

# LEAVING CARE AND EMPLOYMENT IN FIVE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: AN UNDOCUMENTED PROBLEM?

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SOS CHILDREN'S  
VILLAGES  
INTERNATIONAL



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# PREFACE

A life of independence is an exciting and anxious time for young people. This is even more true for young people leaving alternative care, who are expected to acquire very quickly a level of maturity and self-reliance that will allow them to lead an independent life. What this means in practice is that they need to have the necessary employability skills to enter the labour market, while having to secure housing and financing, or continuing their education. Practice and research show us that many care leavers are often unequipped and unsupported to find a job. Without the necessary assistance and support, care leavers are at risk of social exclusion and of exploitation.

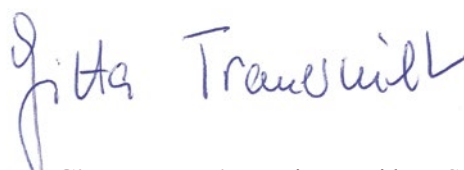
As a global Federation with over 60 years' experience in providing alternative care for children and young people worldwide, SOS Children's Villages is a leader in working with and for young people in their preparation for a life of independence. Given our experience as quality service providers and as advocates for children's rights, we work to shape the policy framework at international, national and local levels to ensure that young people are able to access their rights, relevant information and adequate services to ensure their continued development and well-being after leaving care.

Our work in achieving this task is best highlighted through our partnerships with international institutions, other civil society organisations, universities, and above all, young people themselves. The results of this work can be found in our Project "I Matter – Leaving Care Campaign" and "When Care Ends – Lessons from Peer Research".

Creating positive change for young people leaving care requires that we rethink how we best prepare them for a life of independence. This is especially true when we look at developing and increasing the employability of care leavers about to enter the labour market. However, as this research report shows, young people leaving care are at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to their peers in gaining employment. This disadvantage can be linked to a number of reasons: inadequate preparation for independence or support by public social services in accessing additional trainings, information or employment assistance once they have left care.

This report is just a snapshot of the critical employment situation of care leavers in five European countries. It is the first time that an attempt has been made to collect quantitative data on the employment of young people who have spent their lives in care. It shows that young care leavers are often being left behind and forgotten by those who are charged with the responsibility of ensuring their wellbeing. It highlights the systematic failures of the child and social protection systems to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of one of society's most at risk group. This begs the questions: where is the accountability of the State in protecting some of its most vulnerable citizens? Supporting young people leaving care in the field of employment will be an increasingly important priority for SOS Children's Villages International going forward – and one in which we are fully prepared to engage to ensure all young people receive the adequate support to access the labour market.

I would like to thank all the national partners who have contributed to this report, and to Professor Claire Cameron from the Thomas Coram Research Unit of the Institute of Education at the University of London who prepared this insightful report.



**Dr. Gitta Trauernicht**, Vice President, SOS Children's Villages International



# INTRODUCTION

This report is of a brief exploration of data collected on young people leaving care in five European countries with a view to ascertaining what is known about employment among this group, what support they receive and what policy measures might be developed (see Appendix 1 or methodology).

Young people leaving care are known to be disadvantaged, compared to their peers not in care, in many countries across the world. Statistically, they are often invisible. Without data documenting their particular circumstances and pathways it is almost impossible to quantify the problem and to develop supportive measures for a group of young people whose elevated needs for support were recognised when they were under the age of 18 and therefore children.

The specific objectives of this ‘national scan’ were to:

- Demonstrate if young people leaving care are disproportionately affected by, or at higher risk of unemployment, in comparison to their peers
- Assess the need for the collection of disaggregated data on young people and employment, to include young people leaving care as a going concern and vulnerable youth category

- Develop recommendations regarding young people leaving care as a youth group which require specific actions (at national and EU levels)

## Definition of young people leaving care

“Young people leaving care” refers to young people who leave care because they have reached the age when they are no longer entitled to special protection and assistance from the care system. The typical age of a young person leaving care is 18, however in some countries this can be up to 26 years, depending on various circumstances.

## Note on language and terminology

Countries vary in the terminology used to refer to children in, or leaving state care. For example, Hungary and Norway use the term ‘aftercare’, while Norway also refers to the group of young people as (former) ‘child welfare clients’ and Germany uses the term ‘care leaver’. Such differences relate to whether there is provision of care, education or support services for a group defined as care leavers, or whether the group are still in care even though they have passed the age of majority.

# FIVE COUNTRY PROFILES: LEGISLATION AND SIZE OF CARE POPULATION

**Austria** The legal right to support from child and youth welfare ends at age 18. Possibilities to extend support up to age 21 exist but there are considerable variations in implementation across the nine states. Post 18 support can only be given if the young person has already been a client of the service, he/she agrees to it, if the young person meets conditions that states impose, and if the continuing support is deemed necessary.

**Croatia** The Social Welfare Act 2015 defines welfare users as children aged 0 – 18 years without parental care, and children (0-18 years) and young adults (aged 18 – 21 years) with behavioural disorders. The Juvenile Courts Act defines minors (14- 18 years) and young adults (18-21 years) who are charged with offences. There are no special provisions in law for young people who ‘age out’ of care provision. The term ‘care leavers’ refers to those who leave any form of alternative care such as foster care, correctional institution or children’s home. Within social pedagogy, where there is a concern about behavioural problems, the age range is up to 21 years. For those leaving residential and foster care, the maximum age of assistance is 18 years.

**Germany** There is no legislative definition of care leaver although the term is increasingly used. Young people aged 18 – 27 years can access continuing support in the youth care system, but this is not restricted to care leavers. The basic federal legal framework for socio-educational provision for children with problems is the Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB) VIII. The central point of this framework, pertaining to all young people until the age of 18 (extended support for young adults up to age 21, and in exceptional cases until the age of 27), is the child’s right to assistance in their upbringing and education. Implementation is via local youth offices and independent organisations who provide services.

Legislation contains special provisions such as single or group accommodation with social worker support (called assisted living) or non-residential assistance (for example, counselling) (§41 – young adults, age 18-21). Accommodation is provided for in assisted living (§13) for young adults with a socially disadvantageous background who are enrolled on a school or vocational educational measure.

Unusually among this group of countries, the legislation includes measures on employment for young people such as SGB II (basic security for job-seekers) and the SGB III (employment promotion). In particular, a number of new divisions have emerged in practice between the SGB II and the SGB VIII since the implementation of the SGB II, in early 2005. Employable young people receive basic social services and a partly pedagogically-orientated assistance. Although the SGB VIII has a clear legal priority on the best interests of the child, in practice local municipalities exercise stringency in access to provisions for young people aged 16 -18. A study informant said that ‘more and more young people are released early from care and the legal scope of the SGB II is applied to them, which foresees the implementation of tough sanctions for young adults under the age of 25’.

**Hungary** The Child Protection Act 1997 defines aftercare conditions and methods, age limits, possible locations, professional rules and the required professional field of activity, the required professional qualifications for staff and the minimum number of professionals. Young people must agree to aftercare and aftercare services on a voluntary basis but use of services is based on a contract between the young adult and the service provider.

‘Aftercare’ is a personalized consultation and help for young adults, for one year between the ages of 18-24. Help with housing can be requested up to the age of 30. To be eligible, the young person must be unable to sustain a living independently, whether unemployed or employed, studying or waiting for admission into a residential institution. Currently, young people can access aftercare provision until they are 21 years of age; but if they are disabled, the age limit is 22; if they are in secondary education it is 24; or higher education it is 25. Aftercare service can be provided within foster care, a mixed age group children’s home or a supported living apartment, an organizationally independent aftercare home, or an external placement (supported housing, primarily an apartment maintained by the operator).

**Norway** The Child Care Act (currently under revision) specifies measures applicable to children under 18. Before the age of 18, there is a duty to ask the question and make a decision about whether to continue support, which can be by extending residential care placements for 12 months or ‘after care’ support, which can be until the age of 23. If services are used, they should be supported by a written plan. If a request for services is refused, the

authorities must give grounds for doing so, and decisions must always be in the best interests of the child. Young people can appeal such decisions.

### Size of in care population

Among participant countries, the proportion of children aged 0 - 18 years who are in public care is around .8% apart from Croatia, where it is about half that and Germany where it is 1.2%. There are broadly similar criteria for entry to state care, around abuse and/ or neglect by, or absence of, birth parents. However, figures for the 18+ population in or leaving care, where they exist, are not comparable across countries. This is because the entry criteria are not the same. In Austria and Norway, support is available as a continuation of earlier arrangements, while in Germany, young people can access youth care without a requirement for prior enrolment in care or protective services. In Hungary, accommodation and other support post 18 is conditional on both continuation and current enrolment in education, employment or training. In Croatia the system of accessing post care support was described as ‘chaotic’.

Table 1. Number and percentage of young people aged 0 – 17 years in care and ‘care leavers’ 18+ years of age

	0-17 YEARS (YEAR)	%	18+	%
AUSTRIA	11,074 (at census point, 2014)	.8	1250 <sup>i</sup>	N/A
	13,417 (over whole year, 2014)	.89		
CROATIA	3,260 <sup>ii</sup> (2012)	.4	N/A	
GERMANY <sup>iii</sup>	161,233 (2013) <sup>iv</sup>	1.2	28, 181 (up to 26 years of age)	.3
HUNGARY	18674	.8	2954	N/A
NORWAY	8681 (2014)	.77	N/A	

N/A = not available

i refers to the number of young people whose application for prolonging care was approved in 2014. This may underestimate the total number who were living in care placements.

ii refers to children in state run children’s homes: 66% foster care, 34% institutions. Source: Ministry of Social Policy and Youth

iii Source: Statistisches Bundesamt: Statistiken der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – Erzieherische Hilfen; 2013; compilation and calculations by Arbeitsstelle Kinder- und Jugendhilfestatistik (<http://www.hzemonitor.akjstat.tu-dortmund.de/>). The figures represent an estimate of the number of children in care during the year and include the number of episodes of care that came to an end. It may be an overestimation of the actual number of young people living in care placements (Tueber, p.c).

iv accommodation according to §§ 33, 34 and 27,2 Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB) VIII



# LEAVING CARE

Little official data is collected at a national level about the numbers and characteristics of young people leaving care. Table 2 largely presents the ‘best guess’ of study informants; Table 2a presents more detailed data for Germany.

While in Croatia there is no official data on ageing out of care, an indication of patterns can be gained from the following data relating to state children’s homes. According to the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, in 2014, there were 716 children in children’s homes (64 living in housing communities) and 296 children living in correctional institutions/residential treatment institutions for children and youth with behavioural problems (22 in housing communities) and 2403 children in foster families. Of these, 71 children left children’s homes (and returned to birth families), 47 went to foster care family from children’s home, and 33 children were adopted from children’s homes. Since placements are relatively stable, it might reasonably be assumed that those leaving children’s homes for birth families relate to young people ageing out of care. Norwegian data refers to a much broader group than those in or ageing out of care placements. Within child protection services, it is possible to have supervised semi-independent living arrangements, economic support, help to find housing and the provision of a support person. This means the number of young people receiving support does not reflect the number of young people ageing out of care.



Table 2. Numbers ageing out of care each year

	OFFICIAL DATA	ESTIMATE	NOTES
AUSTRIA	N/A	300	Estimated on basis of SOS CV and other residential care provision (excluding foster care)
CROATIA	N/A	1-200	Estimated on basis of number who left children’s homes, foster care and those with behavioural difficulties using after care services
GERMANY (2013)	See Table 2a		Provision for young people continues after age 18
HUNGARY (2014)	1662		1153 entered after care provision
NORWAY	N/A	3787	Number of young people aged 18 – 22 receiving support from child protection services at census point 31.12.2014. (www.ssbo.no)



**Table 2a: Young people (0-26 years) leaving care (foster care and residential care) (Germany; 2013; completed accommodation)**

YEARS	YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE <sup>i</sup>	PERCENTAGE <sup>i</sup>
0-17 YEARS	35818	0.3%
16-17 YEARS	10790	0.7%
18-20 YEARS	13247	0.5%
21-26 YEARS	981	0.0% <sup>iii</sup>

i accommodation according to §§ 33, 34 and 27,2 SGB VIII

ii refers to the age-group in population

iii 0.02%

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt: Statistiken der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – Erzieherische Hilfen; 2013; compilation and calculations by Arbeitsstelle Kinder- und Jugendhilfestatistik (<http://www.hzemonitor.akjstat.tu-dortmund.de/>)

Table 3 shows that for all countries where there is data there are slightly more young men than young women leaving care or in care. This becomes relevant when thinking about structuring employment and education or training options for young people leaving care.



**Table 3. Gender breakdown of care leavers**

%	MALE	FEMALE	ESTIMATE
AUSTRIA	51.8	48.2	Not care leavers but combined total of those in residential care and foster care
CROATIA	N/A	N/A	
GERMANY (2013)	52.5	47.5	Of those aged 16+ in youth care system <sup>i</sup>
HUNGARY (2014)	54	46	Of those in after care service
NORWAY	N/A	N/A	

i source: Statistisches Bundesamt: Statistiken der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – Erzieherische Hilfen; 2013; compilation and calculations by Arbeitsstelle Kinder- und Jugendhilfestatistik (<http://www.hzemonitor.akjstat.tu-dortmund.de/>)

## EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Informants were asked to supply information about school leaving qualifications for a) all young people and b) those in and leaving care, to ascertain the gap between young people in the care system and others. Educational qualification data is complex to present in cross-national terms, as educational systems vary across countries. Moreover, educational qualification data is rarely collected on young people who have been or are child welfare clients. Table 4 shows the available information; much of that pertaining to care leavers/those in care is on the basis of informed guesswork or small scale studies or studies with a selective sample (e.g., those in SOS facilities).

In Croatia, two studies carried out in residential institutions for young people give some detail which suggests that this group were generally attending

schooling, but this was on the whole in lower level academic settings. Maurović and Ratkajec Gašević (2015) found that, of 201 young people living in 12 institutions, with a median age of 17 years, just over three-quarters (77%) were male. Of this group, 88 percent were in school, of which 28 percent were in elementary school and 68 percent were in high school. Two thirds of those attending school had achieved mark of 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent' in the most recent end of year assessment. In a further analysis Maurović (2015) found that of a sample of 228 young people in a slightly larger group of residential institutions, 54% were female, and there was an average age 16.79. Among this group, 79% went to high school, of which 53% were in three year high school for crafts and 26% in the four year high-school. Six percent did not attend school.

Table 4. Highest school leaving qualification, all young people and those in care/care leavers

Highest qualification/ proportion of cohort	ALL young people leaving school with basic certificate/ qualifications	Young people leaving care or in care with basic school leaving certificate/ qualifications	ALL young people Advanced school leaving qualifications (e.g. for university entrance)	Young people leaving care or in care Advanced school leaving qualifications (e.g., for university entrance)
AUSTRIA	22.3%	44.2% <sup>i</sup>	41% <sup>ii</sup>	10% <sup>iii</sup>
CROATIA	41%	68.5% <sup>iv</sup>	58%	26% <sup>iv</sup>
GERMANY	46%	80% <sup>v</sup>	48%	10% <sup>v</sup>
HUNGARY (2008/9)	54.9%	70.7% <sup>vi</sup>	45.1% <sup>vii</sup>	29.3% <sup>vii</sup>
NORWAY (2013)	64,280 left school at basic level	N/A	56% complete after 3 years and 71% complete after 5 years	N/A

i Figure taken from SOS-Kinderdorf Austria data (n = 156)

ii Remaining 34% are accounted for through the vocational training system – they are counted as in work

iii Estimate supplied by Stephan Sting, University of Klagenfurt

iv Figure taken from Maurović (p.c)

v Estimate, no data collected

vi Data on those finishing elementary school, refers to all children in public care

vii Sum of those with Gimnazium, vocational secondary school and vocational training school certificates, which permit access to different types of further and higher education

# DESTINATIONS OF CARE LEAVERS

Few data are available about care leavers' occupational status after the age of 18 years. In Germany, where the provision for care leavers is part of general youth care support, estimates are that about half of the young people receiving support are in vocational training or vocational preparation. A further 20 percent are employed, 20 percent unemployed and ten percent in further or higher education<sup>1</sup>. SOS CV Germany has conducted a study of about 600 young people and about 120 care leavers aged 18+. Using a questionnaire, participants were asked about vocational training and employment. Findings suggested it was quite hard for them to succeed in education and employment. SOS CV places emphasis on education and future prospects in its practice, so one might hope that graduates from SOS CV would be better qualified than

1 Statistisches Bundesamt was unable to supply more precise information for Germany

young people as a whole although there is currently no reliable data on this point. Dumaret et al. (2011) found that among 123 graduates from SOS Children's Villages facilities in France, two-thirds became independent without major problems by the age of 24–25. Moreover, among the three age cohorts examined the youngest had obtained a good level of high school and university diplomas.

Hungary has the most data on care leavers among participant countries. But because participation in education, training or employment is a condition for entry to the aftercare service, it is unsurprising that 90% of young people are in further or higher education. A further condition for accessing housing support through the aftercare service is that employment must be at a low rate of pay. Just 8.3% of those in aftercare are





employed and earn a low salary, or are unemployed. In 2014, just under two percent were disabled young people and waiting for a place in a social institution. SOS CV Hungary tries to track young people who were previously residents. To date, the picture is very varied, with many young people unemployed, some able to work, or have a succession of temporary jobs. Some young women are on maternity leave. Further results will be available by end 2015.

In Austria, SOS CV has also carried out some internal research. On this basis, it is estimated that two percent of care leavers are in higher education, 70% in vocational training or employed and around 28% are unemployed. Austria has a generous and extensive vocational training scheme for young people, which means that youth unemployment rates are among the lowest in Europe. This also adds to a perception that care leavers are supported through this and additional provision is unnecessary.



Croatia has almost no data on this topic. The only time a young person leaving care is recorded is when they leave an institution or caregiver. There is no obligatory follow up, and so no information about employment or education post 18. Small scale research and practice evidence suggests that most of this group are either unemployed, working in the black market or have temporary employment.

Norway has no national statistical data either. When young people are 18 they are entitled to support measures like any other citizen, on their own initiative and with no special assistance beyond that arranged prior to turning 18 under the Child Care Act. As a result, no information is collected on care leavers in official statistics. However, academic research, based on a longitudinal design, has compared child welfare clients with those who have not accessed child welfare services. Analyses over time found that young people who were child welfare clients were more likely to be at risk of mental health problems as young adults, fewer had finished compulsory school and more had had access to social assistance as young adults. Four years later, however, there were more positive outcomes, especially among young women, and those who had been in foster care or had come from immigrant backgrounds. Those most at risk were young men with severe behavioural or drug misuse problems. The studies further noted that use of aftercare support increased fourfold over the period 1990 -2005, and access to this support improved the chances of accessing further education beyond compulsory school (Nova report 9/2014; 3/08) and were also more likely to meet the criteria for a successful adult career<sup>2</sup> (NOVA report 10/09). More positive outcomes for those who access after-care provision suggest that a longer-term perspective on support would help improve the quality of life for care leavers further.

## EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

No participating country had data on employability skills such as informal education, non-certified education, volunteering, vocational training or apprenticeships that is not part of the aforementioned qualifications, holding a driver's licence or language or computer skills.

2 Criteria for successful adult career were: achieved at least upper secondary education; gross income above average; not received social welfare help; not been registered unemployed.

# COMPARISONS WITH ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

The Eurofound publication, ‘Mapping youth transitions in Europe’ provides data on youth un/employment, participation in education, leaving parental home and starting a family in EU study countries Austria, Croatia, Germany and Hungary. It does not include Norway.

The report notes that youth unemployment is high, at 23.4% on average in the EU28 countries (November 2013 data). This is a rise of eight percentage points over six years. Moreover, there is wide variation in rates of youth (15- 24 years) unemployment across countries.

Table 5: Youth Unemployment Rates in selected EU countries, 2013

COUNTRY	AGE 15-24	MEN	WOMEN	RATE OF CHANGE SINCE NOVEMBER 2007
AUSTRIA	9.7	8.5	11.1	24.4
CROATIA	49.8	50.5	48.8	108.4
GERMANY	7.7	8.3	7.1	-33
HUNGARY	25.1	24	26.6	28.1
NORWAY <sup>i</sup>	9.1	10.7	7.5	-
EU 28	23.4	23.9	22.8	53.9

i Data for Norway taken from OECD: <http://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=36499>

Since 2013, youth unemployment rates have changed little. OECD figures for 2014 suggest that in Norway and Hungary, unemployment among young people has decreased a little, while in Germany it has stayed the same and in Austria it has increased slightly. OECD does not include data for Croatia.

Estimates for care leavers suggest that their unemployment rates are around the average for the EU but are very high in relation to country contexts. In Germany, for instance, unemployment is on average just under eight percent for those aged 15 -24 years, but among those accessing support through youth care it is thought the figure is nearer 20 percent. In Austria, the gap between the estimated rate of unemployment for care leavers and other young people is around 20 percentage points. There is insufficient data for further, meaningful comparisons. Also worth noting is that the gender imbalance in the care population, with consistently more males than females, will also play out in the

unemployment figures. In Croatia, Norway and Germany there are more males than females unemployed, while in Austria and Hungary there are more unemployed young women than men.

The ‘Mapping Youth Transitions’ report points out that youth employment rates are at a historically low rate, at around 33% of 15 – 24 year olds, due to the effects of economic recession and slow recovery. Further employment trends are a rise in non-standard forms of employment among 15 – 24 year olds, such as temporary contracts, part-time and fixed-term contracts. These trends point to continuing uncertainty within the youth labour market in all countries but of relevance here are the trends in Croatia and Hungary, where the job market is particularly precarious. A study informant gave the example of life story interviews with 11 young people who had left care in Croatia. Their accounts were dominated by temporary work, being ‘off the books’, and having 10 – 15 jobs within a year.

Uncertain youth employment and unemployment has wider implications for European societies. As the 'Mapping' report makes clear, where young people cannot find, and keep, secure employment, they delay moves to independent living away from parents and delay starting families. This has consequences for societal prosperity. The pathways of young people who have been in care as children suggest they are very familiar with such delays. The YiPPEE study in five European countries (Spain, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden and England) found that, among 170 young people aged 19-21 who had some educational qualifications at age 16, and had spent at least one year in state care as children, most were delayed in acquiring the educational qualifications which permitted access to further and higher education, or were encouraged to settle for low level qualifications and vocational entry occupations. Their aspirations were highly normative, wishing to finish courses on which they were embarked, find employment and adequate housing, and, eventually, find a partner and have children (Jackson and Cameron 2014).

The 'Mapping' report finds that three markers of transitions to independence – leaving parental home, living with a partner and having first child - have become diversified and disentangled. Patterns of transition are partly linked to employment, and resources, but also to wider individualisation trends that are decoupling 'traditional' life events in relation to family formation. Ages of transition differ for men and women, with men making transitions later than women across all countries. Among the three study countries for which the Mapping report has data, the age of leaving home is lowest in Germany (24.1 years for men, 22.2 years for women) and highest in Hungary (29.2 years/25.9 years). Austria is closer to Germany (25.9 years/23.3 years). The average in Europe is 26.3 years. The phenomenon of leaving home for a number of years before living with a partner is most common in Northern Europe, where we might expect to find Norway, and less so in Southern Europe, where we might expect to find Croatia. Indeed the gap is just one year in Hungary and 3-4 years in Austria and Germany. Average age of having a first child is now around 30 for women and 34 for men, and study countries reflect this.



For young people who have been in care as children, the absence, or variable implementation, of accommodation or other support once they have reached the legal age of majority means that they effectively leave 'home' much earlier than other young people. In Germany there is provision to have support to age 27, but study informants state there is strong pressure from municipalities to discharge young people at age 18 years, or even earlier, due to the expense of continuing support. In practice, the threshold is high. Young people are going to court to ask for their rights to support to be upheld, which is usually granted. Without a reliable parental home to return to, young people who have been in care as children are often homeless, according to study informants in Austria, Hungary and Norway. In Croatia, young people in more rural areas, where there are no aftercare facilities, often do return to birth families, but in these areas there are no services to support employment, such as public transport, so young people cannot work or attend college programmes, and are stuck in the very environment from which they were previously removed.

Mike Stein refers to transitions to independence on leaving care as 'accelerated and compressed' in that, in the UK, young people leave care placements very early compared to other young people leaving home and they have to manage multiple transitions, life events and complex families simultaneously (Stein 2012; Hauari and Cameron 2014). Stein's (2014) comparison of European countries in respect of leaving care concludes that in postcommunist countries young people leaving care are more likely to experience transitions to adulthood that are 'abrupt and extended' than accelerated and compressed. But neither pattern reflected what would normally be expected for young people of their age.



# TOWARDS SOLUTIONS: CASE STUDIES

Some examples of practices to support care leavers were collated. Together, these ideas, and the challenges of operationalisation, may give some inspiration about how to develop policy and practice in European countries.

**Austria** Extended support is available not as care leaving but as prolonged placement if a young person is in education or training and they write to request the extension. Access to this support is very different according to where one lives and whether the regional state wants to provide the support. There was a legislative proposal to extend support for all care leavers to 21 years, but this was withdrawn due to the projected expense.

SOS CV provides a popular service for its former residents. This is a counselling office where young people can access support to find a job, help with psychological difficulties, or to find accommodation, and so on. Almost all the care leavers from SOS use this service but as it is restricted to those from SOS, the majority of care leavers do not benefit from it.

There is some evidence that children in care, and so care leavers, have an elevated risk of having special educational needs. Nearly 27 percent of residents in SOS CV have a diagnosis of needing ‘special education’ compared to four percent in the population as a whole. A study informant observed that children with such a diagnosis can include those who need to learn German language as well as those who have an identified learning problem. Both groups will attend integration classes in either special or mainstream schools.

**Croatia** Aftercare facilities are apartments in some cities with some bills paid and some personal support. In Zagreb, for example, there are apartments for the use of young people who previously lived in children’s homes, where the rent is paid and groceries are delivered. They might be visited once a week by support staff, but they are not taught to be independent. SOS CV has a semi-independent living programme where the apartment rent

is paid for six months, and then payments taper off if and when the young person is employed. The idea is that young people learn to manage over time. They can stay for up to three years but if there is no progress towards employment and self-managing goals after a year, they will be discharged from the programme. In nearly all cases, the programme works.

There is a problem with lack of completion of higher education studies according to SOS CV data in Croatia. There is a system of tuition fee and living costs payments for those young people who are studying, paid for by the Rotary Club. This means young people are covered financially. It is estimated that ten percent of young people who are care leavers enrol and two percent complete their programmes. A study informant believed the reason was a lack of psycho-social support at a time when their contemporaries were still living with, and gaining support from, birth parents.

In order to address high job and study precarity, a Croatian study informant suggested that care leavers should be able to access high quality mentorship from their first employment. This would be access to someone who could facilitate communication with employers, and assist with job searches, and help young people build up psychosocial skills. The issue of recognising and delivering special assistance to this group is politically current in Croatia, so this informant considered it a good moment to introduce new ideas for policy and practice.

This informant believed that addressing employment required a much earlier starting point in children’s lives. If children do not succeed in school, ‘we are just patching up later’. One example was in SOS CV Croatia, where ‘little schools of life’ begin at age 11. These are 12 – 15 scheduled group sessions each year on topics such as children’s rights, communication skills and social skills which all residents attend with the aim of helping them become independent. They also write up a development plan with an educator from an early age (11- 15 years

onwards) because ‘they won’t have as much time as their peers in families’ to learn how to manage on their own.

**Germany** Data collection about care leavers/young adults in the youth care provision is hampered by different levels of government being involved. As a federal state Germany has 16 Länder and more than 320 urban and rural authority districts or local municipalities. Transition to work is the responsibility of the federal government discharged through job centres. Young people in/leaving care are the responsibility of local authorities. A study informant was highly involved in a plan to get the two levels of government to harmonise and synthesise data in Lower Saxony in order to cooperate to get an information network underway. A further step will be to integrate information on young people’s mental health. One German study informant pointed out that ‘some young people leave care with no idea what to do, even from facilities, like SOS, that have good conditions’. She had observed a trend that care leavers are more successful in their vocational training when they are older, i.e. over the age of 20, and that they should be able to stay in care until the end of vocational training. Zeller et al. (2009) found that the employment emphasis in support for disadvantaged young people through a Workfare approach that imposes conditions on accessing social assistance can create difficulties or ‘traps’ in self-realisation of career ambitions. Applying these foci to young people from public care backgrounds causes particular problems in making the transition to adulthood given their particular life histories and personal development.

**Hungary** Extended support is available as ‘aftercare’, or personalised consultation and help for social inclusion for one year; accommodation up to age 25 in some circumstances (studying in higher education) through staying with foster carers, living in an after group in a children’s home or in a supported apartment. Each young person in aftercare gets a monthly allowance of €130 - €170, depending on their needs and educational achievement. One of the problems with the system is that, while generous, it does not fulfil its pedagogical role of educating young people to live independently. If a young person has more than a minimum salary, they cannot stay

in the provision, which encourages them to take low paid jobs, beneath their capability, to avoid being homeless.

There are several schemes to foster talent among disadvantaged young people, to which care leavers can apply. These schemes provide financial help to attend higher education, (Arany Janos Talent Fostering Programme), complete vocational qualifications (Arany Janos Talent Fostering Boarding Facility Programme) and scholarships and mentoring support in primary and secondary schools to enhance the performance of disadvantaged children (Tanoda programmes).

SOS provision accounts for about two percent of the total care placements. It provides long term, stable, family oriented support. Forty percent of those former SOS residents reached in a follow up study were thriving in adulthood. A study informant described a system of housing support where care leavers could buy a low cost apartment in a village but there was usually no employment, so young people were trapped. There is no data about the proportion of young people who buy such apartments. SOS would like to build up an Alumni Network of former residents as a low cost form of mutual support, perhaps facilitated through an aftercare worker.

**Norway** Norway has a system of ‘treatment collectives’ where young people aged 16 – 18 with serious difficulties live in community with adults, their families and children. They share everyday living, work and holiday together. In one example, there are 22 young people living in three houses, all of whom ‘have a long list of problems’, including drug addictions, family problems, criminality, difficulties in school and so on. They are all clients of child welfare services and are placed in treatment collectives with the aim of avoiding incarceration in prisons. The success rate is good. Two-thirds are drug free two years after leaving. Through living together, residents and adults develop strong, distinctive and meaningful relationships that encourage a sense of belonging and avoid a negative peer culture – ‘that can’t happen because it is the staff’s homes’ said a study informant. The treatment collectives are part of the privately run, non-profit sector.

# FACILITATORS AND OBSTACLES IN COUNTRY CONTEXTS

To begin to make recommendations about data collection on the employment of care leavers, we need to understand the policy and practice context. Five study countries reflect a small proportion of the Europe28, but may give some indications of facilitating factors and obstacles that might be addressed.

## *How professionals think about the age of majority*

There were several references from study informants to the ideological – professional landscape about what it is to be an adult. By age 18, it was said, one is legally an adult and therefore it is up to individuals whether to access continuing support – it should not be mandatory or provided as of right.

## *Freedom from scrutiny*

There was a connected point, in some countries, that ‘we don’t follow people all the time’. Data collection represents scrutiny of personal lives that might be unwelcome or unnecessary.

## *Concerns about cost*

Some study informants thought data collection on care leavers is resisted because it would lead to demands to spend more money. It was said that the cultural mentality is ‘it’s better to do nothing than to know and then have to do something’.



## *Fragmentation of responsibility*

Different layers of government can be responsible for different parts of the problem – such as states working with federal governments, with weak mechanisms for coordination. In some countries, the fragmentation is in the organisation of the professions, and it is no-one’s job to follow up care leavers and be concerned about whether they have employment or education or both.

## *Absence of recognition*

Most common was a reference to an absence of thinking that what happens to care leavers is seen as important to society – they are a largely invisible group who show up in later indicators of disadvantage, such as prisons, mental health institutions, homeless and unemployment statistics. Encouraged to think they are on their own, and often happy to be free of ‘the system’, they don’t seek help, and then, often, their situation deteriorates markedly.



# CONCLUSION

Study informants in all five countries recognised the problem that their national data collections do little to encourage identification of, and support for, young people who have been in care as children. Care leavers were discharged from care placements far earlier than their peers not in care, with little ongoing support. They were less well educated, and in some cases care and welfare systems encouraged young people to work in low paid occupations, despite their aspirations, and despite the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states, in Article 28, that ‘young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable’.

Currently, young people in Europe are disproportionately likely to be suffering from the effects of economic downturn: their unemployment rates are high, and patterns of employment are characterised by temporary, part-time and short term work. This is almost certainly the case for those care leavers who are in work; many are not.

Germany’s experience with supporting young people from public care backgrounds through employment training programmes is particularly worth scrutiny. Some evidence suggests that by making the focus on employment, the whole person, who often has a range of health and personal disadvantages, may be neglected.

To return to the study objectives:

- i) We do not have sufficient data to conclusively state that ‘young people leaving care are disproportionately affected by, or at higher risk of unemployment, in comparison to their peers’ but all the available evidence points in this direction;
- ii) All study informants agreed that there is a need for the collection of disaggregated data on young people and employment, showing the particular category of young people leaving care, but further work would have to be done to articulate a definition of leaving care that was cross-nationally agreed;
- iii) We make some initial recommendations below regarding young people leaving care as a youth group which require specific actions (at national and EU levels).



## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The term 'care leaver' is defined and agreed upon, within a framework of Rights. The 'Care Leaver's Charter' (Department for Education 2012) is a set of principles for practice including an obligation to respect and honour young people's identity; to believe in young people; to listen, inform, support, find a home; and, perhaps most importantly, to be a lifelong champion for young people. Adoption of such a charter of 'promises' would go some way to a rights framework at the level of professional practice.
2. Local, regional and national governments work together to record the employment, educational and housing destinations of young people leaving care as a group of vulnerable adults. Young people should be involved in the adoption of data plans so they know what information is being held on them and for what purpose.
3. The timing of planning for leaving care should mirror the transitions of other young people not in care. Young people should not be planning for leaving care when they are in the midst of educational programmes or vocational training, nor should they leave care placements with nowhere to live.
4. Leaving care schemes and systems should not include perverse incentives to take low paid work or to continually reenrol in educational programmes to avoid homelessness.
5. Models of support for care leavers into employment should not neglect young peoples' opportunities to study beyond compulsory school level in further and higher education.
6. Leaving care should be seen as a process and not an event. The process has multiple elements, which have their own timescales. Elements include housing, education, employment, health, finance, and someone to rely on, with the option to return to that person (or home/institution) at moments of difficulty, or to share success. There are examples of this approach to practice in various European countries, although overall, it is rarely visible. A costs and outcomes feasibility study examining expenditure on tailored and continuing support well into young adulthood compared with entry to prisons, mental health institutions, social welfare payments and so on, would be likely to show that continuing support was more cost effective as well as more socially just.

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# APPENDIX 1 METHODOLOGY

This ‘national scan’ took place between September and November 2015. Data sources were:

- Completed proformas about the situation for care leavers and employment in five study countries. Questions were:
  - name, job title and expertise in relation to young people leaving care
  - Definition of ‘care leaver’; legal age when young people are no longer entitled to special assistance or ‘age out’ of care
  - Legal provisions a) for care leavers and b) for all young people no longer living with their parents and no longer in full time education
  - Number of young people in care, and percentage of the child population this represents
  - Number of young people who ‘age out’ of care each year, by age group
  - Gender breakdown of young people leaving care in 2014
  - School leaving educational qualifications of young people overall and young people in and leaving care in 2014
  - Number & percentage of young people leaving care who are employed, unemployed, in further or higher education
  - Any information on the employment/education status of young people 12 months after they have left care
- Any information recorded on the informal educational attainment or employability skills of young people who have left care: for example, regarding Informal education, non-certified education, volunteering, Vocational training or apprenticeships, Driver’s licence, Language skills, computer skills or any other employability skills
- Skype or telephone interviews with study informants drawn from academic research and SOS Children’s Villages country representatives to check understanding of information provided. These interviews provided an opportunity to find out why data was not collected (where this was the case), about small scale research and advocacy work, and about case examples of practice.
- Study informants were selected on the basis that a) they were known to, or recommended to, the consultant as experts in their field in respective countries or b) were representatives of SOS Children’s Villages at the level of research and development.
- The report was drafted from data provided by study informants, and with reference to the Eurofound 2014 publication ‘Mapping Youth Transitions in Europe’, and supplementary sources such as OECD data, and independent research.
- The drafted report was sent to study informants for their comments, which were incorporated into the final text.
- A Skype conference call was organised by SOS CVI with country representatives on 8 January 2016 to discuss feedback.





**SOS Children's Villages International:**

SOS Children's Villages International is the umbrella organisation of more than 130 affiliated national SOS Children's Villages associations worldwide. SOS Children's Villages is a non-governmental and a non-denominational child-focused organisation that provides direct services in the area of care, education and health for children at risk of losing parental care, or those who have lost parental care. The organisation also builds the capacity of the children's caregivers, their families and communities to provide adequate care.

SOS Children's Villages advocates for the rights of children without parental care and those at risk of losing parental care. Founded in 1949, its operations are guided by the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



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