SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES

Table of contents

Foreword 3

Introduction 5

Impact at the individual level **8**

Impact at the community level **25**

Impact at the systemic level **30**

Contribution to SDGs **41**

Social return on investment **42**

Looking ahead **45**

Annex 1: Methodology: Impact in the lives of individuals 48

Annex 2: Countries represented in the aggregated social impact figures 50

Annex 3: Bibliography 51

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Foreword

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Dereje Wordofa
President

Photo: SOS Children's Villages Colombia

Angela Maria Rosales R.
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Chief Programme Officer

In the aftermath of World War II, millions of children in Europe were left without someone to care for them. In some cases both parents had died; in others parents simply lost the ability to provide care due to the traumas of war. These children were often placed in large-scale orphanages and separated from their siblings – a last familial connection that could have served as comfort.

From this need, a movement was born 75 years ago. Hermann Gmeiner and a group of passionate associates pioneered an initiative that soon expanded from Imst, Austria to all corners of the world, rooted in the simple but profound premise that children need and have the right to grow in nurturing and loving environments.

During these 75 years, we have seen the movement spread in reach and scope. It was built by many – staff, caregivers, volunteers, donors, and partners around the world. Our heartfelt thanks go to everyone who has contributed to a global movement dedicated to upholding and advocating for the rights of children and young people without or at risk of losing parental care. We especially call out the thousands of devoted care practitioners and professionals who work with compassion and diligence, every day.

We welcome the significant strides that have been made in effecting systemic change. Drawing on our collective experience and guided by the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, SOS Children's Villages joined with others to engage in advocacy work, broadening our scope beyond providing direct care. This collaboration was instrumental in promoting the development of global quality care standards and led to significant influence on national governments and milestone international instruments, such as the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and the subsequent 2019 UN Resolution on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, it prompted our organization to actively engage in shaping the UN Sustainable Development Goals and various regional child rights instruments and frameworks.

Today, SOS Children's Villages is a federation of locally led member associations in over 130 countries and territories, supporting children, young people, and their families with a range of services aimed at keeping families together and providing tailored quality alternative care that best meets the child's and young person's needs. Through a holistic approach, we strive for children to grow into confident, resilient, and empowered individuals. To maximize our impact, we work with communities and engage in advocacy to create systemic change for children and young people without parental care or at risk of losing it.

Unfortunately, even today, a combination of crises is depriving millions of children around the world of their basic rights and opportunities. Just like in 1949, we witness children and young people being forcibly displaced from their homes, separated from their families, and traumatized. Humanitarian crises induced by armed conflicts and natural disasters are making it harder for families to stay together, leaving children without adequate parental care. Without someone to protect them, children are suffering

from lack of protection, shelter, safety, and are vulnerable to a range of abuses and exploitations. In addition, multidimensional poverty, inequality, and social exclusion have also perpetuated the cycle of vulnerability for many children, young people, and families everywhere in the world.

As we reflect on the past 75 years and look to the future, in a world where so many millions of children and young people are in need of protection, we must all continue to learn from our past and improve in providing safe and nurturing environments. In this way, we can empower families and communities to contribute to societal well-being and economic development.

We must also continue to persevere and expand our movement so that families at risk of breaking down are given the support they need to stay together, suitable and quality alternative care is available when necessary and in the best interest of the child, and young people are supported as they transition into independent life. We commit to working with communities, governments, partners, international governmental and non-governmental agencies, and peers in our sector to scale up investments in family strengthening and social protection so that no child is unnecessarily separated from their family, and to ensure that every child receives quality care to thrive.

Together, let us reaffirm our commitment to building a world where every child and young person is given the opportunity to live a life of dignity.

Together, we can continue to build on this global movement, which remains a beacon of hope for those who have no one – so that no child grows up alone.

Dereje Wordofa
President
SOS Children's Villages International

Angela Maria Rosales R.
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Chief Programme Officer
SOS Children's Villages International

Introduction

Science confirms that children need nurturing relationships to grow and develop, and to build resilience against adversity. It is well established that the lack of positive interactions in early childhood can harm brain development and that child neglect and abuse and family separation can have long-term consequences for physical and emotional well-being in adulthood.[1]

Preventing this harm requires a multifaceted approach: one that ensures children can rely on an adult in their life for support and encouragement; families are equipped with strategies to deal with stress and that promote overall well-being and healing from trauma when relevant; communities are able to provide individuals and families with a reliable social support net; and policy frameworks leave no person or group behind.

Preventing harm in children and adolescents and ensuring nurturing relationships reaps benefits not only for the individual and family, but also for the communities and countries they live in.[2]

And yet, while the evidence for the importance of providing supportive environments to children grows, the ability to deliver on this for many of the world's children is under threat. For example:

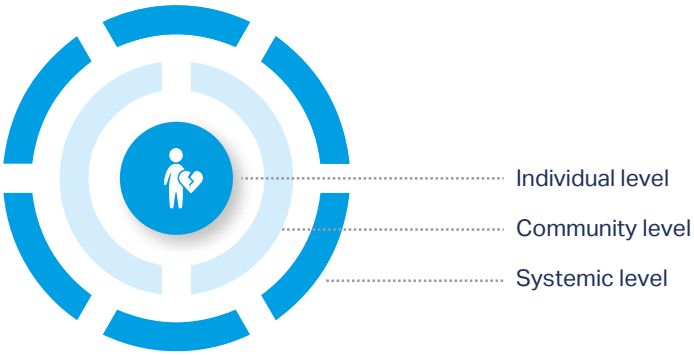
- on the African continent alone, a recent study estimates that 35 million children have lost parental care;
- globally, more than 10 million children lost a parent or caregiver due to COVID-19;
- more than 43 million children have been forcibly displaced from their homes, many of them separated from their families;
- and rising inflation and poverty levels are increasing the pressures on families around the world, threatening their ability to care for their children.[3]

Since our founding in 1949, SOS Children's Villages has been dedicated to ensuring that no child grows up alone. Over 75 years, as society and our own understanding of child and youth development have evolved, so have our responses to the issues faced by the children we work with. The first three decades of our existence were devoted to directly caring for children and youth who were without parental care. Then in the 1970s we began our prevention work, supporting families to stay together, and in the early 2000s we began coordinated advocacy work at the international level.

Today, we work along three main levels in order to maximize our impact: the lives of individual children and young people (working also with parents and extended family), the support systems of their communities, and the policy frameworks that affect the trajectories of their individual and collective lives.

1 J. P. Shonkoff et al., "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129, no. 1 (2012): e232–e246; K. Hughes et al., "The Effect of Multiple Adverse Experiences on Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Lancet Public Health* 2, no. 8 (August 2017): e356–e366.
2 SOS Children's Villages International, *The Care Effect* (Innsbruck: SOS Children's Villages International, 2023).
3 African Commitee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), *Children without Parental Care in Africa* (November 2023); Imperial College London, COVID-19 Orphanhood Calculator, 31 December 2022; "Refugee Data Finder", UNHCR, updated 24 October 2023.

This approach can be conceptualized as an application of the ecological systems theory, which views child development as being influenced by multiple layers of the surrounding environment.[4]



As we work alongside partners to ensure that all children and youth have the safe and supportive relationships they need to thrive, it is crucial that we measure the long-term impact of our work – in terms of the change we seek. On the 75th anniversary of the start of a movement for children without parental care or at risk of losing it, this publication brings together our learnings so far in order to:

- help us improve the quality of our services
- inform strategic decision-making, including our research and advocacy priorities
- report back transparently towards our programme participants, partners and donors
- contribute to the broader discussion of ending unnecessary child-family separation and upholding the rights of children without parental care or at risk of losing it

This publication represents an update of the social impact assessment data presented in our earlier report, *70 Years of Impact*, but also expands the discussion to include results from our advocacy efforts in the last two decades. A series of interviews help to illustrate impact. These include the perspectives of former programme participants, a professional caregiver, a community leader and two policymakers.

In 2015, recognizing a dearth of evaluation methodologies that could be applied to our context, we developed a social impact assessment methodology to measure the impact of our core services, family-like care and family strengthening.[5] Based on interviews with community stakeholders and with former programme participants, the methodology measures the long-term impact of these services on the following levels:

- impact in the lives of individuals
- impact in communities
- social return on investment, which expresses the social impact of our work in financial terms
- our contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals

Our *70 Years of Impact* report, published in 2019, consolidated the findings of social impact assessments carried out between 2015 and 2019 and comparable data from the 2002–2008 Tracking Footprints project. Both social impact assessments and Tracking Footprint studies were carried out by independent researchers.

4 For more on the ecological systems theory, see, for example, O. Guy-Evans, "Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory," Simply Psychology, updated 17 January 2024.

5 For more information, see R. Willi et al., *Social Impact Assessment in SOS Children's Villages: Approach and Methodology* (Vienna: SOS Children's Villages International); R. Willi, D. Reed, and G. Houedenou, "An Evaluation Methodology for Measuring the Long-Term Impact of Family Strengthening and Alternative Child Care Services: The Case of SOS Children's Villages," *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 11, no. 4.1 (2020): 7–28; and A. Baic et al., "Gauging Long-Term Impact in the Social Sector: A Cutting-Edge Approach," BCG, 17 February 2016.

This publication updates the data presented five years ago with the findings of impact assessments completed since then, in France, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua and the Philippines.[6] It represents the findings of assessments conducted over the past two decades across 40 countries with the participation of approximately 4,500 children, young people, and their parent/caregivers, in addition to representatives of government, partner organizations, and SOS Children's Villages staff. Qualitative findings from the assessments are also presented in the relevant chapters and expanded on in the final chapter.

Discussion of our advocacy efforts to improve policy and practice at international, regional and national level follows a narrative approach rather than a formal assessment methodology. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate our work alongside partners to address specific gaps in national laws and international frameworks and explores how our experience as a practitioner organization informs our advocacy.

The final chapter, Looking Ahead, outlines how the findings and observations presented in this publication will inform our future work.

While outside the scope of this publication, in recent years, strengthening our child and youth safeguarding has been a key focus area for our organization, as reflected in our strategic goal added in 2021: we ensure and live safeguarding in our daily actions. We have been focused on supporting individuals we were not able to keep safe in the past, and we initiated reviews in order to address past failures and improve our safeguarding. More information, including our yearly reports against our Safeguarding Action Plan (2021-2024) can be found on our website.

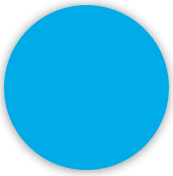
Additionally, the impact assessment data discussed in this publication does not cover all areas of our work. Our humanitarian action work continues to expand, for example reaching around 378,000 people during two years of war in Ukraine and over 7,000 people since the beginning of the war in Gaza. We remain focussed on our core pillars – preventing family separation and protecting children – but in an emergency context. In 2023, these efforts reached nearly 1.4 million people in 38 countries. Our Humanitarian Mandate, approved 2023, will guide further activities.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the definition of "impact" or "change in situation." While SOS Children's Villages contributes to positive change, our ultimate aim is we are no longer needed. We work directly with individuals so that they have the support they need to become self-reliant, we work with communities so that can take on the role of supporting children and families to stay together, and we work with governments and partners so that duty bearers take responsibility for upholding the rights of children without parental care or at risk of losing it.

In closing, we thank our partners, staff members, supporters, and the children, young people and families we work with and for. A special thank you goes out to the individuals who share their stories in this publication. Together we will continue the work to ensure that no child grows up alone.

6 For a list of available snapshot country reports, see annex 3.

Impact at the individual level



Since our founding 75 years ago, we have been providing services to individuals. Our work centres around ensuring that children grow up in a nurturing environment with strong and trusting relationships – whether in their families of origin or in alternative care. With this as our aim, we work directly with children, young people and families, providing holistic support. We measure the impact of our services in the lives of individuals who participated in our programmes along four main themes covering eight dimensions of well-being.[7] This chapter provides overall results and explores each theme in detail.

The four main themes addressed by our social impact assessments:

A **Breaking the cycle of separation and abandonment through care:**
To what extent can former participants rely on family, friends and neighbours for support? If still children, do they receive quality care, and if parents, do they meet their parental obligations?

B **Enabling self-reliance through education and employment:**
Do former participants have adequate education and skills? Do they have a job and are they able to earn a decent living?

C **Securing basic needs:**
Do former participants have adequate accommodation, food security and health?

D **A foundation for a happy life:**
To what extent do former participants experience social and emotional well-being, and are they safe from discrimination and harm?

As part of the assessments, external researchers conduct interviews and focus group discussions with former participants of our family-like care and family strengthening services. Information on their situation before they entered the programme and benchmarking against indicators is applied. The methodology is novel for our sector since we try to locate former participants one-six years after the services have ended to see how they are doing and whether the services have had a sustainable positive impact in their lives.

For each well-being dimension, a score between 1 and 4 is given, with 1 representing highly satisfactory, 2 fairly satisfactory, 3 fairly unsatisfactory and 4 highly unsatisfactory. "Doing well" is assigned to those interviews where assessment of 1 or 2 was given.

7 The eight well-being dimensions: care, education and skills, livelihood, accommodation, food security, health, social inclusion, social and emotional well-being.

The findings below represent consolidated data from interviews with former programme participants from 40 countries. (For more detail on methodology, countries covered and links to country snapshot reports, see annex 1, 2 and 3.)

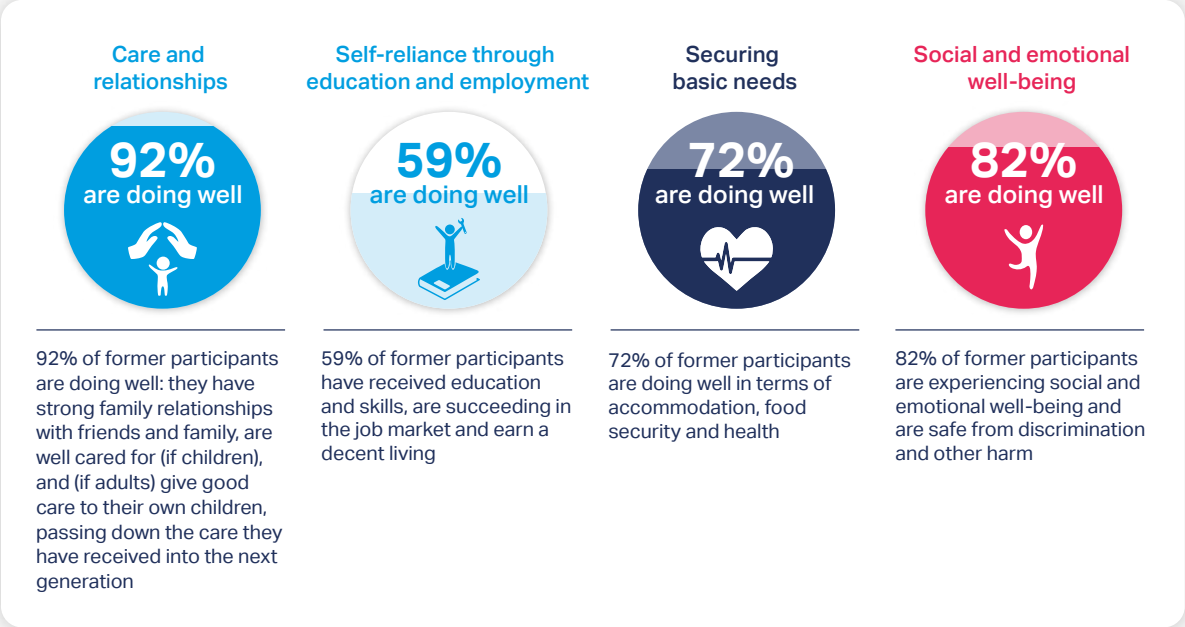


Figure 1: Share of former participants doing well across the four themes

The age of former family-like care participants is generally 18 to 30, and the questions centre on how the individual is faring at the time of the assessment. For family strengthening, both children and parents/caregivers are interviewed. The focus is on how the children are faring at the time of the assessment.[8]

The results show that most of these children and young people have significantly improved their well-being and are able to contribute positively to their communities.[9] These findings are largely consistent with the data presented in our *70 Years of Impact* report, with some slight variations, which are covered in the sub-chapters below.

Key facts on former participants who participated in the assessments

- 4,488 children, young people and caregiver/parents interviewed (3,654 children and young people; 834 parents/caregivers)
- 2,820 from family-like care
- 1,668 from family strengthening
- Interviewees received services between 1986 and 2019

8 For more information, see SOS Children's Villages International, *Assessing Social Impact in the SOS Children's Village Programme: 'How to' Research Guide* (July 2019).

9 Figures rounded to the nearest whole number. This differs from 2019 report, which rounded figures to the nearest 5 number.

Care and relationships

Nurturing relationships are the foundation for a child's development and well-being.[10] Our alternative care and family strengthening services are designed to provide or support the nurturing environments that children and young people need to grow and develop. In family-like care, we work to provide consistent quality care to children and to build strong relationships with their families of origin so that they can return to their families whenever possible. In family strengthening, we support families at risk of breaking down so that children grow up in a safe and nurturing environment.

The extent to which we have achieved providing a foundation of care can help us to understand whether we managed to break the cycle of separation and abandonment. This theme measures how former participants are doing along the well-being dimension of care.

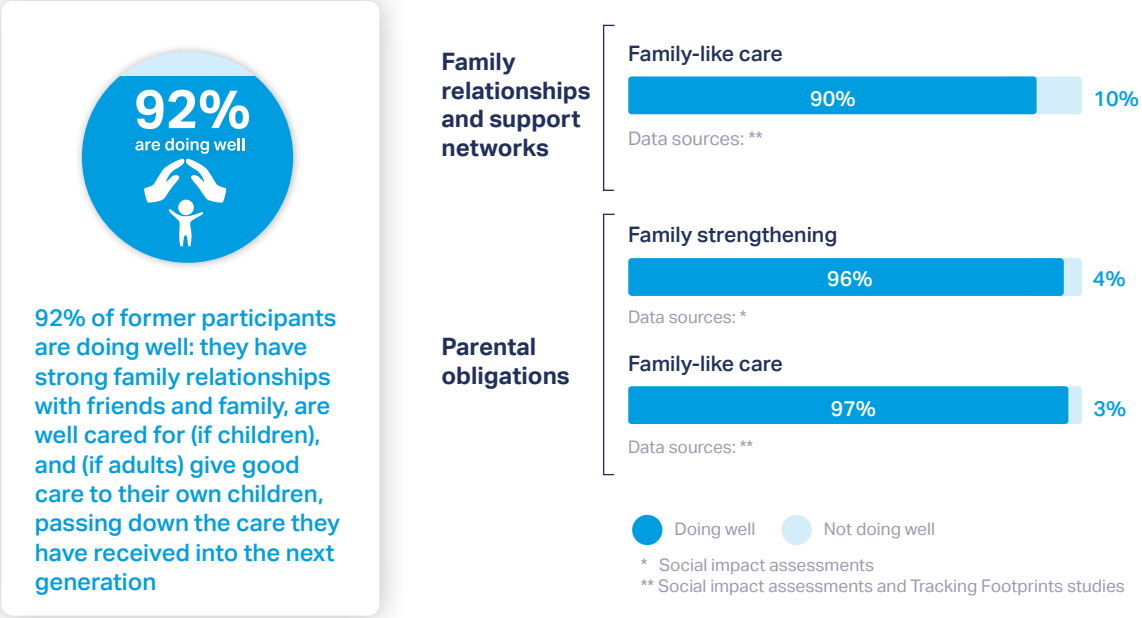


Figure 2: Share of participants doing well in terms of care and relationships

Our impact assessments show that the care that former participants have received carries into the next generation: 92% of those surveyed had supportive networks and were fulfilling their parental obligations (if they were adults) or had a caregiver who is there for them (if they were still children).

"Now that I am already a mother, the care I experienced is also the same care that I give my child."

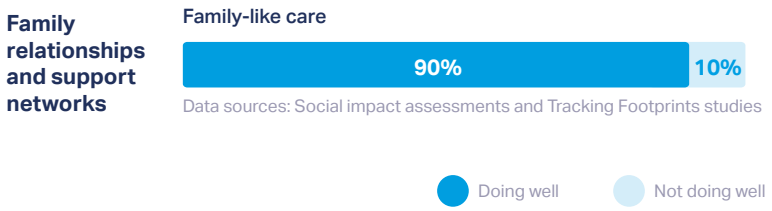
Interviewee from the Philippines

10 T. Granberger and M. Brezovich, *A Child's Road to Resilience: The Science behind the Importance of Nurturing Relationships in Child and Youth Development* (Vienna: SOS Children's Villages International, December 2023).

Family relationships and support networks

Positive relationships with family while in care provide the groundwork for potential reunification and are a key factor supporting long-term well-being.[11]

Among interviewees who grew up in our **family-like care**, 90% had positive relationships with family members, friends or neighbours and could rely on their support. Across countries, interviewees with experiences of care said their most important social relationships were their spouse and children, people they grew up with while in care, caregivers, biological family and friends. Most former participants were receiving moral, emotional and in rarer cases financial support from their alternative care or biological families.



In the majority of countries included in our research, current ties with siblings were reported to be especially strong, in part because the interviewees were placed in care together with their siblings. Sibling relationships are known to have a lasting impact on the lives of people who leave care.[12]

As mentioned in our last report, across 10 countries in Latin America for example, 76% of former participants lived with their biological siblings.

In some cases, siblings were the only family that former participants are in contact with:

"I don't have any contact with my aunts, uncles or parents. If you consider them parents... I only see my brothers and sisters."

Former participant, France

In fact, in France, where SOS Children's Villages specializes in providing care exclusively for sibling groups, 62% of the young people interviewed said they were maintaining family relationships mainly with their siblings.

Seven social impact assessments and multiple Tracking Footprints studies indicated a need for more support for children in care to maintain a relationship with their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles or other family members. This finding is also supported by recent consultations with children living in SOS Children's Villages care.[13]

11 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, *Interventions to Support Positive Relationships for Looked-After Children, Young People and Care Leavers: Looked-After Children and Young People: Evidence Review C* (London: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence [NICE], 2021).
12 See, for example, A. Bocioaga, *Sibling Relationships in Care* (Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services [IRISS], 2023); S. Meakings, J. C. Sebba, and N. Luke, *What Is Known about the Placement and Outcomes of Siblings in Foster Care? An International Literature Review* (REES Centre, 2017). See art. 17 of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.
13 SOS Children's Villages International, *Consultation Conducted with Children Receiving Family Strengthening Services and in Residential Care: A Summary of Findings* (November 2020).

Past failures to provide children with opportunities to keep in touch with their biological family were noted in Nicaragua:

"In the past, few relatives visited the children because there was a closed-minded position."

Staff member, Nicaragua

As noted in research, the existence of positive relationships with families of origin is key to ensuring positive outcomes across a wide array of well-being domains, including educational, relational, and physical, mental, and emotional health.[14] Moreover, this is a key factor for the reintegration of children in their families of origin, enabling them to return to their families at the earliest possibility.[15]

In response, in recent years, SOS Children's Villages has put more emphasis on promoting positive practices in this regard, to strengthen relationships and the sense of identity of children, with a view of supporting reintegration. This is reflected in the guiding policy for programmes, the SOS Care Promise, and the related Programme Services Regulation, approved in 2023.

Other areas for improvement came through in the assessments. The qualitative findings show that programme participants were often sheltered from the harsher realities of life, making it harder for them to transition and adapt to independence. Former participants stated that social and physical integration should be improved, which will help in building stronger community-based ties and relationships.

Moreover, institutional features, such as signs and logos, should be eliminated to make the care as family-like as possible and to reduce stigma towards children in alternative care.

Efforts are ongoing to shift towards small-scale living arrangements seamlessly integrated into the surrounding neighbourhood rather than clustered in a separate compound, and to eliminate institutional features. Evidence from evaluations indicates that community-integrated living arrangements improve children's outcomes in terms of life skills.

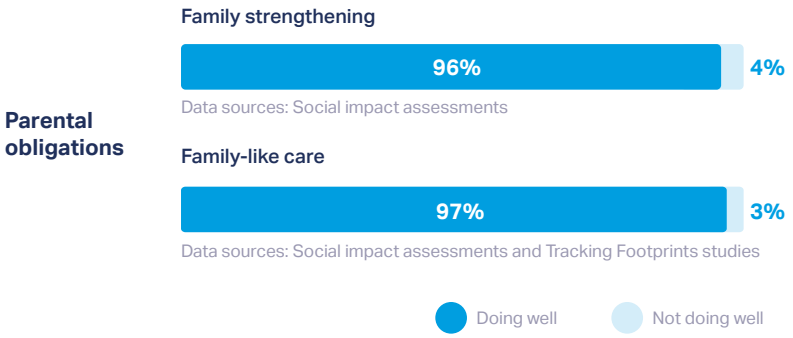
Parental obligations

The presence of a supportive caregiver is a major protective factor against the effects of childhood adversity. Moreover, parenting patterns can be passed down through generations, which means impact in this area extends beyond individual well-being.[16]

Among the children and young people surveyed who had received our **family strengthening** services, 96% had a primary caregiver who was actively involved in their life and nurtured them. This means that for these children and young people, the primary goal of preventing family separation was achieved at the time of the assessment.

14 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, *Interventions to Support Positive Relationships*.
15 See also art. 51 of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.
16 J. Belsky, R. Conger, and D. M. Capaldi, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Parenting: Introduction to the Special Section," *Developmental Psychology* 45, no. 5: 1201–1204.

While these are positive results, it is important to note that 4% of children did not always have a consistent caregiver due to their parents' employment situation or were reported to be without the care of their parents.



In some locations impact assessments suggest there is a need for more services to support parenting skills, tailored to specific groups such as single parents or fathers. The assessment in Nicaragua highlighted the country's active fatherhood programme as a good practice.

"Before I joined the programme, I had many doubts about fatherhood; I did things that were not correct… We have observed many changes in the group. We also learned to better express ourselves, to show our weaknesses and doubts and to help each other."

Former family strengthening participant, Nicaragua

For **family-like care**, this dimension of assessment focuses on the way people who have left our care parent their own children.

About 47% of those interviewed had their own children at the time of their interview. Of those, 97% reported fulfilling their parental obligations, be it directly in their own household or in their partner's household in the case of divorce or separation.

Overall, these results are promising, especially considering the fact that most former participants had experienced difficulties during childhood, such as family breakdown. This data indicates that there is a likely positive impact on the next generation of children, breaking intergenerational patterns of family breakdown.[17]

"I can protect and take care of my children with a good attitude. It means a lot to me as a mother."

Former family-like participant, Indonesia

17 Belsky, Conger, and Capaldi, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Parenting."

© Photo from the interviewee

Alain, Belgium

Interview

Alain grew up together with his sister in an SOS Children's Village in Belgium. For almost 16 years they were cared for by Anne-Marie, whom he and the other children called "Mamy." Today, Alain lives in a town near Brussels together with his wife Véronica and his son Alejandro. He works as an IT Application Manager at a Public Social Service Center and together with Véronica, he shares a passion for art.

"My biological father and mother were not able to take care of me and my sister. When I arrived in the village at 1.5 years old, I did not speak one word till the age of 3. The early years in my childhood for sure had an impact on me. But the stability of having Mamy around us helped me to grow as a person. It was really a mother-child relationship. When growing up, she gave us the freedom to explore. I loved to go into nature to reflect and think. But I also hitchhiked thousands of kilometres to discover the surroundings. I knew what I could do and what I couldn't as Mamy had clear rules and values. Respect was one of them. Respect for others, for yourself and for materials.

This value I also embrace in the raising of our son Alejandro. Another value Mamy taught us was open communication. If you have something to say, say it. Always with respect.

I have a good relationship with my son, built on trust. I'm 51 years old now but we still play video games together and we share the same passion: martial arts. In 2 years he will turn 18 years old. For me, that was a challenging period as I had to leave the village. But I stayed positive and optimistic

"It's like an acrobat having a net below him to catch him when something goes wrong in the jump."

knowing I had a fallback with all the people working in the village and with whom I had built up a relationship. It's like an acrobat having a net below him to catch him when something goes wrong in the jump. I will encourage Alejandro to explore, to take on projects and discover what life has to offer. And Véronica and I will be there to support him, and be the net when necessary."

Enabling self-reliance through education and employment

Our services aim to support children to attain relevant education and skills, according to their interests and potential, so that they are able to secure a suitable job which provides for a decent living. This is a pre-requisite for an independent and self-determined life as an adult. This theme measures the education and skills and the livelihood situation of former participants from family strengthening and family-like care.

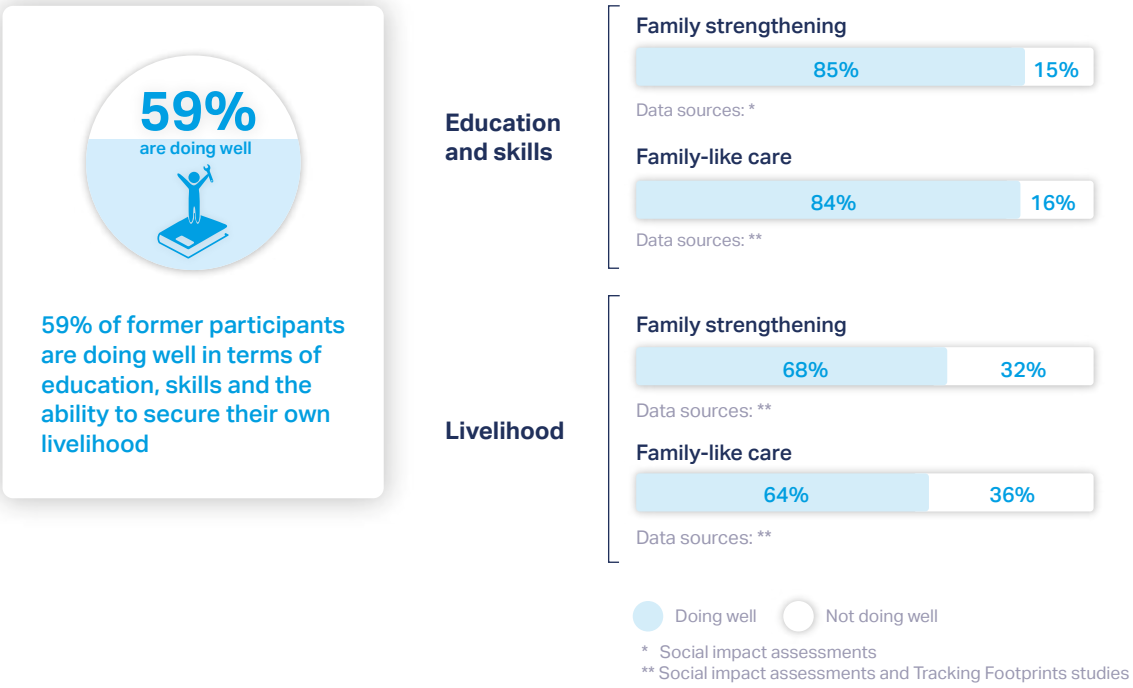


Figure 3: Share of former participants doing well in terms of self-reliance

Results show that on average 59% of former participants are doing well in terms of their education, skills and the ability to secure their own livelihood.[18] Only individuals with positive scores across both dimensions (education and skills; livelihood) are counted as "doing well," which explains why the overall figure is lower than the dimensions. This also indicates that on average, 41% are not doing well in one or both of the mentioned dimensions, which requires further attention from a programmatic perspective.

Education and skills

Of those surveyed, 84% of former participants from family-like care and 85% of former participants from family strengthening (a slight increase from 82% as presented in 2019 report) had completed secondary or vocational training and either had the skills to secure a decent job or were studying towards relevant qualifications. In fact, across ten countries, former participants achieved equal or higher educational levels than the national average.

18 In education and skills, children from family strengthening are assessed, but not parents/caregivers. In livelihood, parent/caregivers are assessed in terms of having funds to cover children's survival and developmental needs.

Livelihood

However, only 64–68% were earning a decent living (64% from family-like care and 68% from family strengthening). Those who were not earning enough lacked professional networks, work experience or in-demand qualifications. That being said, this figure shows a slight increase from the 2019 report for family strengthening participants, from 64% doing well in this area to 68%.

The rates of employment among young people who grew up in SOS Children's Villages care compared to the general population of young people considerably varied by country. In most countries, those surveyed were doing at least as well as the national average. It is important to note that the livelihood dimension measures the ability to earn a decent living, rather than simply being employed.

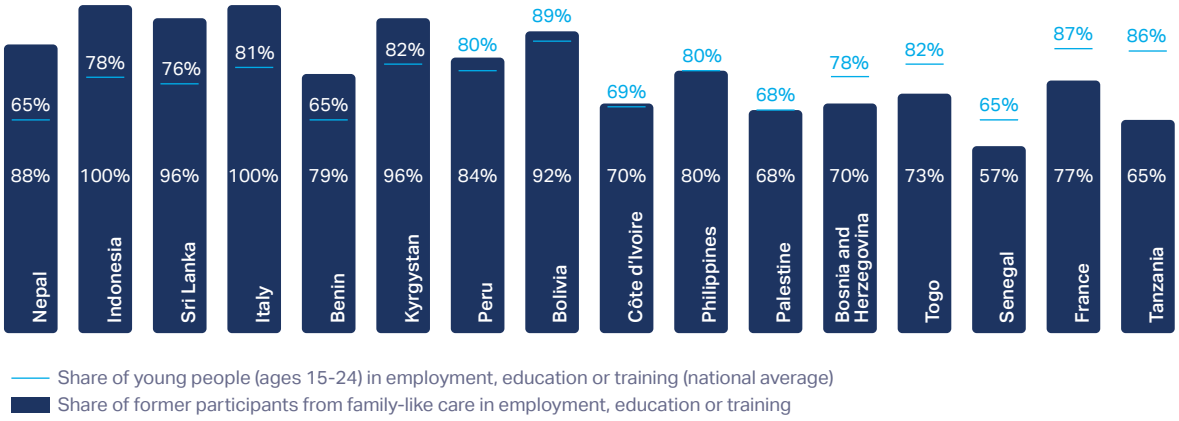


Figure 4: National youth employment rate (inverse of NEET indicator) (%) vs. employment of former participants from family-like care

The problems that young people face in finding decent employment across a number of countries also reflect global youth employment trends, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, one in five young people in the general population are not in employment, education or training (NEET), and this rate further rose in 2020.[19]

Especially young people leaving care are affected by these trends. Due to a lack of legislative and practical support provided to young people leaving care, they are often required to become fully independent and self-reliant at a relatively early age compared to their peers. This pushes many into informal and low-paid employment, which can result in exploitation.[20]

19 International Labour Organization (ILO), *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in Transforming Futures for Young People* (Geneva: ILO, 2022).
20 C. Cameron, H. Hauari, and C. Arisi, *Decent Work and Social Protection for Young People Leaving Care: Gaps and Responses in 12 Countries Worldwide* (Vienna: SOS Children's Villages International, 2018).

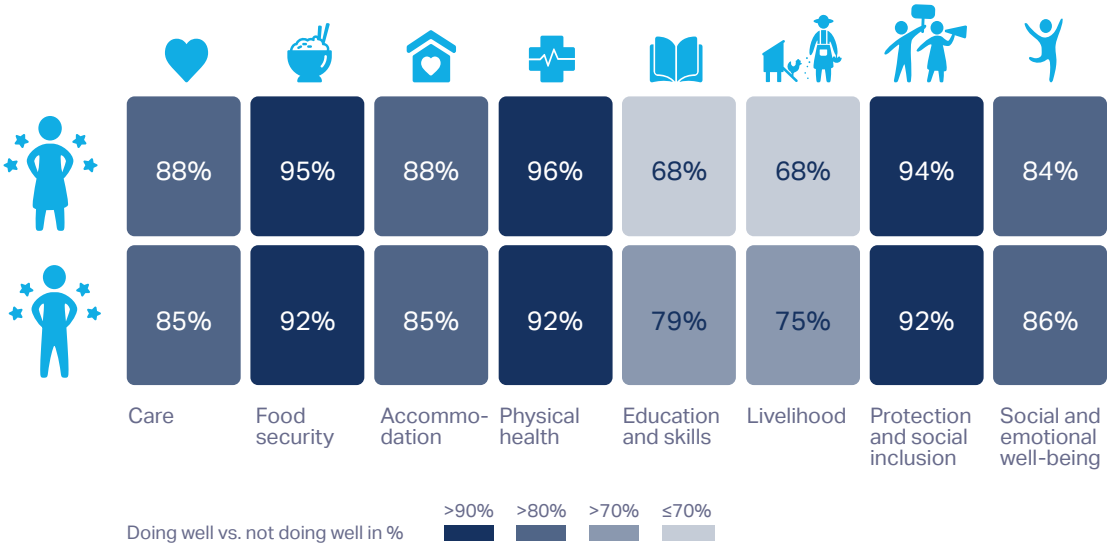


Figure 5: Share of former family-like care participants doing well in respective dimensions, by gender

This is especially the case for female care leavers, who are significantly less frequently employed than their male peers, as shown in the "livelihood" and "education and skills" scores (see figure 5).

On average, young women fared worse than young men in terms of both education and employment, even though in all other dimensions female interviewees were doing either slightly better or marginally worse than male. In almost all countries, women were either equally or less frequently employed than men. Only in France, Italy, Kyrgyzstan and Zanzibar were slightly more women than men employed or in education or training at the time of the survey. During the assessments, one of the reasons mentioned for lower education and employment levels was that young women often had to stay at home due to household duties or child care. As one former participant highlighted:

"I don't have time to play. Almost all household duties are on my shoulders."

15-year-old female former family strengthening participant, Kyrgzystan

These trends are also reported globally; young women on average are less likely to be in education, employment, or training than young men and are more likely to contribute informally to the care economy.[21]

That being said, the gap has slightly closed since our 2019 report, when women were at 65% in terms of livelihood, as opposed to 68%.

We have put special measures in place in recent years to boost the employability of young people in our programmes and support them in the labour market. Our strategy towards 2030 puts a special emphasis on this. In addition, a global project called YouthCan! aims to boost the employability of young people. During 2023, the project reached 17,800 young people in 49 countries through training, job exposure or mentoring.

21 ILO, *Global Employment Trends*.

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Sireen, Jordan

Interview

Sireen and her siblings grew up in SOS Children's Villages family-like care in Amman, Jordan. Now a college graduate and mother to a young girl, Sireen has faced many challenges in finding stable employment. In 2022, she joined the Care Leavers Coalition project, through which she has received financial support, skills-building and training opportunities.

"Before I joined this programme, I had lost hope in people due to encountering numerous opportunities with false promises. I didn't expect to derive real benefits from the programme. But to my surprise it has helped me regain confidence and hope. It served as a reminder of my capabilities and reignited my determination, giving me the encouragement I needed. The most rewarding aspect has been the positive atmosphere and sense of community. The support we received from the other people involved – particularly the staff – assured all participants that they were not alone. This made me feel safer and more supported."

The Care Leavers Coalition is a partnership between SOS Children's Villages Jordan and Futuremakers by Standard Chartered. As a participant, Sireen has gained access to a global initiative providing young people aged 18-35 with the skills and knowledge they need to enter the labour market.

"I've learned so much. I love marketing and hope for a full-time job here after my internship. It has refreshed my mind and memory. I practice English daily with language apps and podcasts, because it's an essential language for excelling in my career. This is the only chance that has truly made a difference in my life, the only one that has genuinely prepared me for the future. I have discovered a leader within myself, someone who is capable of making decisions and achieving success. I believe in my ability to manage processes and work hard. I hope to use these qualities to run my own business one day."

"I have discovered a leader within myself, someone who is capable of making decisions and achieving success. "

"Here's a piece of advice for everyone out there. Say no to despair. Life is a series of challenges that you can overcome. Create boundaries, distance yourself from negative influences, and focus on your personal growth. Never underestimate yourself."

Securing basic needs

This theme explores the extent to which former participants are doing well in terms of their basic needs, which includes their living conditions and stability of their accommodation, health status, and food security. In family-like care, children are empowered to learn how to take care of themselves when grown-up, for example through the development of day-to-day life skills and age-appropriate household responsibilities. In some programmes, young people leaving care are provided housing support that gives them access to affordable housing or loans. And in family strengthening, we work together with partners to support caregivers to access essential services, such as social protection and health care, for themselves and their children.

Across family strengthening and family-like care, 72%[22] of former participants surveyed were doing well in terms of accommodation, food security and health.

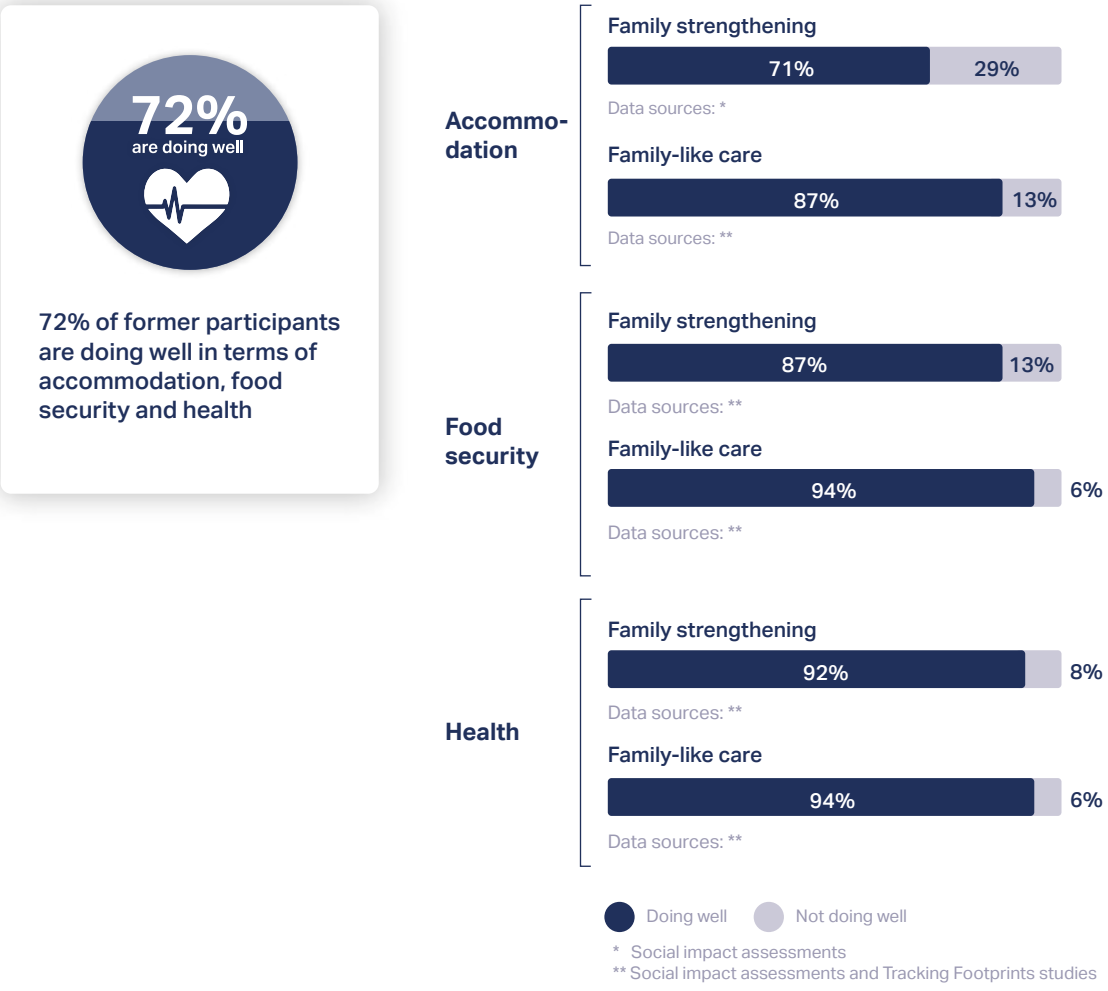

Figure 6: Share of former participants doing well in securing basic needs

22 Only individuals with positive scores across all three dimensions are counted as "doing well," which explains why the overall figure is lower than the scores of the individual dimensions.

Former participants from family-like care generally fared better than those from family strengthening.

"We cannot afford sufficient health care for my daughter. When I went to the clinic, doctors told me that they cannot help us until we get an official registration. So, for now, some friends of mine helped me find other available doctors."

Former family strengthening participant, Kyrgyzstan

In terms of accommodation, in family strengthening while 71% of former participants reported doing well, 29% had unsatisfactory living conditions. This includes not being able to afford paying for repairs, not having basic amenities, or living in underprivileged neighbourhoods and overcrowded situations with many extended family members.

"Life is difficult for us, because we are poor, and we can only afford to rent here in the squatters' area."

Former family strengthening participant, Philippines

This indicates our programming needs to incorporate more work to develop local partnerships to support families in improving their living conditions. At the same time, child-sensitive social protection is required to ensure that vulnerable families have access to essential services in their communities.[23]

It is encouraging that since our 2019 report, the percentage of former participants doing well in terms of food security increased – for family strengthening from 84% to 87% and for family-like care from 87% to 94%.

23 Global Coalition to End Child Poverty, *Child-Sensitive Social Protection: Briefing Paper* (Global Coalition to End Child Poverty, 2017).

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Lindiwe, South Africa

Interview

Lindiwe and her family joined a family strengthening programme (FSP) in South Africa in 2008, after meeting with a community social worker. At the time, the family was grappling with severe poverty, with no income or access to social services. She describes how the support she received helped the family to turn things around.

"The situation was very difficult. We lived in a two-roomed house with six children, and there were many of us. I lived with my children and my sister's children, whose parents had passed away. My sister's children had no birth certificates, because their mother had had no identity document. It was very bad. We were always hungry.

Joining the family strengthening programme made a huge difference in our lives. Through the FSP team's work with the South African Social Services Agency, we were able to access government social grants for each of the children. We received food parcels, clothes, transport money for school and extra support to help them learn better. All six children are now documented.

As a mother, the programme taught me how to make means and provide for my children. I was part of a self-help group where I learned how to start saving and could also borrow money. I started a small business at home, selling sweets, chips, ice lollies and other such items. This provides us with a small income. Parental lessons helped me with how to relate to my children and care for them in a loving way. I was taught that I need to have conversations with my children, to talk to my children often and consistently, and that I need to express to my children that I love them. These are things I never used to do before. We are now more open and communicate in a manner that satisfies all of us. This is what I learned, that it's not just about basic needs like food and clothes, but children need to be shown love. I now sleep peacefully. Life is smooth now knowing that my family is provided for. Yes life is not perfect, but we are in a much better situation. The learnings we got from the programme are passed on from us to our children, our children pass them down and this makes a generational change that makes sure we are permanently pulled out of poverty."

"Life is smooth now knowing that my family is provided for. "

Social and emotional well-being

This theme assesses the extent to which former participants are doing well in terms of social inclusion, protection and general well-being. In the case of independent adults, we measure this through their perceived level of self-esteem, happiness, and whether they report experiencing discrimination. For former participants who are still children, we assess whether they are protected from abuse and exploitation, have all legally required identity documents, and experience any discrimination, as well as their happiness levels and social behaviour.

Through our services, we support children and families through life skills training, social and emotional support as part of day-to-day interactions, support groups, counselling, trauma therapy, psychotherapy, child rights trainings, and other psychosocial support services whenever required.

Overall, 82%[24] of former participants reported to be doing well in terms of their perceived social inclusion, protection, happiness, and self-esteem (figure 7).

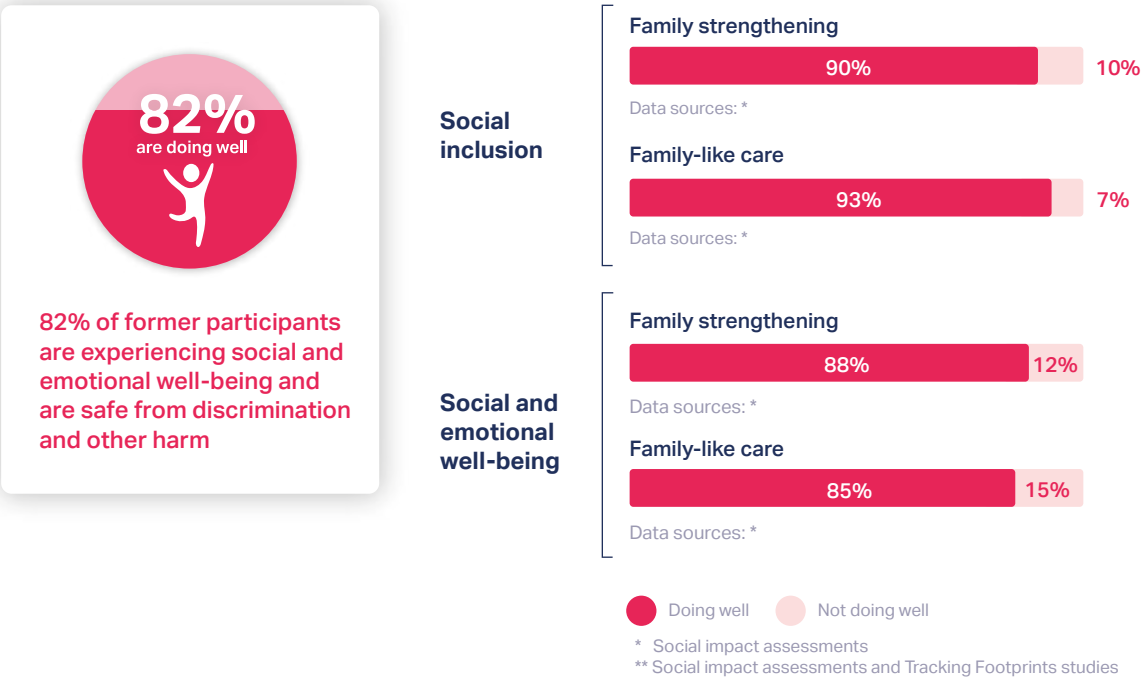

Figure 7: Share of former participants doing well in social and emotional well-being

Social inclusion

In terms of social inclusion, overall, 93% of former participants from family-like care reported experiencing no discrimination that compromises their well-being. From family strengthening, 90% of former participants reported doing well in this regard.

24 Only individuals with positive scores across both dimensions are counted as "doing well," which explains why the overall figure is lower than the scores of the individual dimensions.

Children generally have all legally required documents, do not experience discrimination and are safe from abuse and exploitation, according to their parents. Some families reported that, thanks to the programme, they now felt more included in and accepted by the community, some even engaging in community activities. Others reported that the services had helped them learn how to cope with hardships. Those that did not receive satisfactory scores either did not have an identity card or birth certificate for their children, or experienced discrimination in the neighbourhood or at school.

Some interviewees who have left family-like care recalled past experiences of discrimination or stigmatization due to their alternative care status:

"At school, they called us the 'little SOS monkey' or 'parentless kid.' I learnt to be careful of people; they can turn out wicked. So my social circle is small, but I can count on it."

Former family-like care participant, France

Social and emotional well-being

In terms of their social and emotional well-being, 85% of former participants from family-like care reported being generally satisfied with their lives, having a sense of purpose in life and wanting to achieve personal goals. Those that reported not doing well were unhappy with their employment situation and had not achieved their goals, or were still coming to terms with difficult childhood experiences:

"I need to improve my social and communication skills. Because of the violence I experienced during my childhood, I am a very shy person and I am afraid of people."

Former family-like care participant, Kyrgyzstan

In family strengthening, 88% reported to be doing well, in the sense of the social behaviour of the children and their happiness. Those with unsatisfactory scores mentioned experiences of discrimination, dissatisfaction with living conditions or behavioural problems reported by teachers at school.

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Mama Arista, Indonesia

Interview

Mama Arista has spent nearly three decades as a caregiver at SOS Children's Villages in Jakarta, Indonesia. During that time, she has raised 33 children. Seven of them – all girls – are currently in her care and she maintains a close relationship with most of the others. In this interview, she describes how the children she raised are faring today.

"I've worked with SOS Children's Villages for about 29 years, since August 1st 1995. I still have a really good relationship with most of the children I've cared for. There are only two or three people who I am not in contact with anymore.

We speak by phone, usually on Saturday or Sunday. Bunga frequently calls every week with greetings like 'happy Sunday!' 'happy weekend, mama!' and she takes me on holiday every year on my birthday. She often tells me about her baby, her activities, and her business.

I believe most of the children I cared for are happy and doing well in life. I feel that their tasks, responsibilities, and the work they do bring them joy. I see their children – my grandchildren – growing up and following their own dreams. That makes me feel that their parent's upbringing at SOS Children's Villages was successful. One of my grandchildren even wants to become an engineer. Still, I don't say that the successful children are only those who succeed in school or work. Those who are independent, who truly make the most out of their lives, it's not necessarily their studies or businesses that make them successful. Success for me means those who can complete their tasks well, who fulfill their responsibilities well, who can adapt socially, follow norms, and manage their household well.

I realize that they come here from different backgrounds, not related. They are all truly different, SOS Children's Villages gives me the responsibility to unify them as one family – that's what I do. I want to be open with them and open the hearts of the children to understand that we are all the same here. We may come from sad or difficult backgrounds, but we are all the same. Look at me, if I can love you, you can love each other too."

Our impact at the community level

Beyond the impact our services and projects have in the lives of individuals, we also work at the community level to improve the situation of children without parental care or at risk of losing it. We design our programmes so that support systems for children and their families are strengthened. Our aim is that communities are strong and can serve as a safety net for children who are on their own or families who are at risk of breaking down. Our work supports for example community- and family-based care options, such as kinship care.

Our social impact assessments measure the changes in the situation of communities brought about by the programme.[25]

The following dimensions are assessed:

- **Community awareness:** Are key stakeholders aware of the situation of children and families; do they have a clear idea of how to improve their situation?
- **Civic engagement:** Do individual community members take action for children and families who find themselves in vulnerable situations?
- **Community networks:** Are there formal community networks that take coordinated action to support children and families in vulnerable situations?
- **Child protection mechanisms:** Does the community have mechanisms to respond to child rights violations?
- **Progress towards sustainability:** Could partners participating in programme implementation continue the activities to support children and families in the community if SOS Children's Villages withdrew?
- **Alternative care:** Has the number of children placed in alternative care reduced since the services started?

The results below represent evidence collected (via social impact assessments) from 2015 to 2022 in seventeen countries: Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Nepal, Palestine (in two locations, Bethlehem and Gaza), Peru, Philippines, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Togo. Independent researchers carried out individual interviews and focus group discussions with relevant community stakeholders, including authorities, partners and programme staff. Across all locations, the assessments showed that SOS Children's Villages was working closely with governments, NGOs and community-based organizations to support children and their families.

25 Based on interviews with experts in the community and government and assessed against benchmark data.

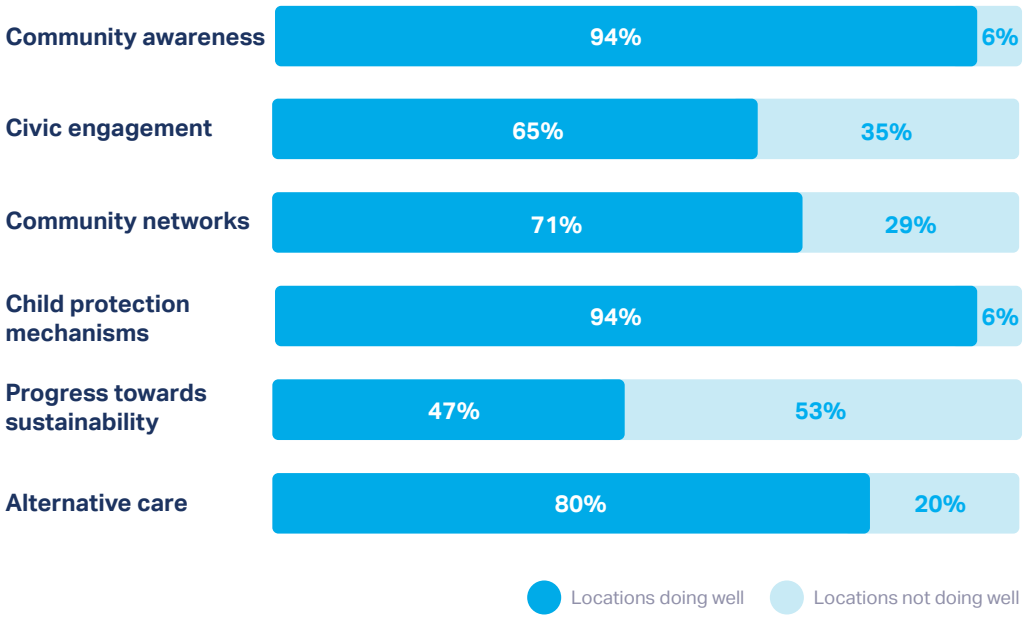

Figure 8: Average community scores across 18 social impact assessment locations

As figure 8 shows, the impact of our work in communities along the six dimensions generally scored positively, but the results also highlighted some areas to further strengthen.

While there is strong **community awareness** of children and families at risk, **civic engagement** to address the situation lags behind, but has improved since our *70 Years of Impact* report in 2019 (from 58% to 65% of locations doing well).

In fact, each dimension showed improvement since our 2019 report except for the community networks dimension which decreased from 83% to 71%. **Community networks** typically include networks of service providers, but can also include alliances for advocacy to address key issues at community level – for example ensuring that relevant policies are actually put into practice on local level. Our work with community networks tends to be stronger where it is possible to work with a community-based approach. The reduction to 71% in this report is likely due to the inclusion of countries where the role of the state is stronger, with less readiness for community-based approaches.

Across almost all locations, SOS Children's Villages was found to have contributed to strengthening local **child protection mechanisms** and procedures. For example, the programme work in Nicaragua contributed to the establishment of community-based child protection groups.

"I became a person who raises awareness about child protection and defends it. For example, when a process is identified, we monitor it until it ends. We promote the engagement of families and replicate the good practices about child protection."

Child Protection Network member, Nicaragua

In terms of **progress towards sustainability**, community-based partners did not always continue supporting children without adequate parental care. This means there is room for improvement in advocating for better government responses and in strengthening community-based initiatives and organizations, local authorities and other community-based partners.

Lack of national and regional data makes it challenging to estimate our impact on decreasing the number of children in **alternative care**. In ten of the eighteen locations surveyed, expert stakeholders suggested the number of children placed in alternative care had stabilized since the family strengthening services had started. At the same time, the need for more non-institutional alternative care options was raised in several countries, including Bolivia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Kzrgzystan, and the Philippines. Large-scale state- and privately-run orphanages are still predominant, rather than small-scale individualized options or family-based care.

In recent years, we have also supported change at the community level by developing trainings that are relevant to the issues facing children without parental care or at risk of losing it. For example, our Applying Safe Behaviours project focusses on preventing and responding to peer violence amongst children in care or from vulnerable family backgrounds. The European Commission-funded project was designed to train and inform children and young people on peer violence and also targeted professionals in the project countries (Belgium, France, Italy, Romania and Spain) who work directly with children, young people, caregivers and families at risk on a daily basis. This includes roles such as field staff supporting disadvantaged families, caregivers, foster parents, teachers, youth workers, day care staff and social workers.

The participation of children and young people was integrated throughout all project activities, which was vital in ensuring their voices shaped the content of all resources that were developed and implemented. Through the development of training and awareness-raising materials in 7 languages, including the e-learning modules for all adults, the intervention lives on and can be used by other communities around the world.

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Souleymane Koliko Barry, Guinea

In-depth interview

The PACOPE partnership between six SOS Children's Villages associations and Luxembourg's Ministry of Foreign Affairs lasted from 2017 to 2021. Its goal was to improve the lives of children and families indirectly, by strengthening their communities. Activities ranged from awareness-raising on child rights to the establishment of village savings and loans associations. In Koulidara, Labé region, Guinea, the Local Children & Families Committee (CLEF) was set up with PACOPE's support. Teacher and CLEF member Souleymane Koliko Barry talks about how the partnership helped to improve the situation for children in his community.

"Our neighbourhood has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, moving from a situation where children were left to fend for themselves to a conscious and committed community. Before the programme, children had no knowledge of their rights and duties. The school enrolment was quite low, and the whole community – estimated at over 6,000 people at the time – only had 3 classrooms. We didn't bother to get birth certificates for our children, we were content to just give the child a name.

There was enough violence, enough neglect, cases of rape were recurrent, cases of abandonment of children too. Members of our community were afraid to denounce cases of violence to avoid any risk of offence to others.

We were used to things, we had our own way of doing things. We weren't used to getting together, let alone consulting each other. So the first challenge we faced was acceptance.

"There was enough violence, enough neglect, cases of rape were recurrent, cases of abandonment of children too. Members of our community were afraid to denounce cases of violence to avoid any risk of offence to others."

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The other problem was referral: when a problem was referred to the authorities, they were rather slow to react.

SOS Children's Villages set us on the right path by teaching us techniques for mobilizing resources and also advocacy: how to react to problems? how to include everyone without neglecting anyone? Thanks to the tools and methods shared with us, we were able to rise to the challenges.

Thanks to the training sessions we attended and the awareness-raising activities, the community understood the benefits of respecting children's rights for their personal development. Raising awareness has enabled us to break down many stereotypes and prejudices. Through educational talks by social group, community dialogue sessions and mass awareness raising (at mosques, baptisms, weddings and funerals, etc.) we have managed to reach almost the entire community.

"Raising awareness has enabled us to break down many stereotypes and prejudices."

We put in place mechanisms to protect people who witnessed and reported abuse, and measures were taken to restore the victims' rights. Because there is now a child protection unit in our neighbourhood, there are rarely any cases of violence. Also, the issuing of birth certificates for children as soon as they are born has become a reality. With all these actions, we were able to gain the trust of the community, which no longer hesitated to denounce bad practices."

Impact at the systemic level

In addition to working directly with individuals and communities, we also engage in advocacy to create systemic change that improves the situation of children and young people without or at risk of losing parental care. These efforts enable us to have impact beyond the people we work with directly. Our 75 years of service provision informs our advocacy, providing us with unique insights into the challenges the people we work for are facing, as well as solutions. This chapter outlines the evolution of our advocacy efforts. It includes achievements reached working together with partners internationally, regionally and nationally, along with two in-depth interviews with policymakers.

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is defined as a coordinated set of actions to influence duty bearers and people with power to make systemic changes for rights holders.

At SOS Children's Villages, we advocate for change – in policy and practice – to improve the situation of children and young people without parental care or at risk of losing it. We advocate for the rights of children and young people who have lost parental care or are at risk of losing it, especially their right to grow up in a supportive family environment. Through partnerships, we raise awareness about the issues they face and work towards influencing positive change. We base our work on evidence, expertise and people's lived experiences. We hold those with the duty to protect, promote and fulfil children and young people's rights accountable.

The issues we address include:

- increasing support for families to prevent avoidable child-family separation
- strengthening child protection systems
- improving the quality and range of alternative care services
- facilitating child and youth participation, and
- increasing support for young people who are preparing for independence.

Advocacy is a long-term process. For systemic policy change, it comprises setting objectives to achieve one or more goals of developing, passing, domesticating, financing or implementing a policy. It can take years to build momentum for a policy change, and many more to see policy implementation through. With each goal, our long-term desire remains the same: to break the cycle of child neglect, abuse and abandonment.

International advocacy achievements

While SOS Children's Villages associations have been running national advocacy campaigns since the organization's early years, larger-scale international advocacy efforts started in 2003, after a dedicated advocacy initiative was incorporated in the organization's five-year strategy.

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children
Engagement in developing the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children was our first major international advocacy effort, giving rise to valuable partnerships with like-minded organizations.

The guidelines were inspired by the Day of General Discussion on children without parental care, held at the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2005. SOS Children's Villages was involved from the very beginning, contributing to the draft and facilitating child participation in its development. Between 2006 and 2009, SOS Children's Villages and the International Social Service co-led a working group that advocated for the guidelines with the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly. The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children were welcomed by the UN General Assembly with resolution A/RES/64/142 in 2009. The document provides authoritative guidance to state parties on implementing the Convention for the Rights of the Child for children without, or at risk of losing, parental care.

In the years following the resolution, SOS Children's Villages continued to work with partners to raise awareness of the guidelines and to support and monitor implementation. For example, we contributed to the development of the following tools and resources:

- the implementation handbook *Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, published by CELCIS in 2012
- the Tracking Progress Initiative (2017), which is a tool to assess implementation of the guidelines at the national level and inform advocacy for effective change
- two Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), *Caring for Vulnerable Children* (2015) and *Caring for Children Moving Alone: Protecting Unaccompanied and Separated Children* (2016), which have reached over 130,000 learners, and
- the report *Towards the Right Care for Children* (2017) and the child-friendly publication *You Have the Right to Care and Protection* (2019), released jointly with the European Commission.

In 2021, we commissioned a global child and youth survey for the Day of General Discussion 2021 on Children's Rights and Alternative Care, the outcomes of which are presented in the report *Make Our Voices Count* (2021).

Our advocacy to promote implementation of the guidelines in national policies has been successful around the world – for example, in Colombia, where the guidelines have been incorporated into technical guidance on alternative care, and in Benin, where the Ministry of Social Affairs has established standards for alternative care organizations. Also in countries such as Kenya and Nigeria, the guidelines have been implemented based on the local context.

The I Matter and Care for Me! campaigns

The 2009–2013 campaign I Matter was among the first large-scale advocacy campaigns by SOS Children's Villages. Focused on the challenges faced by young people leaving care, the multi-country campaign contributed to tangible policy change: for example, in Albania research conducted by young people eventually led to changes in national law that raised the age of leaving care from 15 to 18 and provided for aftercare services. The 2012–2014 Care for Me! campaign focused on children's right to high-quality care. In Lithuania, SOS Children's Villages and the University of Vytautas Magnus demonstrated that children living in Lithuanian institutions and children facing severe adversity did not have the same rights and opportunities as other children. This prompted the government to adopt a national strategy and plan for deinstitutionalization.

The 2019 UN General Assembly resolution on the rights of the child

Recognizing the importance of international policies and political commitment to guarantee that the rights and specific needs of children without parental care are met, in 2018 SOS Children's Villages worked with UN member states and agencies as well as civil society partners and young people to introduce a General Assembly resolution on the rights of the child – the first ever to focus on the rights of children without parental care.

The resolution (A/74/133), formally adopted by consensus in December 2019, re-emphasized the need for government investment into services to support families and prevent unnecessary child-family separation and to ensure the best interest of the child is upheld when addressing the loss of parental care. This includes training for authorities who work with children, improving data collection to inform policies and programming, and recognizing the need for a range of care options so that children can be provided with individualized care.

The 2019 date was chosen as it was the 10th anniversary of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, and the resolution meant one more step in scaling up and providing the operational framework and commitment to implement the Guidelines. After its adoption SOS Children's Villages took the text to government partners at the national level and provided practical proposals – based on our experience as a direct care provider – for implementing the provisions of the resolution within the national context. Such efforts contribute to realizing the Guidelines and tangibly improving the conditions and lives of children without parental care or at risk of losing it.

Regional advocacy achievements

The African Committee of Experts puts children without parental care on its agenda

In November 2019, drawing on the 2019 UN General Assembly resolution on the rights of the child, SOS Children's Villages partnered with UNICEF and the African Child Policy Forum to advocate for putting children without parental care on the agenda of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC – the Committee). As a result of these efforts, the Committee agreed to conduct a continental baseline study on children without parental care and, if warranted based on the study's findings, to conduct a day of general discussion and develop a General Comment.[26]

26 General comments are interpretations of a provision of a treaty. They provide substantive guidance to State Parties to help in understanding and implementing a provision.

The first of its kind, the extensive continental study was conducted between 2020 and 2022, covering all five regions of Africa and incorporating children's and young people's voices. The findings were released in *Children without Parental Care in Africa* on 8 November 2023.

The study estimates that around 35 million children in Africa have lost parental care and found that over 70% of the countries lack explicit child protection policies to implement key provisions in their constitutions and laws.[27] Highlighting the need for a paradigm shift in national policies and practices, the study helped generate recommendations on how to address the continental challenges in child rights.

In November 2023, the Committee decided to develop a General Comment on Children without Parental Care in Africa focusing on Article 25 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The General Comment, which is currently being developed, will provide policy guidance and directions on the rights of the child and become part of the monitoring mechanism on the implementation of the Charter.

The European Child Guarantee

The European Union launched the European Child Guarantee in 2021 in order to fight child poverty and social exclusion. This landmark initiative aims at guaranteeing access to essential services such as nutrition, housing, healthcare, early childhood education, care and education for all children, especially those in vulnerable situations. In partnership with networks such as the EU Alliance for Investing in Children, SOS Children's Villages worked to ensure the needs of children without parental care or at risk of losing it were adequately represented.

As a result of this long-term effort, the European Child Guarantee recognized children in alternative care and those whose families are in vulnerable situations among key groups to be prioritized, which has incentivized member states to allocate dedicated resources. Thanks in part to our advocating for deinstitutionalization, the European Child Guarantee explicitly calls for a transition from institutional care to family- and community-based care, promotes support for young people in preparing for independence, and recognizes the need to invest in social protection systems and support for families. Commitments enshrined in the European Child Guarantee have been translated into national actions plans, and we will continue to advocate for effective, well-resourced and adequately monitored implementation.

The role of child and youth participation in advocacy

Because collaboration and partnership with children and young people is fundamental to ensuring our advocacy efforts are inclusive, responsive, and meaningful, we work alongside them, listening to their perspectives, and involving them in the design and implementation of advocacy activities to voice their opinion towards governments and key changemakers. In 2023, more than 3,000 children and youth participated in advocacy activities supported by SOS Children's Villages.

27 ACERWC, *Children without Parental Care in Africa*.

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Hon. Anne Musiwa

Rapporteur of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

In-depth interview

In 2019, SOS Children's Villages began a strategic collaboration with UNICEF and the African Child Policy Forum to advocate for the agenda of children without parental care to be recognized by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC – the Committee). In this interview, Hon. Anne Musiwa discusses how the Committee adopted the agenda of children without parental care in November 2019 and how the findings of the first-of-its-kind continental study (2020-2022) will inform the General Comment that addresses the needs of these children in Africa.

"The issue of children without parental care in Africa was brought to the attention of the ACERWC at its 34th session in November 2019 by SOS Children's Villages, UNICEF and the African Child Policy Forum. The partners made a presentation covering the conceptual understanding of children without parental care, as well as the root causes and drivers of family breakdown. At the core of this lobbying process was the presentation on the November 2019 UN Resolution on Children without Parental Care in Africa which justified the need to do the same for the African Charter.

Considering the presentation and justifications provided, the Committee decided to take up the agenda, conduct a continental study to develop a better understanding on the topic, have a general day of discussion and develop a General Comment to provide policy direction for African Union member states. The study was the first of its kind in Africa and challenging to conduct due to its scope and nature. It identified various drivers for the situations of children without parental care, including war and conflict; climate change and natural disasters; pandemics; poverty; death of a parent; child trafficking; and socio-economic factors.

"... more than 70% of countries in Africa lack explicit child protection policy frameworks and guidance."

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"The recommendations will serve as a foundation for child rights advocates to hold duty bearers and power holders to account."

Results indicated that there are an estimated 35 million children without parental care in Africa. These children are routinely exposed to various forms of abuse, violence and neglect, which negatively affects their development. Some of the challenges they face are lack of access to education and healthcare; homelessness; sexual and labour exploitation; drug use; and managing households on their own.

These situations are exacerbated by the fact that a significant number of African governments do not invest adequate resources in child protection, do not assign a capable workforce, and lack the relevant policies, systems and coordination mechanisms. In fact, the study revealed that more than 70% of countries in Africa lack explicit child protection policy frameworks and guidance.

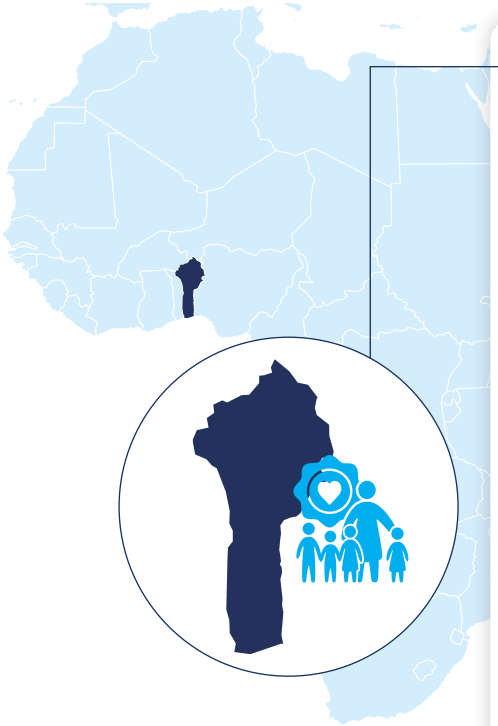
To address the challenges facing children without parental care, African countries need to implement comprehensive and effective social protection systems that prevent child-family separation; ensure the provision of quality childcare services through different settings and tailored approaches; and implement wide-scale interventions on parenting skills and child protection. Governments should also focus on building the capacity of their social workforces – those who are directly engaged in child protection issues. The study reported that in the context of Africa, with appropriate regulatory provisions and support, kinship care options provide significant opportunity to ensure that children remain within a family setting when they encounter the risk of loss of parental care or family separation.

The General Comment on children without parental care in Africa, which is being developed by the Committee based on the findings of the study, will serve as a monitoring tool on the implementation of the rights of children without parental care. It will clarify the relevant article in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in relation to these children and provide clear directions to state parties on how best to comply with their obligations under the Charter.

Its recommendations will not only assist state parties to implement the Charter, but also serve as a foundation for child rights advocates to hold duty bearers and power holders to account."

National advocacy achievements

In 2023, SOS Children's Villages engaged in advocacy in 107 countries. Our activities are tailored to national and local context, but with the same goal of strengthening child protection systems and preventing unnecessary child-family separation. We work with national and local governments, for example in policy formulation and implementation, to address critical gaps. We partner with different stakeholders and participate in networks and coalitions to raise awareness and build momentum for improvement in policy and practice. The examples below showcase some of the change achieved at the national level in the last five years, the groundwork for which was often laid many years before.



Foster care legislation Benin

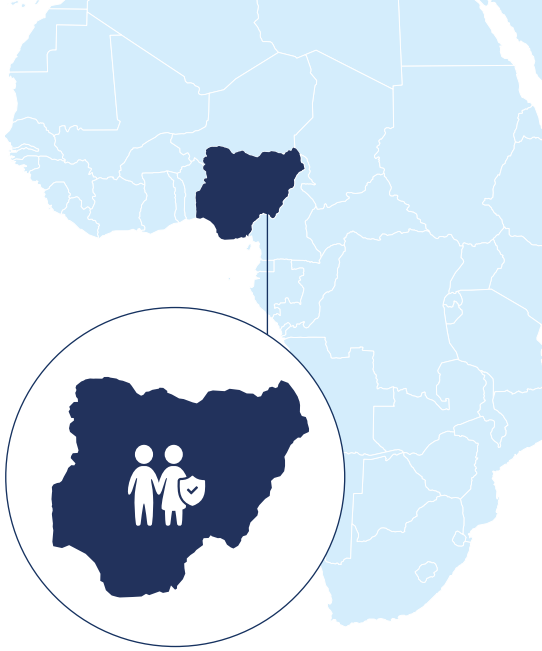
SOS Children's Villages has been working with the government of Benin to improve the situation of children since 2005. We contributed to and advocated for the adoption of the 2015 Child Code. Recognizing a gap in national policies, in 2017 we started advocating for the adoption of legal and policy frameworks on foster care in collaboration with the Network of Organizations for the Protection of Children in Difficult Situations (ReSPESD) and other partners. The government adopted foster care guidelines in 2019. Intended for social workers and other professionals working in alternative care, the guidelines set out the procedures for identifying, selecting, training, monitoring and supporting families capable of providing care for children who have lost parental care.

The pilot phase of implementation began in 2020, broadening the available care options in the country and improving care standards. The development of foster care is one of the strategies pursued in Benin to deinstitutionalize alternative care and promote a family- and community-based approach to supporting children.

Preventing unnecessary child-family separation

Ecuador

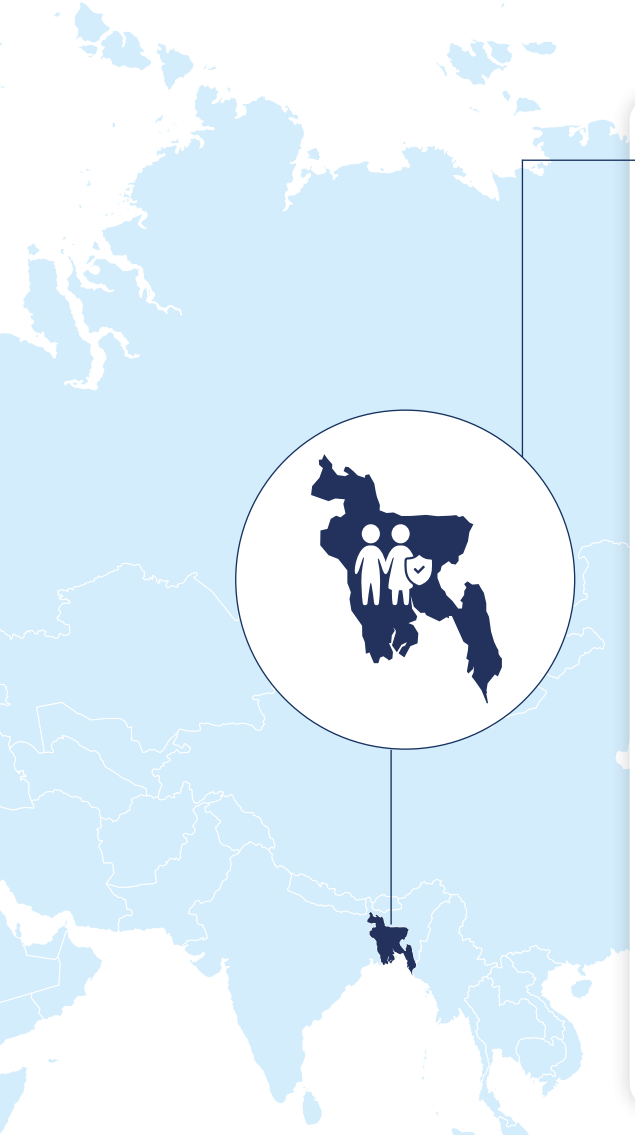
As part of the coordinating team of the "Red Convivencia" Network, which brings together organizations providing alternative care, SOS Children's Villages has been working with the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) to reform the national care system. In 2018, the Network contributed to the definition of technical standards for alternative care modalities, including family-based care and support to prevent unnecessary family separation. In 2021, the Network contributed to the development of the national Deinstitutionalization Strategy, which envisions a comprehensive care reform that would see a 5% reduction in the number of children living in institutional care, an expansion of other care options, and measures to support families.



Reforming child protection systems Nigeria

In partnership with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development and UNICEF, SOS Children's Villages has provided technical support in the development of the National Guideline on Alternative Care for Children. The guideline and a blueprint for its implementation were approved by the government in September 2023. The first national policy to guide the operation of alternative care facilities, the guideline is contributing to reforming the national child protection system.

As a member of the National Child Rights Implementation Committee and as the secretariat of the National Sub-Committee on Alternative Care of Children, SOS Children's Villages is continuing to support the guideline's implementation. We have successfully engaged with the Lagos, Edo and Plateau state governments in developing alternative care guidelines tailored to the specific context of each state. In Lagos State, implementation of the national guideline started with the introduction of short-term care.



National Gatekeeping Policy – first of its kind Bangladesh

Bangladesh is home to more than 55 million children under the age of 18, millions of whom are growing up in vulnerable circumstances. Until recently there was no uniform oversight system for the various residential care settings, potentially compromising the principles of necessity, suitability, and best interests of the child as outlined in the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

In a significant step forward for children growing up without adequate parental care, SOS Children's Villages successfully advocated to the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Department of Social Services and helped to develop the first-of-its-kind National Gatekeeping Policy. This policy will contribute towards the care reform process in the country as well as standardizing alternative care. The government formed a committee involving UNICEF, SOS Children's Villages and Save the Children to facilitate the development of the draft in 2023, with final approval expected in 2024. Once implemented, the policy will help to prevent the unnecessary separation of the children from their families while at the same time ensuring the availability of a continuum of care options.

More support for young people leaving care Kosovo

Starting in 2019, SOS Children's Villages began collaborating with the government and other stakeholders to advocate for and contribute to the enactment of a law on social services and protection by Parliament. This legislative change, which took place in 2023, specifically focuses on foster care, prevention, and support for care leavers, marking a significant step towards reforming social services in the country. We will continue to work with the Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection (KOMF), partners and relevant stakeholders to promote implementation of the legislative changes and raise public awareness.

One of the key components of this law is the inclusion of "supervised independent living" as a new form of protection for children and young people without parental care. This provision allows them to continue receiving care services until the age of 26, strengthening their ability to become independent. Further enriching the legislative change, SOS Children's Villages will continue to lead a technical working group to support the development of an Administrative Guideline for Supervised Independent Living.

Legislation to end violence against children

Spain

Ending violence against children is at the core of upholding children's rights, preventing harm and preventing that children have to be separated from their families. As part of the national alliance "Plataforma de Infancia" (Childhood Platform), SOS Children's Villages has continuously raised awareness about the multisectoral approach it takes including each and everyone working with and for children to address and prevent violence against them.

This included a direct contribution to new legislation, approved in 2021 (Organic Law 8/2021), which introduces comprehensive protocols to prevent violence against children and adolescents and to fight impunity in all places where children are present. SOS Children's Villages contributed with specific expertise on protecting children without parental care and those in families facing difficulties from violence. The new law is a major milestone, considering that different forms of violence such as corporal punishment are still common, despite the practice being abolished in 2007.

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Julián Peinado Ramírez

Member of the House of Representatives, Colombia

In-depth interview

In 2021, Colombia introduced a new law – Law 2089 – prohibiting the physical punishment and cruel, humiliating and degrading treatment of children and adolescents. The law focuses on the need to teach parents alternative methods of discipline and was achieved with the help of technical guidance from SOS Children's Villages in association with la Alianza por la Niñez Colombiana and the support of the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF). Julián Peinado Ramírez was one of the first to voice his support for the new law. He discusses the importance of changing cultural norms for the benefit of future generations.

"What the law is trying to achieve is a cultural shock, a cultural reaction so that Colombians understand that this is not acceptable and that this type of action is harming their children. This behaviour has always been understood as normal, positive. By placing it on the country's public agenda it has generated an understanding, an understanding from the citizenry, that it is forbidden. That it is not good and that it has no positive consequences for the child. The goal is not to criminalize; this is not a punitive exercise but a supportive one. What we aim for is to spread the tools of positive parenting or respectful parenting. Better for you to have another way of relating to the child without resorting to violence.

We managed to get civil organizations in sync, but also religious organizations, teachers and professionals and psychologists themselves to understand that punishment generates emotional effects on the child's development as well as physical effects on brain development. It is scientifically proven that physical punishment harms a child in the long term. The person who hits is teaching violence and this violence is transgenerational.

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"It is scientifically proven that physical punishment harms a child in the long term. The person who hits is teaching violence and this violence is transgenerational."

The law is a milestone that I think is fundamental. Usually we act on behalf of the children, but we do not listen to them. One of the first strategy guidelines is that the child has to participate in their own regulation. What the law says is: come, sit down, listen to the children. What are they going through in this situation? What do they believe are the solutions to prevent it from happening again? How do we make their parents understand that these behaviours bring no benefit to the child? In Colombia, we have a long history of peace negotiations due to guerilla and paramilitary issues. We believe that one of the ways to cut off the transgenerational violence that our population has suffered is precisely to denormalize what we have normalized. The law is a powerful instrument in terms of deterrence but can also do much more in the long term, in terms of pedagogy. We believe that society will learn to resolve its conflicts in a more humane, supportive way and that we will understand children as rights holders. That must be in a protective environment that makes us all protectors of children.

I believe that this is the transition we are moving towards with the implementation of this strategy. The enactment of Law 2089 not only made it possible to bring the outbreak of violence in Colombian families to the public's attention but also allowed us to enshrine on the development agenda a fundamental right, the right to good treatment, which was not so clear in Colombian legislation.

This is fundamental from now on. The effects will be much emotionally healthier populations and stronger families in the future who have the tools to eliminate violence from the home, from the conversation, from the living room, from the kitchen. When societies improve the ways in which they interact with children, they gain an investment not only in their human capital but in their economic situation, because they will have healthier, more stable and more productive cities."

"When societies improve the ways in which they interact with children, they gain an investment not only in their human capital but in their economic situation."

Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals

Through our work together with partners, we contribute to the global efforts towards a sustainable and equitable future – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Unanimously adopted by all member states of the United Nations in 2015 as part of Agenda 2030, the 17 goals and 169 targets in the SDGs outline a roadmap towards peace and prosperity.

Our work contributes directly to the following five SDGs:[28]

- **SDG 1** No Poverty
- **SDG 4** Quality Education
- **SDG 8** Decent Work and Economic Growth
- **SDG 10** Reduced Inequalities
- **SDG 16** Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Based on our impact in the lives of individual children and young people who participated in our programmes in the past, we can estimate the extent to which we contribute to these five SDGs and the related targets by 2030 (Figure 9).[29]

Our calculation, based on available data, assumes that similarly positive results will be seen in the lives of current and future participants. For example, in our family-like care and family strengthening services we support children to access quality education and skills training, from early childhood development through to secondary education, vocational training and in some cases even university education. On average, in all these areas related to education and skills, 82% of former participants are doing well. SDG targets 4.2-4.5 specifically refer to these education areas, meaning that our work directly contributes to those targets. Our assumption is that we can also expect 82% of our current and future participants to be positively impacted in terms of education and skills, which would amount to 5.3 million children by 2030. This same logic has been applied to related SDG targets in SDGs 1, 8, 10 and 16.

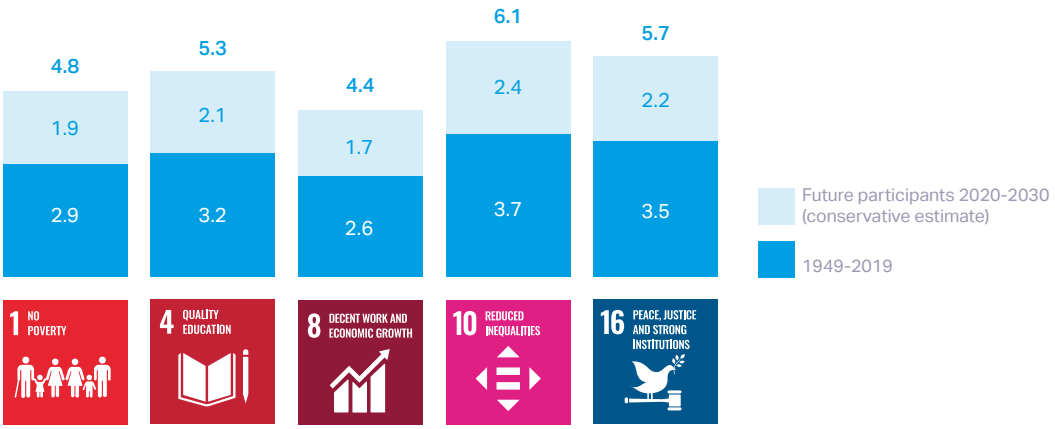


Figure 9: Number of participants (in millions) positively impacted in respective SDG, 1949-2030

28 SOS Children's Villages International, *Care for Children Is Care for Development: How SOS Children's Villages Supports the Sustainable Development Goals* (Vienna: SOS Children's Villages International, 2016).
29 The SDG targets relevant for our work include 1.3, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 8.6, 10.2, and 16.2. For more information about the SDGs and the SDG targets, please refer to United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 70/1, "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," adopted on 25 September 2015.

Social return on investment

As part of our social impact assessments, changes brought about by our programmes are quantified in financial terms. This is calculated by comparing the cost of a programme to the financial value of benefits of the programme for individuals, the community and society. The results from 18 countries[30] show that we are having a tangible economic impact: overall, for every €1 invested into SOS Children's Villages programmes, it is estimated that society reaped €4.50 in benefits.

Figure 10 represents the combined results from our family-like care and family strengthening services; results by individual service area are presented below.

Figure 10: Overall social return on investment for family-like care and family strengthening services

The social return on investment (SROI) quantifies the social impact of a programme and represents a cost-benefit analysis, with the programme's total costs being compared to the expected benefits to society in financial terms.[31]

The benefits quantify:

A **Income and benefits for the individual or family:**
the expected additional income that an individual will be able to earn over a lifetime due to being in the programme, the increase in the income of caregivers who received family strengthening services, and the next-generation benefits for children of former participants.

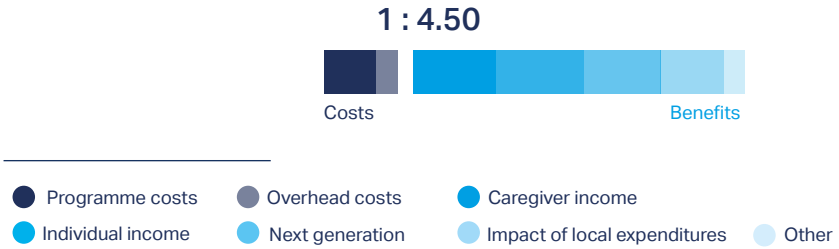
B **Community benefits:**
the impact of local expenditures in the community, the expected future savings on government expenditure (e.g. to provide alternative care and social benefits) and giving and volunteering by former participants.

Costs include costs at all levels: direct programme costs and support costs at the national and international levels of the organization.

30 See annex 2 for list of countries participating in SROI assessments.
31 The benefits returned to society include the initial investment. The figures are considered conservative, as it is not feasible to put a monetary value to all benefits derived from participation in the programme. For more on SROI calculation, see SOS Children's Villages International, *Assessing Social Impact*.

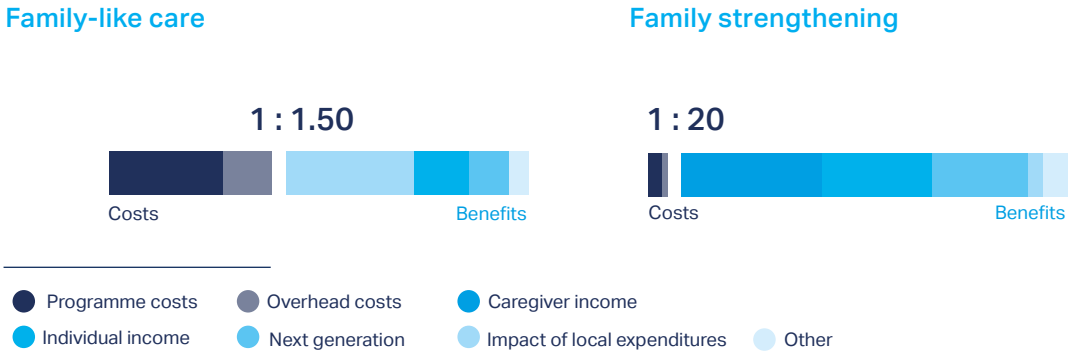
Social return on investment can also be expressed as a ratio. More detailed information on the overall SROI is as follows.

Overall



In calculating SROI, an underlying assumption is that the benefits can only be sustained by those former participants who are doing well in terms of education and skills, and livelihood (see page 15). Therefore, only the results of former participants doing well in these areas are factored in on the benefits side, whereas the resources spent on all former programme participants (including those not currently doing well in terms of their education and skills, and livelihood) are included in the costs. Data is drawn from interviews with former programme participants, secondary data and expert interviews.[32]

Breakdown of overall SROI by service type



At first glance, family strengthening services appear far more "profitable" than family-like care services. However, family-like care and family strengthening services differ in many respects, including the child's level of vulnerability when joining the programme as well as the intensity and duration of support received. Children needing alternative care are particularly disadvantaged. A higher investment in these children, including more intense direct support services over a longer of period of time, is needed. If these children are not supported, there may be negative costs to society. Such assumptions have not been included in our SROI calculations.

Also worth noting is that there is a higher level of attribution of SROI to SOS Children's Villages for family-like care given that we are directly providing services over a number of years. In family strengthening, the social return on investment is the result of a cumulative effect of multiple partners and service providers working together.[33]

32 For more information, see Willi, Reed, and Houedenou, "An Evaluation Methodology," and SOS Children's Villages International, *Assessing Social Impact*.
33 For further discussion, see R. Willi, D. Reed, and G. Houedenou, *70 Years of Impact: Improving the Lives of Children without Adequate Parental Care* (Vienna: SOS Children's Villages International, 2019), 16.

Compared to data presented in our *70 Years of Impact* report, the cost-benefit ratio in family strengthening reduced from 1:22 to 1:20. This was due to Nicaragua, Kyrgyzstan and the Philippines being in the lower range of social return on investment for this service, which has decreased the overall average from 1:5 to 1:4.5. This might be caused by the impact of adverse economic conditions on caregivers' income in these countries, the nature of the services provided, or higher relative costs for service provision.

Looking ahead

Reflecting on impact allows us as an organization to improve our efforts to make sure that every child and young person has the supportive relationships and environment they need to become their strongest self. Achieving this change takes coordinated efforts alongside our partners, donors, peers and governments.

Five years since we released our last impact report, we see similar trends across those countries in which social impact assessments have been conducted most recently. Perhaps most strikingly, our data still suggests that a significant proportion of children referred to our alternative care services could have stayed with their families if they had received the right preventive support earlier on.

With this in mind, we will be focusing even more on preventing avoidable child-family separation: at the individual, community and systemic levels.

We use the evidence from our social impact assessments to inform programme design and improve the quality of our services at the local level. Some examples are:

- In Italy, the findings contributed to improvements in aftercare services, more systematic support to families at risk of breaking down, and faster reunification of children and families after an alternative care placement.
- In Togo, psychosocial support services and services to facilitate children's return from alternative care were strengthened.
- In Bolivia and Peru, the assessments resulted in a wider range of targeted family strengthening services using a case management approach, to complement the existing day care services. Cooperation with the local authorities in the design and delivery of social services was also strengthened.

At the organizational level, the impact assessments are used to see broader trends across our services and to **inform programme direction and policy** for the entire federation. As discussed on page 12, the assessments have consistently shown the need to strengthen the integration of family-like care services into communities, with former participants reporting barriers for their transition to independence when leaving care.

Based on these findings, a new programme regulation was introduced in 2023, requiring all member associations to "*ensure that all alternative care participants live in a small-scale, community-integrated setting and progressively reduce large residential care services.*" The transitioning to integrated community settings must be managed carefully, respecting the rights and best interests of the children and staff, as well as keeping care leavers informed. Best practices are available from programmes that have already made the shift.

As we look ahead to how we can contribute to more positive impact for the children and young people we work for, **we will be focusing on the following**:[34]

34 Some of these focus areas might be relevant for other organizations looking to create change for children and youth without parental care or at risk of losing it.

Our work at the individual level

- Expanding and diversifying family strengthening services to prevent child-family separation. This includes:
  - Tailoring services to the local context, providing for specific sub-groups or introducing specialized services (together with partners), such as for support to single parents, fathers, different caregiver profiles in kinship care, and families affected by violence
  - Improving staff-to-participant ratios, to better serve the complex needs of families
- Diversifying alternative care services and ensuring that children have access to a range of care options in their local communities. This includes:
  - Gradually transitioning away from family-like care provided in a compound setting into small-scale community-integrated residential care and family-based care
  - Providing more support for the reintegration of children in care back into their families of origin when in the best interests of the child (whether care is provided by SOS Children's Villages or other providers), including ensuring strong ties of children to their families of origin while in alternative care
  - Improving aftercare and follow-up support for those who have left care
- Continuing to ensure meaningful participation of children and young people in decisions that affect their lives, including strengthening their role in the organization's governance and decision-making. The inclusion of children and youth in developing an ombuds system for the federation serves as best practice.
- Ensuring robust safeguarding mechanisms, including an independent ombuds system[35]

Our work at the community level

- Expanding our work with communities, especially to raise awareness of children at risk of child-family separation and to strengthen community-based child protection networks
- Strengthening community-based approaches to family strengthening
- Working with partners and local authorities to ensure the change brought about by our involvement is sustainable and continues once a project ends
- Expanding our knowledge-sharing and training efforts with others working directly with children and young people, especially child and youth care practitioners. The Applying Safe Behaviours project serves as a good example.

Our work at the systemic level

- Strengthening partnerships with multilateral institutions, alliances, coalitions and other organizations focused on preventing child-family separation and ensuring a child's right to quality care
- Advocating with governments to:
  - Develop and implement comprehensive national legislation, policies, strategic plans, regulations and standards that clearly define actions to implement the rights of children and prioritize family strengthening and prevention of child-family separation.
  - Provide sufficient funding and other resources to guarantee access to high-quality family strengthening services at the community level.
  - Fully implement the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, which includes putting

35 For more information, see our Safeguarding Strategy and our Safeguarding Action Plan progress reports on our Safeguarding Hub.

in place a range of alternative care services and robust gatekeeping – procedures that ensure children are only placed in care only when necessary and in their best interests and they receive care in the most suitable care setting.
    - Invest in and strengthen social support systems, including social protection, mental health services to help families and care leavers cope in the event of a crisis or multiple crises, and specialized support for care leavers.
    - Strengthen the recognition of and support to those working in formal and informal care, especially care professionals, women, and girls. This includes investing in the social services workforce and their professional development.
    - Improve collection, analysis and dissemination of data on children without parental care and at risk of losing it, including through national household surveys.
    - Improve responses to the needs of children who have lost or risk losing parental care in humanitarian emergencies.
- Internally, work together for the roll-out and execution of our advocacy strategy

It is important to note that we will continue to expand our services in the area of humanitarian action. Our Humanitarian Mandate, approved in 2023, guides us. Our primary focus is on preventing family separation and supporting unaccompanied or separated children. We also support communities to prepare and respond when conflicts or disasters arise.

The importance of evidence to drive change and innovation

Finally, it is important to reflect on the value of assessing impact or "the change we seek." Research and gathering evidence, especially from people who left our programmes years ago, is complex and takes time and resources. But as an organization, we are seeing the fruits of these endeavours. After conducting social impact assessments, colleagues are able to:

- make evidence-based decisions in programming
- report results back to local authorities, partners and funders, and
- use evidence for advocacy efforts.

We have also updated our internal programme structure and strategic indicators to better track our work with communities, our work in humanitarian action, as well as the number of people we reach indirectly. We aim to establish indicators soon to track the impact of our work at the systemic level.

More broadly, research and evidence enables us and other stakeholders such as policymakers to make informed decisions towards the ultimate goal of ensuring all children and young people grow up in supportive and safe environments. Our upcoming global research report on child-family separation (due out in October 2024) will be a relevant contribution to the global discussion.

In the years ahead, we look forward to continuing our work with children, young people, families and communities, as well as with partners, governments and peers. We seek to mobilize within society for a broader movement to end all unnecessary child-family separation and ensure every child's right to quality care. May this 75-year anniversary mark a renewed commitment towards achieving this goal.
The results of current social impact assessments and a previous research project called Tracking

Annex 1
Methodology: Impact in the lives of idividuals

Footprints have been brought together into one framework:[36]

Table 1: Social impact assessments and Tracking Footprints studies

	Social impact assessments (SIA)	Tracking Footprints (TF)
What	• "8 impact dimensions" framework (see figure 4)	• Previous impact surveys used a methodology that was different from our current one, so we have mapped all data against the newer "8 impact dimensions" framework[37]
How	• Data collected via individual interviews and focus group discussions, by independent researchers • Data from ~1,670 former participants from family strengthening and ~650 former participants from family-like care	• Data collected via individual interviews by independent researchers • Data from ~2,170 former participants from family-like care[38]
When and where	• 2015-2022: 22 programme locations in 20 countries Benin, Bolivia*, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua*, Palestine, Peru*, Philippines*, Senegal, Sri Lanka*, Togo, Tanzania. (*) conducted social impact assessments and Tracking Footprints studies	• 2002, 2003 and 2008: 25 countries[39] Argentina, Austria, Bolivia*, Brazil*, Chile*, Colombia*, Dominican Republic, Ecuador*, El Salvador, Honduras, Hungary, Kenya, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Paraguay*, Peru*, Philippines, Poland*, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Uruguay, Venezuela*, Zimbabwe. (*) conducted several assessments in different years
Consolidation of findings	• Consolidation of raw data and meta-analysis of all country reports	• Consolidation of raw data and meta-analysis of global and regional reports; 12 individual country reports

36 In addition to the assessments highlighted in the table, studies to measure the impact on former programme participants have been conducted or commissioned by various SOS Children's Villages associations around the world, such as Austria, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic Congo, France, the Gambia, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Romania, Malawi, Mexico, Nicaragua, Niger, Ecuador, Guatemala, and many more. The results from these studies could not be included in this report, due to differing methodologies used.
37 Some dimensions could not be mapped, as they were either not measured or differently measured in the previous impact studies. This affects the themes related to 'basic needs' and 'building a foundation for a happy life'.
38 This is slightly less than former Tracking Footprints participants reported in *70 Years of Impact* due to a reporting error. This, however, does not affect accuracy of reported percentages/results
39 Countries for which Tracking Footprints raw data was available were included. These countries are not distributed equally across all regions of the world and so the results may include a regional bias (e.g. larger Latin American sample size; smaller Asian sample size).

Former participants were selected to take part in these studies based on the following criteria:

- Minimum participation in the programme: 2 years
- Years since leaving the programme:
  - Family-like care: left at least 2 years ago, but generally limited to no more than 6 years for the social impact assessments, and unlimited (beyond 6 years) for the Tracking Footprints studies
  - Family strengthening: left 1 to 5 years ago
- Reasons for leaving the programme: all types of reasons, including those that left the programme unexpectedly
- Sampling of former participants in each assessment:[4]
  - Family-like care: For the social impact assessments, we included all those that could be contacted and agreed to take part; in the Tracking Footprints studies, a random sample was used
  - Family strengthening: a random sample was used[5]

39 Some former participants could not be located due to missing contact details, and some decided not to take part. For more information about the sampling and methodology, please refer to R. Willi, D. Reed, G. Houedenou (2020). An evaluation methodology for measuring the long-term impact of family strengthening and alternative child care services: The case of SOS Children's Villages. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 11(4.1), 7-28.
40 In each assessment, we try to target as many families as possible with children still under their care; sampling criteria of family type, reason for exiting the programme, age and gender are used to make the sample representative.

Annex 2

Countries represented in the aggregated social impact figures in this report, by area of assessment

	Individual impact (family-like care)	Individual impact (family strengthening)	Community impact	Social return on investment
Argentina	x			
Austria	x			
Benin	x	x	x	x
Bolivia	x	x	x	x
Bosnia and Herzegovina	x	x	x	x
Brazil	x			
Chile	x			
Colombia	x			
Côte d'Ivoire	x	x	x	x
Dominican Rep	x			
Ecuador	x			
El Salvador	x			
Eswatini	x	x		x
Ethiopia	x	x		x
France	x			
Honduras	x			
Hungary	x			
Italy	x		x	X (family-like care only)
Indonesia	x	x	x	x
Kenya	x			
Kyrgyzstan	x	x	x	x
Mozambique	x	x	x	
Nepal	x	x	x	x
Nicaragua	x	x	x	x
Palestine	x	x	x	x
Pakistan	x			
Paraguay	x			
Peru	x	x	x	x
Philippines	x	x	x	x
Poland	x			
Portugal	x			
Senegal	x	x	x	
South Africa	x			
Spain	x			
Sri Lanka	x	x	x	x
Tanzania	x	x	x	x
Togo	x	x	x	x
Uruguay	x			
Venezuela	x			
Zimbabwe	x			

Countries where social impact assessments were carried out (2015-2022)

Countries where both types of studies were carried

Countries where Tracking Footprint studies were carried out (2002–2008)

Annex 3
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Call to action

"As a child who grows up in a care programme, which raises children who lost parental care with full support and without any discrimination on the bases of race, colour or religion, I utterly hate war and racism. In my short life, I have witnessed that deadly wars, displacement, killings, violence against children and women, kidnaping, etc, has become a common phenomenon for many countries in the world. This has pushed millions of children to street life and children rights are violated.

My heart bleeds when I think of children who pass their childhood without education and happiness. I believe that religious, political or ethnic differences are the major causes for many wars. No child has chosen to be born in a certain country or to belong to a certain racial group. Therefore, in the name of the world women, children and youth, I call up on all the world leaders, politicians, legislators, and all adults, to resolve their differences through discussion and create the prospect for all human beings to live life with dignity."

- Selam, from Ethiopia, is President of the Child Parliament in her children's village

በዘር፣ በቀለም፣ በሃገሪ ማኖት ሳይለይ የጦርነት እንቅፋት ላጡ እንጂ ህም ለመጣት ዘገት ሳይ ላሉ ህፃናት ለመሉ ሽንጌ ለመደጋገፍ ተቋም ውስጥ እንቅምታሽግ ብሎ ዘረኝነትንና ጦርነትን አምርሬ እፀየፋለሁ። በኖርኩበት አጭር እድሜ ከዓለማችን የሕዝቦ ሀገሮች አስቃቂ ጦርነት፣ መፈናቀል፣ ግጭት፣ የህፃናትና የሴቶች ጥቃት፣ መታገት፣ መዝ ሲፈፀም መሞት/መጎሳቆል የተለመዳ ሆኗል። ሳሃም ለመጪ ሊዮዩ የሚቆጠሩ ህፃናትና ወጣቶች ከጎጣና ህይወት እንዲገለሉ አድርጓል፣ የህፃናት መብቶች ተጥሰዋል፣ ብሎ ነታቸውን ለጽአትና ቤተሙሂት የመደናገለ ህፃናትን ሳስብ ልቤ ይታሰብሃል። አብዛኞቹ ጦርነት መነሻቸው የዘር፣ የሐይማኖቶች መሆኑም የፓለቲካ አመራሮችን ብዙኃኑ እንጂሆን ይታሰማኛል፡፡ መጣንም ፍፃሬ ብሄሩን መሆኑም የትውልዱ ሀገሩን መውጣ የተገኘበት የለም፡፡ ሃገሪሆኑም በዓለም ላይ የምትገኙ መሪዎቻችን፣ ፓለቲከኞች፣ ህግ አውጪዎች እንዲሁም አዋቂዎች ለመሉ ወገኖቻችሁን ለመፃግት በመፍታት ሰው በስውነቱ ብቻ ተከብሮ የሚኖርባትን አለም እንፍጥርጥር ከለ በዓለም ላይ ላሉ ሴቶች፣ ህፃናትና ወጣቶች ሁሉ እመጣ ፀዳ ነኝ።

- ሰላም፣ ከኢትዮጵያ፣ የህፃናት ፓርላማ ፕሬዚዳንት ናት

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Some names in this report have been changed to protect the individual's privacy.