



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**
INTERNATIONAL

WHAT SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES STANDS FOR – A LOVING HOME FOR EVERY CHILD

Hermann Gmeiner set up the first SOS Children's Village in Imst, Austria, in 1949. Today, SOS Children's Villages is a private, non-governmental child welfare organisation that is active in 135 countries. The main focus areas of our social work are care in a family environment for orphaned, abandoned and neglected children and comprehensive community-based social programmes for disadvantaged families.

World War II left thousands of children orphaned, uprooted and traumatised. Hermann Gmeiner was convinced that, in contrast to conservative, institutional care in children's homes, a family-like environment could provide these children with a good basis for their future. He questioned the traditional methods of caring for children without parental care and introduced an approach that was uncommon at that time: caring for children in SOS families.

Concept: Children need a family

Gmeiner's concept was based on four main aspects: every child needs the care of a parent who establishes a close relationship with each child. The children grow up in a family with girls and boys of different ages as their siblings. The family is part of a community that functions as a support system. Biological siblings are not separated if possible and if this is in the children's best interests. The model of the "classic" SOS Children's Village has been and will continue to be modified and adapted to local conditions and requirements. There are now, for example, SOS Children's Villages that have been integrated into housing estates, short and medium-term care places and assisted living facilities for young people.

Sustainable strengthening of families

Even though the number of children without parental care is decreasing in many countries, the number of children who, for various reasons, cannot live with their biological parents is increasing. This concerns an estimated 150 million children worldwide. SOS Children's Villages continuously works on developing child care methods and preventive support for families to be able to respond to the continually-changing requirements.

In this development process, community-based programmes aimed at preventing the marginalisation of children in society play a key role. With its family strengthening programmes, SOS Children's Villages aims to help families to support themselves in the long term, leading an independent life and raising children in a healthy and protected environment. This is the only way we can assure that children are not abandoned and can grow up with their family of origin.

Comprehensive support

In many countries we have for years provided comprehensive support services regarding nutrition, health, education and child care, which aim to support women and families in particular. Within this support process, solidarity and self-help among women, families and communities are very important issues. Community projects, such as child care that the SOS families themselves have organised, serve as a clear relief and protect families.

Implementation and enforcement of children's rights

SOS Children's Villages works according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and advocates the implementation and protection of these rights at international, national and regional level. We are particularly committed to the rights and protection of children without parental care. SOS Children's Villages has a consulting function in the UN Economic and Social Council and is, among others, a member of the Child Rights Action Group that supports the EU Child Rights Strategy.

SOS Children's Villages is an independent, non-governmental, social development organisation that provides care and support for children and disadvantaged families in 135 countries and territories and that advocates the concerns, rights and needs of children. Approximately 85,000 children and young people live SOS families and youth programmes; most of them in one of the 571 SOS Children's Villages. SOS Children's Villages also provides families with material, psychological and social support: Nearly 493,000 people participate in one of the 553 SOS family strengthening programmes. Approximately 297,000 children, young people and adults attend SOS schools, SOS kindergartens, SOS vocational training centres or SOS social centres. More than 894,000 single health services were delivered at SOS medical centres in 2016. In times of crisis and disaster, SOS Children's Villages helps through emergency relief programmes. In 2016, SOS Children's Villages supported children and families affected by humanitarian emergencies in 23 countries.