

SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES EMERGENCY POLICY



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
INTERNATIONAL

May, 2012

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES



CORE POLICY

This policy expresses the organisation's stand on Emergency activities and sets an action framework for the SOS Children's Villages organisation. It is implemented by co-workers and other relevant stakeholders within the organisation, and has an impact on all aspects of the organisation's work. It has been elaborated in accordance with SOS Children's Villages' roots, vision, mission and values ("Who we are") and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It has followed a consultative development process with participation and feedback from national associations, and in consideration of the views of children and young people.



WHAT WE STAND FOR: POLICY STATEMENT

When children are exposed to emergencies, be it as a result of war or natural catastrophe, we take action to bring them as quickly as possible from the emergency situation into a caring family environment where their development as individuals is supported. We achieve this by:

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

INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

- 217 million people were affected by 385 natural disasters in 2010 (CRED, 2011)
- Close to 43 million people are currently displaced due to conflict or persecution (MDG report 2011)
- 175 million children will be affected by humanitarian crises over the next decade (IFCR, 2008)

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

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

Girls and women are particularly vulnerable to being deprived of fundamental rights in emergency situations. The UN Security Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (S/RES/1325) addresses the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on girls and women. It also recognises their rights to protection from violence and to participate in all peace and security processes. Due to inequalities in their social and economic position, girls and women face a number of rights violations and experience higher mortality rates in all types of disasters than do boys and men.

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

The SOS Children's Villages Emergency Policy builds on more than 60 years of experience in the care and support of children and their families. Our activities in emergency situations

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

"Who We Are"

benefit from our local presence in the countries and locations affected. SOS Children's Villages has an established cooperation with local authorities, proven infrastructure and logistics, local cultural knowledge, and trust and recognition as a reliable partner. These strengths enable us to effectively support and influence humanitarian agencies and state governments and to advocate the prioritising of children's rights and their well-being in emergencies.

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

B. TARGET GROUP

- Children who are unaccompanied or separated immediately following an emergency.
- Children affected by an emergency who have lost parental care or who are at risk of losing parental care.
- Children who might be affected by an emergency who have lost parental care or who are at risk of losing parental care. This includes children in our programmes or in other forms of out-of-home care.

C. TERMINOLOGY

Disaster risk reduction

Disaster risk reduction is the concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and diminish the causal factors of disasters. Examples include reducing exposure to hazards, lessening vulnerability of children, wise management of SOS Children's Villages' utilities, including land and the environment, and improving preparedness for adverse events.

Emergency

A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources (UNISDR, 2009).

Emergency relief

The immediate survival assistance to the victims of crisis and violent conflict. Most relief operations are initiated on short notice and have a short implementation period (project objectives are generally completed within a year). The main purpose of emergency relief is to save lives (Relief Web 2011).

Exit strategy / transition

All actions carried out to close the emergency activities at a location. This could include actions such as downsizing or handing over the emergency activities to local authorities or to a partner organisation. It could also include transforming the intervention from a temporary emergency service to a programme in accordance with the SOS Children's Village Programme Policy.

Preparedness

The knowledge and capacities developed by governments, professional response and recovery organisations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current hazard events or conditions (UNISDR, 2009).

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

Separated children

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

Unaccompanied children

PRINCIPLES GUIDING: SOS CHILDREN’S VILLAGES’ ACTION

1. We make sure children are in a caring family environment.

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

Child development in a caring family environment

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

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

Keeping children secure and protected

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

Preparedness is crucial for children, families and for SOS Children’s Villages to be able to respond to an emergency situation and to mitigate its effects. Before emergencies take place, we make sure our co-workers in high-risk countries are prepared to respond to emergencies by assuring they receive proper training. We use our expertise to strengthen the resilience of children, families and their communities to respond and cope if and when emergencies occur.

Children and communities supported

4. We make a quick, focused and effective emergency response.

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

Quick emergency response

Cooperation with partners

5. We maximise our impact through cooperation with partners.

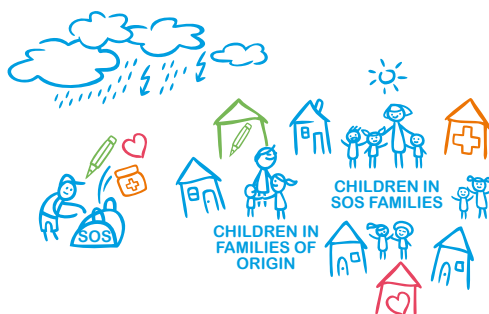
We are a reliable and committed partner, and our existing infrastructure and logistics allow us to tailor our services to the needs of our target group. We recognise that an emergency can only be confronted in partnership with state governments and other stakeholders. We make our specialized contribution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

POLICY OVERVIEW

THREE-STAGE APPROACH: preparation, response and return to normality

The approach of SOS Children's Villages in emergencies can be summarised in three stages: preparation, response, and return to normality, where the individual development of the child is supported.

Prepare co-workers, children and communities for emergency situations



Provide a family environment during emergency situations



Enable children to develop amidst emergency situations



IMPLICATIONS

1. We make sure children are in a caring family environment.

1a) Our first priority is to reunify unaccompanied children with their families. We invest significant resources to trace families and mediate family reunification as soon as possible.

Reunifying the child with his or her family

1b) In cooperation with duty bearers and stakeholders, we advocate and actively engage in the rapid establishment of a secure and confidential identification system. This ensures early identification, family tracing, proper data protection and access to personal identification documents for unaccompanied and separated children. The aim is to trace their families so they can be reunited.

1c) After the emergency has subsided, we follow-up, monitor and support children who were registered as separated or unaccompanied in order to ensure that their care arrangement is in their best interests.

1d) When it has been confirmed that an unaccompanied child has lost parental care, we initiate and, together with stakeholders and duty bearers, set about finding a long-term placement which is in the best interests of the child. Possibilities include reunification with the child's extended family, community-based alternative care options, integration into an SOS family and other forms of quality care. The opinions of children are listened to and given due consideration in this process.

Finding alternative care options

1e) We refrain from taking or supporting decisions regarding permanent and/or long-term care solutions for unaccompanied children until all possible efforts to trace and reunify them with their parents and/or relatives have been exhausted. We encourage local authorities, state governments and other duty bearers to delay and/or refrain from the construction of residential facilities for children who have lost their families during emergencies. These permanent facilities can diminish the motivation to continue searching for the children's families and can lead to unnecessary separation, even when families have been found.

1f) Whilst acknowledging that under specific circumstances adoption can be an appropriate care solution for children who have lost their parents, we do not support nor do we encourage national or international adoption as a response to an emergency.

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

2a) During an emergency, we take all efforts to prevent the separation of children from their families and to help them to cope with the situation. We expand and/or adapt existing programmes as required to provide access to basic services, support, and capacity-building services for affected children and families. These measures enhance the care and protection of children.

Our direct response – keeping children safe and secure

- 2b) If a child is identified as unaccompanied, we ensure temporary shelter, care and support in a safe and protected environment. SOS Children's Villages or other SOS premises may be used (and/or expanded) as temporary shelters. If a significant need is identified, we may also engage in the set-up and operation of temporary shelters for unaccompanied children which comply with the SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy.
- 2c) We promote and support interventions which help children and their caregivers to regain a sense of normality following an emergency. Examples of such interventions include play activities, art, and family counselling and can also include the provision of support among peers, family and community members.
- 2d) We place special focus on particularly vulnerable groups such as women and girls, children with disabilities, and children affected by HIV and AIDS. Emergency activities are tailored according to their specific needs, rights and views.
- 2e) Our response is designed in accordance with the SOS Children's Village Programme Policy. Thus, when the initial emergency response is finished, there is programme continuity and an individual approach to the development of each child.

Responding with partners

- 2f) In the immediate aftermath of an emergency, we assist in meeting the basic needs of the population, based on humanitarian principles, by providing access to clean water, food, clothes, sanitation and medical care, as well as temporary shelter. This is for a limited period of time and in partnership with other specialist organisations.
- 2g) We promote the access of quality education. This may include promoting and actively engaging in the swift re-establishment of schools and educational services after an emergency has occurred. We consider all possible actions to ensure that the state governments or partner organisations take long-term responsibility for educational services; this is a key measure to promote a child's physical, psychological and social recovery, and is an effective means of protecting children and supporting their return to normality.
- 2h) In cooperation with partners, our emergency activities include measures to reduce children's susceptibility to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV and AIDS. We promote and engage in awareness-raising activities in the community affected by the emergency and provide access to counselling services and medical treatment.

3. We help children and communities to prepare for and to respond to emergencies.

Getting ready for an emergency

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

- 3b)** Co-workers are trained and prepared to support emergency activities locally or internationally. We develop co-workers' skills and knowledge in areas such as child-focused disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness, family tracing and reunification, and special support needed for children living in traumatic emergency situations. We ensure that co-workers of SOS Children's Villages who are engaged in an emergency follow our stated human resources principles and quality standards.
- 3c)** We allocate resources to implement preparedness activities in our programmes and ensure the strengthening of internal capacities to guarantee effective emergency coordination across the organisation.
- 3d)** We aim to raise awareness within the community of the risks of family separation. The family is actively promoted, monitored and supported as the best place for a child to grow up, develop and be protected, especially in times of crisis.
- 3e)** We increase the ability of communities to respond to potential emergencies by strengthening community networks for children and their families. We participate in community-based actions to identify and mitigate disaster risks, prevent family separation and strengthen the care and protection of children within families in the event of an emergency.
- 3f)** We strongly condemn child trafficking. In order to prevent children from being exposed to the risk of trafficking and exploitation, we work with and support their families and caregivers, and we advocate appropriate action to be taken by state duty bearers.

Preparing together
with communities and
the government

4. We make a quick, focused and effective emergency response.

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

Rapid assessment
and start-up within
days

Ensuring good management and accountability

- 4e) To guarantee the high quality of our services during emergencies, we employ only co-workers who have adequate qualifications, attitudes and experience. To ensure the full protection of our beneficiaries, all co-workers of SOS Children's Villages must follow the Child Protection Policy and must sign and adhere to the SOS Children's Villages Code of Conduct. We make every effort to ensure the security, supervision and support of staff during an emergency activity. We pay special attention to the physical and emotional recovery of co-workers participating in the activity, as well as of co-workers directly affected by the emergency.
- 4f) In order to guarantee the integrity of our emergency activities, we act in accordance with organisational policies, guidelines and standards, and the organisation's good management practices. We are aware of and make efforts to mitigate possible unintended negative impacts of our actions on the dynamics of an emergency. We manage our resources wisely and in a responsible manner.
- 4g) The emergency programme will include an internal and external communications and reporting plan to ensure that relevant information, results and challenges reach beneficiaries, donors, media and other stakeholders in a timely, transparent and accountable manner. To ensure effective communication, the necessary information technology infrastructure is put in place, or expanded if needed. Personal information about beneficiaries of our emergency activities is treated in a dignified manner and any personal data is kept confidential.
- 4h) Throughout the emergency programme, we constantly evaluate our plan against newly obtained results and measure our progress against objectives and indicators. We monitor our programmes to regularly assess their relevance and impact on our target group. We carry out periodic and final evaluations and impact assessments to gain a realistic picture of the programme's achievements and the changes – positive or negative, intended or unintended – it has delivered to the target group. According to the information obtained, we realign and revise our programme and enhance future practice and strategies.

5. We maximise our impact through cooperation with partners.

Preparing and acting with partners

- 5a) We proactively engage in relevant partnerships (with all relevant UN agencies, INGOs and others) and actively participate in networks and emergency coordination platforms (of the government, the UN, and the civil society) in order to reach agreements on effective emergency preparedness and disaster response for our target group. This avoids unnecessary duplication of work.
- 5b) We foster a spirit of cooperation and actively exchange knowledge and information, tools and other resources with partners present in the emergency. We promote the collection and exchange of lessons learned among our partners to improve our services towards the target group.
- 5c) We work in conjunction with and complement the efforts of state governments, other civil society actors and international humanitarian bodies. Thus we ensure that our emergency activities are aligned with national priorities as defined by the authorities and the humanitarian aid community, while at the same time being guided by the best interests of the child.

5d) We recognise the state as the ultimate duty bearer, and we are committed to supporting its efforts in order to ensure that children are safe, cared for and protected during an emergency situation. We also wish to ensure that family and community-based care and protection is prioritised, and that interventions are guided by the best interests of the child.

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