

# BE THE CHANGE!

## Leave No Care Leaver Behind!

CALL TO ACTION



SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES



FICE  
AUSTRIA

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FEDERATION  
OF EDUCATIVE  
COMMUNITIES

AUF JEDES KIND KOMMT ES AN

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Federația  
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Pentru  
Copil

România



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Equality and Citizenship  
(REC) Programme of the  
European Union



## The context:

Numerous studies have highlighted that in Europe people with care experience are amongst the most socially excluded groups and are at greater risk of poor outcomes in education, health, employment, criminality, mental health and social functioning in general as compared to the wider population.

Leaving the formal alternative care system is an important phase for both young people and the service providers responsible for their care and development. All the efforts and investments made throughout the child's alternative care path risk being rendered futile if the preparation for leaving care, the transition out of care and aftercare services fail to provide the individualised support the young person needs.

Together with 11 partners, SOS Children's Villages International designed two projects that were granted funding from the European Commission (DG Justice) and that aimed at developing and implementing a state-of-the-art training programme for care professionals who work directly with young people leaving care in order to equip them with the skills, knowledge and tools they need to work with young people in transition. Creating a supporting network for care leavers as well as awareness raising and advocacy activities were part of the projects as well.

In the course of different project activities, we have listened to the voices of young people with care experience from ten European Union countries<sup>1</sup>: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Spain. Through peer-to-peer interviews, these young people have shared what worked for them during the leaving care process, what should remain the same and what should change, as well as what skills, knowledge and experience people who work with care leavers need to have.

The findings tell us that care leavers experience a range of emotions when leaving their place of care: a mix of happiness and expectations of freedom and independence along with feelings of loneliness, anxiety and, sometimes, fear. Care leavers have concerns about their protection, inadequate levels of support, the unsatisfactory manner in which support is offered, lack of access to services, and insufficient participation in decision-making. They feel their needs and wishes are not being fully met by those responsible for supporting them through the care leaving process.<sup>2</sup>

The content of this Call to Action comes from what we have heard from young people with care experience as well as from the professionals working with them. A draft was prepared before the conference "Be the Change! Partnering to improve the transition from alternative care to independent living" and was adapted based on the feedback received by participants and the conclusions that came out of the different discussions that took place in Bucharest on 12 and 13 June, 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> Five countries in the Prepare for Leaving Care Project (2017-2018) and five countries in the current Leaving Care Project (2018-2020). Both projects co-funded by the REC programme of the European Union.

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Cantwell, Chrissie Gale, Kenny McGhee, and Kate Skinner, *Prepare for Leaving Care Practice Guidance*, (Innsbruck: SOS Children's Villages International, 2017), p. 26.

## CALL to ACTION<sup>3</sup>

### Be the CHANGE!

#### ‘Leave no care leaver behind’

2019 marks an important year for children’s rights with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 10th anniversary of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states to ‘leave no one behind’ – we commit to ‘leaving no care leaver behind’ and to act now to ensure full respect, protection and fulfilment of their rights:

#### Action 1: Realise Care Leavers’ Rights in the Law<sup>4</sup> - at EU<sup>5</sup>, national, regional and local levels

- a. Ensure that all care leavers, without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of their own or their parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status, have the same rights and access to support and services<sup>6,7</sup>
- b. Allocate a specialised person of reference for each young person in alternative care as a minimum from age 16 to 24 in order to support them throughout the process of transitioning into independence
- c. Anchor the right of care leavers to access child protection/social services after their 18th birthday – a continuum of services is needed, enabling a tailor-made and progressive ageing out of care process depending on individual development and capacity and not on an ‘expiry date’
- d. Make ‘Pathway Planning’<sup>8</sup> and its regular review mandatory from age 16-24 as a minimum<sup>9</sup>
- e. Anchor the right to ‘come back’ for support if and whenever needed
- f. Anchor the right to be supported throughout education / study / work path – a few failures or change of direction on the way are allowed like for any other young person and do not result in losing support

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<sup>3</sup> Released after conference “Be the Change! Partnering to improve the transition from alternative care to independent living” – Bucharest, 12-13 June 2019

<sup>4</sup> A good practice to look into is the concept of “corporate parenting” that the UK and Scotland have recently anchored in their laws and which means that duty bearers should be doing everything they can for every child in their care – and every care leaver – to give them the opportunities that other children get. The purpose of “corporate parenting” is to increase the sense of accountability of duty bearers towards care leavers’ well-being. For more info see: <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council/policies-plans-and-strategies/health-and-social-care/corporate-parenting-strategy/>

<sup>5</sup> The EU is working on a ‘child guarantee’ and has been implementing the ‘youth guarantee’ since 2013. However, care leavers’ special status and complex needs are not fully covered in the youth guarantee. They are at high risk of falling out of those guarantees and being left behind. The ‘child guarantee’ should include the provision of adequate support for care leavers, since children in institutions are one of its target groups.

<sup>6</sup> The [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol](#) (A/RES/61/106), entered into force on 3 May 2008

<sup>7</sup> For specific recommendations related to young refugees in transition to adulthood, see the Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood, adopted in April 2019 [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016809416e1](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016809416e1)

<sup>8</sup> A Pathways Approach to leaving care is the initiation and implementation of a process that encompasses all necessary considerations and actions to meet the needs, circumstances and wishes of a young person when planning for and supporting the different stages of their leaving care process - preparing to leave care, transition or semi-independent living and, the move after care to independent living (adapted from Pathways Handbook and Pathways Materials, Scottish Executive, 2004), [Prepare for Leaving Care Practice Guidance](#), p. 68

<sup>9</sup> As of 14 is best but as of 16 as a minimum - Up to 24 years old as a minimum, but with the possibility to extend until 26

## **Action 2: Realise Care Leavers' Rights in Practice**

- a. Secure and encourage full and meaningful participation of care leavers in decisions affecting their lives<sup>10</sup>
- b. Ensure that support to care leavers is provided by professionals in a caring manner<sup>11</sup>
- c. Improve care leavers' access to relevant information (e.g. support the creation and existence of digital platforms which compile all relevant information for care leavers)
- d. Support care leavers in organising themselves in networks or associations to enable them to better connect to peers and supporters, thereby feeling less alone and increasing their capacity to assert and advance their rights
- e. Create a mechanism allowing care leavers to file a complaint in case they experience a violation of their rights – make sure they are informed about its existence and how it can be accessed
- f. Simplify administration and access to services – integrate services better – and improve privacy and data protection in administrative/counselling/legal proceedings
- g. Up-date basic and ongoing education of care professionals working with care leavers in a way that ensures they can acquire adequate skills – enable professionals to access capacity building initiatives and supervision
- h. Enable young people leaving or having recently left alternative care to participate in training care professionals to help ensure that child protection systems adequately respond to the realities of young people leaving alternative care
- i. Do not separate siblings because one of them is 'ageing out of care'
- j. Provide all necessary interventions for breaking the cycle of disadvantage with the goal of preparing care leavers – once and if they decide to be parents – to take care of their children in a caring and supportive way
- k. Improve inter-sectoral working across sectors, such as health, education, accommodation and employment, and with judiciary and legal professionals as well as other essential care professionals
- l. Regularly collect and analyse data on care leavers and their situation after care to accurately inform and enable efficient planning and realisation of needed services

## **Action 3: Allocate adequate funds for realising care leavers' rights (in legislation and in practice – at EU, national, regional and local levels)**

- a. Include in the European Social Fund Plus regulations a predictable proportion of funding to strengthen child protection and care systems, including ensuring adequate support for children ageing out of care
- b. Ensure the regulations of the European Social Fund Plus stipulate the need to reinforce services aiming at preventing the loss of parental care as well as measures ensuring the quality of alternative care services, including through the establishment of adequate policies and practice for care leavers
- c. Create a special fund to support care leavers that is quick to access especially when they find themselves in a financial crisis situation
- d. Support care leavers in securing decent accommodation – start-up help for first furniture, act as guarantee for rental contracts, cover additional costs (real estate agent fees, provision, etc.)
- e. Provide free access to health services including specialised support like psychotherapy

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<sup>10</sup> Also see the 'Bucharest EU Children's Declaration on Child Participation in Decision-Making at National and EU levels' <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1246&newsId=9380&furtherNews=yes>

<sup>11</sup> In the scoping that took place at the start of the project, care leavers highlighted that trust, respect and feeling genuinely cared for are the most important aspects of a relationship between themselves and those that support them

- f. Provide financial support to enable care leavers to study up to their highest potential
- g. Invest more in the skills, knowledge and abilities of all professionals and caregivers with responsibility to support care leavers, in order to ensure an enabling environment that allows them to undertake their responsibilities with enough resources and to do so in a caring manner

*Released in Bucharest on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2019 by care leavers across Europe and the professionals at their side*

## PROJECT WEBPAGE

Leaving Care: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/leaving-care-project>

## READ MORE

- Prepare for Leaving Care: <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/prepare-for-leaving-care>
- SOS Care Promise: [https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/2ccd4a43-00d9-489a-8eb1-b57089f08289/SOS\\_CARE\\_PROMISE\\_EN\\_Web.pdf](https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/2ccd4a43-00d9-489a-8eb1-b57089f08289/SOS_CARE_PROMISE_EN_Web.pdf)
- Decent Work and Social Protection for Young People Leaving Care: [https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/842a5811-fdb7-41c4-a0b2-45b0e5e79090/SOS\\_LeavingCare\\_web.pdf](https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/842a5811-fdb7-41c4-a0b2-45b0e5e79090/SOS_LeavingCare_web.pdf)
- Leaving Care and Employment in Five European Countries: An Undocumented Problem? : [https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/908bc3ed-244d-48d0-b8e1-d44d8cdd8e8a/SOS-CVI\\_Leaving-Care-and-employment-report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/908bc3ed-244d-48d0-b8e1-d44d8cdd8e8a/SOS-CVI_Leaving-Care-and-employment-report_Final.pdf)
- Preparation for Independent Living (I matter): <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/getmedia/db45016e-a5df-4995-819e-af02d6634347/Preparation-for-Independent-Living,-Briefing-paper-3-web.pdf>
- United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children [https://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative\\_care\\_Guidelines-English.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative_care_Guidelines-English.pdf)
- Moving Forward, Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children' <https://www.celcis.org/files/4514/5450/2144/Moving-Forward-implementing-the-guidelines-for-alternative-care-for-children.pdf>

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