



Statement on the second report by the Advised Further Inquiries Team (AFIT) regarding the Organisational Responsibility Relating to the Compulsory Indeterminate Placement (CIP) of Children in Syria.



1. Introduction

In 2023, the current management of SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V. first received indicative information that children and young people had previously been forcibly assigned to the Syrian national association for temporary care by Syrian state security authorities. Most of these children had parents who had been imprisoned by the Syrian authorities for political reasons. This practice did not and does not comply with our identity and international standards and statutes and we, the SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V., condemn these actions strongly. We reacted immediately and demanded a full investigation. Due to the independence of each national association, including SOS Children's Villages Syria (SOS CV Syria)¹, SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V. has only limited insight into local processes.

For this reason, we commissioned a team of independent international lawyers (AFIT) to conduct a special investigation to clarify these allegations and determine the whereabouts of the children. The investigation team began its work in June 2024, focusing on three key areas: the actions of the Syrian government; the structures and processes within the SOS Children's Villages federation; and the whereabouts of the children. In an initial, [first part of the investigation report](#) presented in August 2025, the actions of the Syrian government were examined in detail. SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V. has now received the second part of the of the investigation report, which primarily addresses organisational shortcomings, processes and responsibilities within the different units across the SOS Children's Villages federation.

The report reveals significant shortcomings in management structures. These shortcomings meant that the children's forced care was not terminated more quickly, and the whereabouts of most of the children remained unclear and were not investigated at the right time. In particular, the investigators identified several areas where serious omissions occurred. The investigations have clearly shown that this was a

systematic practice known to individuals within the federation, which was neither immediately stopped nor adequately addressed. Instead, it continued for some time after concerns initially emerged, with critical documentation of the process being severely neglected. Thorough investigations into the circumstances only began once the events became public and were perceived as reputationally damaging. These findings highlight significant gaps in the processes of the several bodies of the federation and raise questions about how the organization responded in politically challenging contexts where actions may have been constrained or influenced.

This statement outlines the key findings of the investigation and our intended course of action. Additionally, the report provides recommendations for action from the investigation team. We will implement these within SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V. and we will also promote their implementation within the other organisations concerned. Meanwhile, we will continue to collaborate with our investigation team and other partners such as the United Nations as well as the transitional government to locate the children and reunite them with their families.

We recognise our responsibility to continue this important investigative work and to lead by example in terms of transparency and accountability. We are committed to using the insights gained through this investigation to strengthen child safeguarding across all levels of the federation of countries and to push for the implementation of necessary measures. This includes critically reviewing and improving our structures, ensuring robust independent oversight, and fostering a culture in which failures are acknowledged and addressed and not hidden.

Only by learning from past failures, taking meaningful action, and holding ourselves accountable to the highest standards can we truly move forward as an organisation, and as a part of a global child protection movement.

We are therefore determined to take an active role in driving change. This involves not only

¹ For readability, the abbreviation SOS CV Syria will be used throughout to refer to SOS Children's Villages Syria.

implementing the recommended actions throughout SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V., but also advocating for their consistent, binding and transparent application across the entire federation. We believe that genuine credibility and trust can only be restored if structural change is not optional, but shared and enforceable for everyone.

2. Integrity of the investigation

After first commissioning the independent investigation by AFIT in 2024, we encountered initial resistance from SOS Children's Villages International (SOS CVI)². According to the investigation team, SOS CVI was not fully convinced of the need for a comprehensive review of the case and expressed reservations about the process we initiated.

Since January 2025, however, this stance has changed, with the need for a comprehensive review confirmed in May. To this end, SOS CVI proposed that the investigation commissioned by SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V. should be conducted jointly from now on. However, after consulting with our investigation team, we decided against this procedure. On the one hand, there were reservations that joint management would delay the investigation. Furthermore, conflicts of interest regarding the investigation could not be completely ruled out for individual employees of SOS CVI.

To strengthen the integrity of an independent and transparent investigation, we therefore decided not to directly involve SOS CVI in the investigation by AFIT. The lack of support for our efforts to clarify the matter from the beginning is regrettable, as early cooperation would have been essential to ensure a swift and thorough investigation. At a time when unified action would have been crucial to uncover the truth and support those affected, this lack of engagement was not only disappointing, but it also represented a missed opportunity to act with the urgency and seriousness the situation demands.

Nevertheless, we welcome SOS CVI's decision to commission its own independent investigation in May 2025. We hope that this will yield further results and meaningful insights that contribute to a thorough investigation of the cases.

3. Scope of the cases

An initial due diligence investigation, initiated by SOS CVI in 2023, initially identified 35 children believed to have been placed with SOS CV Syria between 2015 and 2018. This investigation was conducted in response to a report by the Independent Special Commission (ISC) published in June 2023 which examined child safeguarding incidents in several countries, including Syria. The report referred to allegations of the forced placement of children in Syria. The following investigation aimed to establish how many children were affected by this practice, whether they were still in care of the member association and if not, if they had been reunited with their families.

We now know that the number of children identified was incorrect. The investigation by AFIT revealed that a total of at least 140 children were cared for by SOS CV Syria after being handed over to its facilities by the Syrian secret service, most of them between 2013 and 2018. The majority only stayed at the association's short-term accommodation facilities in Syria for a few months. As far as the investigation shows, none of the children are in the care of SOS CV Syria today.

We are deeply troubled by the number of cases that have come to light. The investigation results as detailed in the initial report by AFIT clearly show that these were not isolated incidents, but rather part of a systematic pattern. This reality is both devastating and unacceptable. Such practices fundamentally violate our values and are incompatible with our standards and statutes. We condemn them unequivocally.

In light of this, we distance ourselves from the initial investigation by SOS CVI, the results of which have since been shown to be inadequate and unreliable.

² For readability, the abbreviation SOS CVI will be used throughout to refer to SOS Children's Villages International.



It is unclear on what basis the original 35 children were identified and why the investigation only revealed this number. The results indicate that the monitoring of the children and the initial investigation were inadequate and expose significant deficiencies. We expect SOS CVI to provide an explanation through their own investigation.

We will take responsibility and are committed to doing better by making the investigation into these incidents our highest priority. As SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V., we are determined to do everything in our power to locate all of the children and, wherever possible, reunite them with their families. To that end, we are working closely with the investigation team and other partners and will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to find answers.

4. Timeline and reaction by federation

The investigation concluded that the original timeline for the forced care and the SOS Children's Villages federation's knowledge of it were incorrect. According to the investigation report by our investigators, some employees across the federation had been aware of this practice for latest around 18 months before it was terminated in 2018.

The investigation has revealed that the majority of the children handed over by secret service were cared for between October 2013 and 2018. In an exceptional case in 2020, a child was admitted as a medical emergency and received the necessary medical care through SOS CV Syria.

Additionally, the investigation has established that SOS CV Syria had mentioned the care of children handed over to the facilities by security authorities in several weekly and situational reports regarding their programmes for emergency relief in 2016. The situational reports provided an overview concerning the programmes' activities and projects, as well as general information on funds received and used. They also contained details such as the number of children admitted, and specific information relating to them such as educational enrolment and family reunification. Meanwhile, the weekly reports focused

more on the children themselves, including photographs of them, details of their accommodation and the impact of the security situation on them. The reports were primarily written in English and were probably intended for distribution to employees within the SOS Children's Villages federation. It is possible that these reports were seen by senior staff at SOS CVI, the International Office for the region, and SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V.. Due to gaps in the documentation, however, AFIT cannot make a certain statement on the reaction by the federation in 2016.

Nevertheless, through the investigation AFIT has established that employees of SOS CVI and SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V. were aware of the children's placement as early as June 2016. With regard to SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V., one person had in-depth knowledge and two people had limited knowledge. At SOS CVI, around 15 people had in-depth knowledge of the children from 2016 onwards, while up to 20 people had fragmentary knowledge. We must conclude that the vast majority of employees at SOS CV Syria were somewhat aware of the children's situation. The Board President and the National Director had detailed knowledge. Furthermore, we must conclude that, from 2018 onwards, the senate of SOS CVI, and thus the governance level and other public service associations (PSAs) in the federation, had knowledge of this practice.

Meanwhile, investigations show that the practice only ended in 2018 after advice by SOS CVI and SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V.. In this context, SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V. also demanded structural and programme changes at SOS CV Syria, linking them to the continuation of funding. In 2023, the authorities attempted to place more children in the care of SOS CV Syria, but these attempts were rejected. At the same time, the investigation shows that there had been no public communication about the incidents until 2023. It was only after the ISC report was published that an initial investigation was launched, focusing on finding the children and reuniting families.

This means there was a gap of around 18 months between the placement of children first becoming

known and its termination on the instruction of SOS CVI. Additionally, the termination seems to have been primarily motivated by concerns about a potential loss of public reputation.

This, along with other documentation identified by the investigation team, also indicates that this practice, which violates the federation's guidelines, was not initially considered problematic. The lack of investigative efforts when the information first became known suggests that the extent of the practice was either not understood or greatly downplayed and that the implications from a child protection perspective were not considered. The focus of the due diligence investigation on family reunification in 2023 also suggests that the extent and significance of the incidents were not recognised in relation to our central goal of child protection, especially from a governance and safeguarding perspective. Together, these factors demonstrate major gaps in safeguarding at the time and highlight that important standards were not being met within the SOS Children's Villages federation.

AFIT's findings show that all parties involved failed in their responsibility to act swiftly and decisively. The lack of immediate intervention and investigation not only allowed the practice to continue for too long but also significantly delayed the identification and support of the affected children. These failings raise serious and painful questions about the effectiveness of existing due diligence processes and the willingness to confront uncomfortable truths when it mattered most.

As SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V., we strongly and categorically denounce the forced placement of the children. It is unacceptable that such a practice was knowingly tolerated, and that it took the international organisation 18 months to put a stop to it. This delay represents a deep failure to uphold our collective duty to protect the most vulnerable. We take full responsibility for the actions of our former staff and apologize for failing to address the issue immediately.

We also condemn the lack of transparency regarding the actions of the Syrian government when this issue first came to light. That the first public disclosure

only took place five years later, in 2023, is deeply troubling and contradicts our standards for transparency and accountability. At SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V., we consider it of paramount importance to thoroughly investigate these incidents – not only to understand how such failures could have occurred, but to ensure that they are never repeated. The children affected deserved protection, not silence.

5. Monitoring of documents, archiving and delivery of information

Documentation and archiving of documents

During the investigation, our legal team identified serious deficiencies in the documentation and archiving of cases related to the admission of children. This was particularly evident in the Emergency Response Programmes (ERPs) and the Intermediate Alternative Care Centres (IACCs), which operated alongside the regular SOS Children's Villages programmes in Syria from 2012 until 2019.

The exact operating structure of the ERPs and IACCs could not be clearly determined, in part due to the inadequate documentation. However, the investigation suggests that these programmes were initially set up by SOS CVI and SOS CV Syria, before being fully handed over to the Syrian national association. As the ERPs and IACCs were either phased out or transferred entirely to SOS CV Syria, further shortcomings in documentation became apparent. According to the investigation report, the handover occurred hastily and lacked proper procedures, including insufficient sharing of key child protection documents.

We strongly criticise the way responsibilities were transferred and the manner in which the documentation process was handled, as it falls far short of the standards we expect and does not align with our established guidelines and quality standards. We recognise that consistent, transparent documentation is critical – not only to protect the rights and well-being of everyone involved, but also to ensure accountability and transparency, particularly in complex or sensitive situations. Where documentation is lacking,

facts become obscured, the truth becomes harder to establish, and trust is compromised.

Delivery of documents for investigation

In order to reconstruct the relevant cases, AFIT worked primarily with documents from the period 2011 to 2018. Yet again, they encountered significant challenges in accessing complete and relevant documentation. The team found that some of the case files related to the IACCs were held by SOS CVI, not SOS CV Syria. However, only documents from 2015 to 2018 have been made available so far; data relevant to the time frame between 2011 and 2014 has not been provided. In addition, SOS CVI has not yet provided all information necessary to fully understand the governance structures of the respective programmes. As a result, this second report is unable to answer all questions arising from the investigation, and further investigation is necessary.

In the absence of comprehensive records, the investigation team had to rely largely on documents provided by SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V. and the Syrian national association. Although the majority of the documents examined were provided by SOS CV Syria, unfortunately, the investigation team has not yet received all of the requested documents, and in certain instances, has only received a response to explicit requests. Nevertheless, the report notes that since August 2025, SOS CV Syria has shown increased responsiveness and more proactive cooperation.

We are disappointed that there have been repeated delays and apparent efforts to stall the process by SOS CV Syria and SOS CVI, including the continued failure to provide the full set of requested documents. Such behaviour undermines the integrity of the investigation and contradicts our shared commitment to transparency and accountability. We strongly urge both organisations to engage with the investigation openly and without further delay, and to immediately provide all outstanding documentation. Full cooperation is essential to allow the review to continue and to fulfil our shared responsibility for transparency and accountability, and towards those affected.

Only with access to all relevant documents can the promise of full clarification be upheld. The protection and well-being of the children must always remain our highest priority. This requires complete information, not only to understand past failures, but to take meaningful steps toward locating the children and reuniting them with their families, whenever possible. We remain firmly committed to advancing this process with the seriousness and determination it requires and will continue to call on all organisations in a position to support the investigation to cooperate fully. Anything less would fail to meet the responsibility we owe to the children and others affected.

6. Organisational structure

Throughout the existence of the different programmes, such as ERPs and IACCs but also the regular SOS Children's Villages programmes in Syria, the investigation has uncovered a persistent lack of clarity regarding governance, responsibility and oversight. These circumstances are also responsible for the gaps identified, particularly in the documentation as described in the previous chapter.

From the outset, both programmes operated entirely independently of one another, with separate management structures in place. While the ERPs and IACCs were first managed by SOS CVI through the regional office in Damascus, the regular programmes of SOS CV Syria were under management of a board of directors of the national association. Although they ran in parallel, only a few individuals had insight into both programmes, notably the Board President and the National Director of SOS CV Syria. Although there was some crossover between the programmes, particularly among caregivers, a singular management was only established at a later point in time. Later, the ERPs and IACCs fell under the management by both, SOS CVI and the Syrian national association, before being seemingly transferred fully to SOS CV Syria.

These shortcomings were obvious even prior to the investigation: During the lifetime of the ERPs, multiple audits, investigations and assessments were

conducted, addressing concerns such as governance weaknesses, lack of transparency and accountability, and fraud. This lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities, both within the national association and beyond, has significantly hindered efforts at oversight and accountability. No single entity assumed full responsibility for the governance or documentation processes, either at the time of implementation or during subsequent investigations. The blurred lines of responsibility, particularly during transitions between organisational units, contributed to insufficient monitoring and a lack of transparency and led to conditions that ultimately undermined child protection.

This reveals significant gaps in our processes within the federation that we must urgently review and address with appropriate measures. As SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V., our central goal is to continuously improve our child protection processes and ensure that such situations do not happen again. We are committed to closing the identified gaps and implementing the recommendations of our investigators within our organisation.

7. Political context, relationship with government and compliance

The investigation revealed that the work of SOS CV Syria was characterised by close cooperation with the Syrian authorities from the outset – a result of the country's political and legal framework. In order to operate as a care facility in Syria, SOS CV Syria had to enter into a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL). Among other provisions, this agreement stipulated that MOSAL could guide the election of the board by the general assembly of SOS CV Syria in order to maintain neutrality. These conditions also required the Ministry's approval with regard to certain programmes of the Syrian country association, which in turn meant that the Ministry could make demands of the organization, such as the care of children that were forcibly separated from their parents. There was therefore consensus among the individuals interviewed by AFIT during its investigations that such instructions could not be refused. However, the AFIT

team could not confirm this assumption. It is conceivable, though, that the political situation in the country made it impossible to make completely independent decisions. SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit e.V. is of the opinion that rejecting the placement of the children would have been possible for the international level of the federation, which includes our own organization.

It was also found that the former deputy Board President and later President – who became the de facto President in 2013 and was officially elected in 2015 – enjoyed a certain amount of prestige and privileges with regard to the Assad regime. This can be explained by the close ties between her family and the Assads, given that her father held a senior advisory position in the Assad government. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the Board President had close ties with the MOSAL.

An internal investigation in 2015 revealed that the board had not been elected or appointed in accordance with the ministry's specified framework conditions since 2003. However, the investigation in 2015 concluded that MOSAL had decided against enforcing its own legal framework because the Syrian country association had accommodated the Ministry in the placement of children without parents. In this specific case, AFIT has not yet conclusively determined whether the children in question were forcibly separated from their parents due to political detention or were left without parents due to other causes. This question will be the subject of further investigations by AFIT. It is important to emphasize that this uncertainty applies only to this particular case. In other cases, it has been clearly established that children were forcibly separated from their families due to political reasons.

AFIT has also identified multiple allegations against the former management team of SOS CV Syria by former employees. These include reports of unfair dismissals, as well as favouritism and discrimination against employees based on their regional origin, religious beliefs, and affiliation to a particular denomination.

The Board President stepped down in May 2025 following strong calls for resignation. Additionally, the



former National Director has been arrested by Syrian authorities in summer 2025 and remains in custody.

These findings reveal an association shaped not only by difficult external conditions but also by significant and troubling internal instability. While the political and legal environment in Syria presents undeniable challenges, these must not be used to justify clear violations of our organisational standards and ethical guidelines. Our commitment to impartiality and child protection must hold firm and remain non-negotiable, even under the most difficult circumstances.

Where these standards cannot be guaranteed, it is imperative that this is communicated transparently within the federation. Silence or ambiguity in such situations not only undermines trust within our federation and with the public, it also prevents us from acting collectively and responsibly. Only through openness and communication can we develop joint responses and take protective measures that live up to our shared values.

One of our key tasks going forward will be to build a shared understanding of how we operate in politically sensitive and high-risk contexts and to jointly define the safeguards that ensure our principles are upheld, even under such conditions. Anything less would compromise the very integrity of our work.

8. Our next steps

In the coming months, we will receive the third part of the investigation report, which will focus on efforts to trace the missing children. On this matter, we will work closely with the United Nations and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP), alongside our investigation team. We remain committed to continuing our efforts until the children are located and, wherever possible, reunited with their families.

At the same time, we will further clarify the internal circumstances surrounding the issue, draw the necessary conclusions, and take concrete steps to strengthen our processes and structures. This includes implementing the recommendations put

forward by AFIT and, where appropriate, introducing additional measures of our own.

The protection of children is at the core of everything we do. It is our unwavering responsibility to uphold this commitment, regardless of external challenges or the context in which we operate. Only by openly confronting past mistakes, even if they are not ours personally, thoroughly investigating them, and learning from them, can we grow as an organisation and fulfil our mission with integrity.