

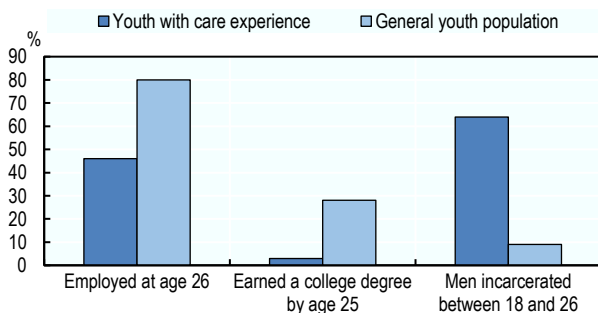
The OECD proposes a new project to improve policies for care leavers. The project will provide evidence on the life outcomes of youth who experienced out-of-home care across OECD countries, identify the key challenges these youth face when they become an adult and promote policies to support a successful transition into adult life.

What is the issue?

In many OECD countries, a small but non-negligible share of young people (ranging from 2-6%) experienced out-of-home care at some point in their life, living either in a residential facility or with a foster family. Among indigenous and immigrant populations, the shares are often higher. For example, half of the babies and toddlers in Canadian foster care have an aboriginal background while aboriginal children account for less than eight percent of the population in that age group.

Many youth who leave out-of-home care struggle complete upper-secondary or tertiary education or find stable housing and employment. Their employment rate is considerably below that of the general youth population and only a fraction of them will earn a college degree (Figure 1). Adverse, and in some cases traumatic, childhood experiences contribute to poor outcomes, but so does a lack of support during the key years of early adulthood. While young Europeans leave their parental home on average at the age of 25, out-of-home care typically ends when they turn 18 or shortly thereafter. Many of these youngsters find themselves on the street, without a place to go to. For instance, in the Netherlands, 60% of young homeless have been in out-of-home care.

Figure 1: Care leavers struggle to find stability



Note: The figure presents data on the United States.

Source: Fryar, G., E. Jordan and K. DeVooght (2017), *Supporting Young People Transitioning from Foster Care: Findings from a National Survey*, Child Trends, Washington D.C.

Although social protection systems across OECD countries support people in various ways, care leavers do not always find their way to these services or would need integrated services to make a successful transition into adulthood. The social costs of inappropriate action are considerable, and can include unemployment, prolonged reliance on social assistance, drugs abuse, crime and homelessness. Research has shown that it is less expensive to pay for effective transition support during a few years than for a lifetime of social assistance benefits.

Why is the project needed?

Many agencies responsible for out-of-home placements continue offering support beyond the legal age at which care is ending. However, there is no comprehensive overview of promising programmes and policies across OECD countries; and systematic impact evaluations of those programmes are missing. In addition, local or regional agencies are typically in charge of out-of-home care, leading to substantial policy variation even within member states. This situation makes it difficult for countries to learn from each other and to identify and implement successful approaches.

How the OECD can help?

To close the knowledge gaps, we propose to:

- ✓ Organise a kick-off conference bringing together policy makers, former care children, academic experts, NGOs and other stakeholders;
- ✓ Prepare a policy questionnaire for service providers across the OECD;
- ✓ Assemble relevant data to improve international comparison.

Based on the accumulated evidence, we will publish a first OECD-wide report on the topic, including:

- ✓ Identification of the size of the concerned population and their education, labour and social outcomes;
- ✓ Mapping of existing policies and programmes;
- ✓ Identification of good practices and margins for improvement;
- ✓ Concrete examples of efficient policies;

The report could be followed by in-depth country reviews, targeted at specific challenges and priorities of each country.

Further reading

OECD (2016), *Society at a Glance 2016 – A spotlight on youth*, OECD Publishing, oe.cd/sag

OECD (2015), *Integrating Social Services for Vulnerable Groups – Bridging Sectors for Better Service Delivery*, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264233775-en>.

Contact

Ms. Veerle Miranda, OECD Social Policy Division

Tel: +33 (0)1 45 24 18 73 – Email: Veerle.Miranda@oecd.org