaccompanied or separated children are at greater risk of being sexually abused, trafficked, or recruited into armed groups. Children's rights to health and psychological well-being are threatened, and access to education is often denied. Furthermore, children from ethnic or religious minorities, girls, children with disabilities, and children affected by HIV and AIDS face further risks of discrimination, violence and abandonment. The emotional impact of disasters has the potential to jeopardise children's psychosocial recovery and long-term development.

Girls and women are particularly vulnerable to being deprived of fundamental rights in emergency situations. The UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325) addresses the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on girls and women. It also recognises their right to protection from violence and to participate in all peace and security processes.

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (A/RES/64/142) promote the rights of children at risk of losing parental care and of children in alternative care. They strongly emphasise the importance of preserving and supporting family care; they offer guidance to prevent family separation and to ensure adequate care in all circumstances. It is essential that all duty bearers live up to their responsibilities as laid out in the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and incorporate them into national policy and practice.

The SOS Children's Villages Emergency Policy builds on more than 60 years of experience in the care and support of children and their families. Our activities in emergency situations benefit from our local presence in the countries and locations affected. SOS Children's Villages has an established cooperation with local authorities, proven infrastructure and logistics, local cultural knowledge, and trust and recognition as a reliable partner. These strengths enable us to effectively support and influence humanitarian agencies and state governments and to advocate the prioritising of children's rights and their well-being in emergencies.

## B. TARGET GROUP

- Children who are unaccompanied or separated following an emergency.
- Children affected by an emergency who are at risk of losing parental care, as well as their caregivers.
- Children who might be affected by an emergency who have lost parental care or who are at risk of losing parental care. This includes families and communities as well as children in our programmes or in other forms of out-of-home care.

## PRINCIPLES GUIDING SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES' ACTION

As signatory of the Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, our vision of humanitarian aid is based on International Humanitarian Law and the Humanitarian Imperative, and our conduct in all aspects of emergencies is guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

### 1. We make sure children are secure, protected and able to continue developing amidst emergency situations.

Keeping children  
secure and protected

During emergencies, our immediate response is to provide security and meet the basic needs of the children in our target group. Our emergency activities provide nutrition and other basic services for children and their families. We work in communities where we already have existing SOS Children's Villages programmes or in locations where our work can reasonably be carried out. We work to help restore the everyday rhythm of life in spite of the emergency situation so that children can continue developing. Our emergency response is rooted in the programme work of SOS Children's Villages so that as emergency situations stabilise, long-term individual child and youth development can be sustained. Where possible, we strive to work with partners to complement our strengths in order to reduce the effect disasters have on children and to move towards recovery and development as quickly as possible. This is for a limited period of time and in partnership with other specialist organisations and/or local authorities.

### 2. We make sure children are in a caring family environment.

Child development  
in a caring family  
environment

The key objective of our emergency response is to enable children to grow and develop within a caring family environment. We therefore strive to reunite unaccompanied children with their families, to prevent family separation and to strengthen families to care for and protect their children. Listening to the child and considering his or her best interests form the basis for any decision we take regarding their care and well-being.

### 3. We support children and communities to prepare for and to respond to emergencies.

Children and  
communities  
supported

Preparedness is crucial for children, families and for SOS Children's Villages to be able to respond to an emergency situation and to mitigate its effects. We make sure our co-workers in high-risk countries are prepared to respond to emergencies by assuring they receive



proper training and resources. Furthermore, preparedness tools using innovative technology as well as evacuation and security plans mitigate the risks for children and their caregivers, other participants in our emergency activities and co-workers. We use our expertise to strengthen the resilience of children, families and their communities to respond and cope if and when emergencies occur.

#### **4. We carry out a focused and effective emergency response and recognise the importance of responding immediately and with the appropriate scale-up of resources depending on the needs of our target group.**

Based on our local presence and international support network, our emergency activities are quickly coordinated, based on needs identified in the field. In addition, we use our global capacity, knowledge and experience to support programme solutions. We make sure that the correct staff, funds, communications systems and monitoring activities are in place to deliver an effective response. We manage our emergency activities in a professional and transparent manner and in accordance with existing organisational policies, guidelines and external frameworks. We end our intervention properly with the implementation of an exit strategy.

**We carry out a focused and effective emergency response**

#### **5. We maximise our impact through cooperation with partners.**

We are a reliable and committed partner, and our existing infrastructure and logistics allow us to tailor our services to the needs of our target group. We recognise that a large-scale emergency can only be confronted in partnership with other stakeholders. We make our specialised contribution as part of a broader emergency response.

**Cooperation with partners**

## IMPLICATIONS

### **1. We make sure children are secure, protected and able to continue developing amidst emergency situations.**

- 1a)** In the immediate aftermath of an emergency, we assist in meeting the basic needs of the population, taking into account the needs of our target group based on humanitarian principles, by providing access to clean water, food, clothes, sanitation and medical care, as well as temporary shelter. These activities are implemented in accordance with the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability as well as Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response and as long as needs persist and no other stakeholder is able to address these needs.
- 1b)** During an emergency, we take all efforts to prevent the separation of children from their families and to help them to cope with the situation. We expand and/or adapt existing programmes as required to provide access to basic services, support, and capacity-building services for affected children and families. These measures comply with the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action in order to enhance the care and protection of children.

**Our direct response – keeping children safe and secure**

- 1c) If a child is identified as unaccompanied, we ensure temporary shelter, care and support in a safe and protected environment. SOS Children's Villages or other SOS premises may be used (and/or expanded) as temporary shelters. If a significant need is identified, we may also engage in the set-up and operation of temporary shelters for unaccompanied children. Any form of shelter has to comply with the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and the SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy.
- 1d) We promote and support interventions which help children and their caregivers to regain a sense of normality following an emergency. Examples of such interventions include play activities, art and family counselling, and can also include the provision of support among peers, family and community members.
- 1e) We place special focus on particularly vulnerable groups largely depending on the specific context of an emergency. Emergency activities are tailored according to their specific needs, rights and views.
- 1f) Our response is designed in accordance with the SOS Children's Village Programme Policy. Thus, when the initial emergency response is finished, there is programme continuity and an individual approach to the development of each child.
- 1g) We acknowledge the importance of education during emergency response. This may include promoting and actively engaging in the swift re-establishment of schools and educational services after an emergency has occurred. We consider all possible actions to ensure that the state governments or partner organisations take long-term responsibility for educational services; this is a key measure to promote a child's physical, psychological and social recovery, and is an effective means of protecting children and supporting their return to a life in dignity that includes the protection and promotion of individuals' rights and access to essential services in a safe and secure environment.
- 1h) In cooperation with partners, our emergency activities include measures to identify and refer cases of illness and injury and reduce programme participants' susceptibility to sexually transmitted infections by promoting vaccinations, providing sexual education and enabling access to medical treatment where necessary. The organisation's emergency preparedness and response activities are in line with policies and guidelines of SOS Children's Villages International.

### Responding with partners

## 2. We make sure children are in a caring family environment.

### Reunifying the child with his or her family

- 2a) Whenever possible and in line with the best interests of the child, one of our main priorities is to reunify unaccompanied children with their families. We invest resources to trace families and mediate family reunification as soon as possible.
- 2b) In cooperation with duty bearers and stakeholders, we advocate and actively engage in the rapid establishment of a secure and confidential identification system. This ensures early

identification, family tracing, proper data protection and access to personal identification documents for unaccompanied and separated children. The aim is to trace their families so they can be reunited.

**2c)** After the emergency has subsided, we do the utmost to follow-up, monitor and support children who were registered as separated or unaccompanied in order to ensure that their care arrangement is in their best interests.

**2d)** When it has been confirmed that an unaccompanied child has lost parental care, we initiate and, together with stakeholders and duty bearers, set about finding a long-term placement which is in the best interests of the child. Possibilities include reunification with the child's extended family, community-based alternative care options, integration into an SOS family and other forms of care. The opinions of children are listened to and given due consideration in this process.

**Finding alternative care options**

**2e)** We refrain from taking or supporting decisions regarding permanent and/or long-term care solutions for unaccompanied children until all possible efforts to trace and reunify them with their parents and/or relatives have been exhausted. We encourage local authorities, state governments and other duty bearers to delay and/or refrain from the construction of residential facilities for children who have lost their families during emergencies. These permanent facilities can diminish the motivation to continue searching for the children's families and can lead to unnecessary separation, even when families have been found. The organisation's position on the construction of residential facilities must not impair any forms of activities related to imminent life-saving or to the provision of shelter.

### **3. We support children and communities to prepare for and to respond to emergencies.**

**3a)** In countries or regions of high risk, member associations in close cooperation with the General Secretariat assess the likelihood and type of potential emergency situations. Accordingly, they incorporate capacity-building measures into their national strategic and annual plans. Such measures include training in emergency response, evacuation plans relative to emergency preparedness, and community-based disaster risk reduction.

**Getting ready for an emergency**

**3b)** Co-workers are trained and prepared to support emergency activities locally or internationally. We develop co-workers' skills and knowledge in areas such as child-focused disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness, emergency response, family tracing and reunification, and special support needed for children living in traumatic emergency situations. We ensure that co-workers of SOS Children's Villages who are engaged in an emergency follow our stated human resources principles and quality standards.

**3c)** We allocate resources to implement preparedness activities in all types of our programmes and ensure the strengthening of internal capacities to guarantee effective emergency coordination across the organisation.

### Preparing together with communities and the government

- 3d) We aim to raise awareness within the community of the risks of family separation. The family is actively promoted, monitored and supported as the best place for a child to grow up, develop and be protected, especially in times of crisis.
- 3e) We increase the ability of communities to respond to potential emergencies by strengthening community networks for children and their families. We participate in community-based actions to identify and mitigate disaster risks, prevent family separation and strengthen the care and protection of children within families in the event of an emergency.
- 3f) Our activities in emergency situations benefit from our local long-term presence in the countries and locations affected. The organisation's emergency preparedness and response activities strive to increase the resilience of the target group we work with, supported by the long-term programmes of SOS Children's Villages. The way emergency relief and rehabilitation activities are linked to the SOS Children's Village Programme Policy is described in the organisation's policy support document: Linking relief, rehabilitation and development. This holistic approach ensures that SOS Children's Villages emergency programmes ultimately contribute to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 3g) We strongly condemn child trafficking. In order to prevent children from being exposed to the risk of trafficking and exploitation, we work with and support their families and caregivers, and we advocate appropriate action to be taken by state duty bearers.

## 4. We carry out a focused and effective emergency response and recognise the importance of responding immediately and with the appropriate scale-up of resources depending on the needs of our target group.

### Rapid assessment and start-up within days

- 4a) When an emergency occurs, SOS Children's Villages intervenes if it impacts our target group. A rapid assessment of the emergency situation must therefore be carried out on the ground. Wherever feasible, we support and participate in inter-agency assessments. The respective member association and the General Secretariat of the federation decide together whether or not SOS Children's Villages will respond to the emergency. If there is to be a response, they jointly define the scope of the emergency intervention. In countries where SOS Children's Villages is not present, the General Secretariat decides upon a potential involvement.
- 4b) The emergency activities are led by an emergency team located close to the emergency area supported by the General Secretariat if required. The emergency team is empowered to make decisions based on rapidly changing ground realities and is responsible for the implementation of all activities carried out by SOS Children's Villages.
- 4c) We are committed to making funds available to support identified needs on the ground. This includes preparedness and relief activities, as well as activities aimed at early recovery, and a potential transition into a programme in accordance with the SOS Children's Village Programme Policy.



- 4d) The emergency programme ends with the implementation of the exit strategy. This may close emergency activities, transfer operations to another stakeholder or start a transition into a programme in accordance with the SOS Children's Village Programme Policy.
- 4e) To guarantee the high quality of our services during emergencies, we employ only co-workers who have adequate qualifications, attitudes and experience. To ensure the full protection of children in SOS Children's Villages programmes, all co-workers of SOS Children's Villages must follow the Child Protection Policy and must sign and adhere to the SOS Children's Villages Code of Conduct. We make every effort to ensure the security, supervision and support of staff during an emergency activity. We pay special attention to the physical and emotional recovery of co-workers participating in the activity, as well as of co-workers directly affected by the emergency.
- 4f) In order to give immediate human resources support to member associations in countries affected by a disaster, an international emergency roster system is in place to deploy well trained emergency experts to the field – complementary to the member association's emergency team. The member association and the General Secretariat decide together on deployments according to the needs on the ground.
- 4g) In order to guarantee the integrity of our emergency activities, we act in accordance with organisational policies, guidelines and standards, and the organisation's good management practices. Any emergency activity reflects acknowledged humanitarian standards such as the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response. We are aware of and make efforts to mitigate possible unintended negative impacts of our actions on the dynamics of an emergency (e.g. applying approaches such as do-no-harm and conflict sensitivity). We manage our resources wisely and in a responsible manner.
- 4h) The emergency programme will include an internal and external communications and reporting plan to ensure that relevant information, results and challenges reach children, families and communities we work with, donors, media and other stakeholders in a timely, transparent and accountable manner. To ensure effective communication, the necessary information technology infrastructure is put in place, or expanded if needed. Personal information about children and their caregivers and other participants in our emergency activities is treated in a dignified manner and any personal data is kept confidential.
- 4i) Throughout the emergency programme, we constantly evaluate our plan against newly obtained results and measure our progress against objectives and indicators. We monitor our programmes to regularly assess their relevance and impact on our target group. We carry out periodic and final evaluations and impact assessments to gain a realistic picture of the programme's achievements and the changes – positive or negative, intended or unintended – it has delivered to the target group. According to the information obtained, we realign and revise our programme and enhance future practice and strategies.

Ensuring good  
management and  
accountability

## 5. We maximise our impact through cooperation with partners.

### Preparing and acting with partners

- 5a) We proactively engage in relevant partnerships (with all relevant UN agencies, INGOs and others) and actively participate in networks and emergency coordination platforms (of the government, the UN, and the civil society) in order to reach agreements on effective emergency preparedness and disaster response for our target group. This avoids unnecessary duplication of work and enables a synergetic approach. Any cooperation, partnership, practice or programme activity which is not in line with The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief should be evaluated and adapted or stopped.
- 5b) We foster a spirit of cooperation and actively exchange knowledge and information, tools and other resources with partners present in the emergency. We promote the collection and exchange of lessons learned among our partners to improve our services towards the target group.
- 5c) We work in conjunction with and complement the efforts of state governments, other civil society actors and international humanitarian bodies. Thus, we ensure that our emergency activities are aligned with national priorities as defined by the authorities and the humanitarian aid community, while at the same time being guided by the best interests of the child.
- 5d) We recognise the state as the ultimate duty bearer, and in accordance with humanitarian principles we are committed to supporting its efforts in order to ensure that children are safe, cared for and protected during an emergency situation. We also wish to ensure that family and community-based care and protection is prioritised, and that interventions are guided by the best interests of the child.

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