



BE THE CHANGE!

Partnering to improve the transition from alternative care to independent living

12-13 JUNE 2019
BUCHAREST

A. THE CONFERENCE

The “BE THE CHANGE!” conference shall bring together a range of stakeholders from the child care and protection area including representatives from the European Commission, Council of Europe, national Ministries, child ombudspersons, NGOs, universities, corporates as well as care professionals and young people themselves.

The conference is meant as a platform for discussing and recommending what key changes are needed at policy and practice level in order to improve the leaving care framework with the aim to ensure that the preparation for leaving care, the transition out of care and the aftercare services provide the individualised support each young person needs on the pathway to adulthood. One key aspect in terms of ensuring quality of the leaving care process is to invest into the capacity of care professionals working directly or indirectly with care leavers to better respect, protect, fulfil and promotes their rights.¹

More specifically the goals of the conference are to:

- ✓ **Listen to young people with experience in alternative care** and their messages on the preparation, transition and after care support that should be available in order for them to safely and successfully transition from alternative care to independent life.
- ✓ **Listen to care professionals** and their messages on how to improve the leaving care framework as well as their working conditions in order for them to be able to better fulfil their tasks and responsibilities while accompanying care leavers on their transition out of care.
- ✓ **Promote exchange between Romanian and other European stakeholders on good practices at programme and policy levels** relating to improving outcomes for care leavers and in particular the realisation of their rights.
- ✓ **Present the Leaving Care Training** and highlight how young people with alternative care experience are successfully involved in co-delivering some of its sessions.
- ✓ **Release a set of recommendations on Leaving Care** aiming at improving policy and practice for better outcomes for care leavers.

The event is co-organised by SOS Children’s Villages International, SOS Children’s Villages Romania and the Federation of Nongovernmental Organisations for Children – FONPC Romania with financial support from the European Commission DG Justice.

B. BACKGROUND

2019 marks the **30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** and the **10th anniversary of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (the Guidelines)**. In a European context, it is also the **10th year anniversary of the Treaty of Lisbon** that gives full legal effect to the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**. The Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union has chosen to put “**children’s rights**” at the centre of the debates, with “child participation” being more specifically in focus, thereby highlighting the importance of one of the key principles of both the UNCRC and the UN Guidelines.

Realising full and meaningful child participation in practice is necessary, yet one of the most often neglected rights of children. When it comes to children and young people in alternative care, the

¹ This conference is building on the “Children’s Rights in Alternative Care: Walk the Talk!” conference which SOS Children’s Villages International and partners organized in November 2016 in Paris. Key recommendations [here](#).

need to see their right to participate fully and meaningfully in the decisions affecting their life is at the very heart of what can and need to improve throughout their care path. This is especially important at the time they are preparing to leave care, transitioning out of care and taking their first steps in their after-care life. Listening to young people with experience in alternative care is an invaluable opportunity to receive quality feedback on their care experience and to collect qualitative data with the aim to improve care quality and the leaving care process for the next generations.

The Guidelines provide a valuable framework for the development of quality child care services. It provides clear recommendations to States to develop a range of policies and services for children and young people who leave their care placement when they reach the legal age, i.e. when they age out of care. The Guidelines also call for support to care leavers that allows them to “assume self-reliance and to integrate fully in the community, notably through the acquisition of social and life skills” (§131).

Creating a child care system that includes support for care leavers in a manner which promotes, respects and upholds their rights requires ongoing investment in legislation, strategic planning, structures and those responsible for implementation, including professionals and carers. This will reduce the risk of care leavers falling back on the support of social services as they move on to adulthood.

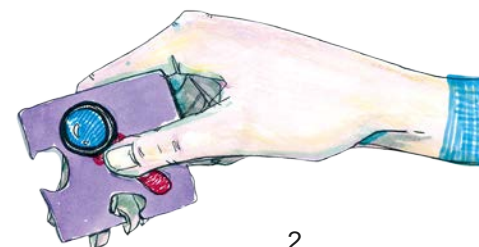
As part of the projects [Leaving Care](#) (2018-2020) and [Prepare for Leaving Care](#) (2017-2018)², financially supported by the European Commission DG Justice, SOS Children’s Villages, together with CELCIS, FICE Austria and FONPC Romania as well as with over 65 national and international partners, *the Prepare for Leaving Care Practice Guidance and Training Manual were developed*. This manual is a tool to develop both the skills and knowledge of care professionals on how to offer support and guidance to young people preparing to leave care, transitioning from care, and in after care. Up until the second half of 2019, more than 800 care professionals in 10 European countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain and Romania– will have been trained using this manual and with care-experienced young people as co-trainers.

C. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Participation of young people has been central to all project activities. Some of the young people with care experience who participated actively in the project will take the lead in preparation for and during the conference and bring forth their recommendations on how to improve the child protection systems to better support young people preparing to leave care, transitioning from care and in after care.

D. TARGET GROUP

- Delegations of the six project countries including young people with care experience who have been involved in project activities;
- Decision-makers who develop policies at local, national and international level (*representatives of Ministries and local authorities, departmental councils*), EU Institutions and International Organisations (*European Commission, Council of Europe, Eurochild, UNICEF, child focused organizations, etc.*), academia;
- Practitioners who work with children and young people in care or/and transitioning out of care;
- Representatives of Romanian associations (*Members of the network FONPC and partners*) and facilities which are members of the Child-rights Ombudsmen office, other associations;
- Romanian professionals from departmental councils and from the relating child-protection sector as well as actors from the field of social work education;
- Corporates who want to be involved in improving the situation for care leavers.



² Read the final publication of the Prepare for Leaving Care project [here](#).