



**Life after institutional care project:**

*The experience of care-leaving in Bulgaria seen from the care leaver’s point of view.*

*Preparing for Bucharest meeting, Bulgarian young care-leavers (in cooperation with the Bulgarian Foundation for Human Resources) created a questionnaire form and submitted it to their peers in order to monitor the lodging, working and educational opportunities available to them once they leave care as well as their approach towards care-leaving.*

*The aim of the survey was to delineate the network of currently available services and its weak points in order to underline the best practices and the facilities and services preferred by the youths in the area of the capital city, Sofia.*

*The survey showed that, usually, young care-leavers turn to NGOs, private agencies and friends rather than to Public Administration Services because the latter are not considered efficient. State institutions are not perceived useful to solve their problems. Care leavers feel they do not have enough skills to find a job when they leave institutes and, moreover, it is hard for them to benefit of dental or psychological care after leaving institutional care. Care leavers give a lot of importance to evening schools and vocational courses in order to complete their education.*

*They also consider very important to promote an individual approach to their issues instead of collective activities, and training focused on managing their future independent life while they are still under care.*

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**“Nice to meet you” meeting  
Young people on the care leaving path.**

17 care-leavers from between 16 and 25 years of age and about 10 educators and experienced accompanying persons coming from seven different countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine and France) attended the workshop, together with members of the IFCO youth committee, of Eurochild and of the Romanian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. The main peculiarity of the event was the fact that all the activities and the debates were entirely centred on the young participants, thus allowing them to take part actively in an international event and helping them to develop their self esteem and self confidence through the open expression of their needs and their worries.

The seriousness of the commitment and participation of these young people deserves to be mentioned because they expressed them in all the activities held during the meeting that were the following:

- I - A description, made on the first day, of the care-leaving process they are undergoing in this period.
- II - Specifically focused reflection workshops, held the second day, in which the participants were divided into two groups, one formed by young boys and girls who had already left the child protection system and the other formed by those who are going to leave it in a short time.
- III - An international debate held on the third day.

It is very important to underline some issues that came out during the meeting: the care leaver’s fear in facing the transition towards an independent life, the confusion that characterizes the information they receive and the lack of specific welfare programs. They also ask for a minimal social assistance (unemployment and lodging benefits and health care). They also pointed out the necessity (that should be



seriously taken into account) for more help on the journey towards independence, asking for more flexibility on some aspects, for instance on the age in which they leave boarding institutions, on the same care leaving strategies and on the eventuality of returning momentarily into the institution if they lose their homes. They also expressed their regret concerning the impossibility to complete their education even if they really want to and the fear of not obtaining the documents that are necessary to start an independent and autonomous life, such as the residence permit.

These young people often live a situation of emergency and precariousness, having the pressing need to find a job and a place to live in and, consequently, they are more focused on the material aspect of human existence than on the relationships and they do not have enough time to try to cope with the shocks they suffered and try to overcome them. Their five priorities are: lodging, education, social welfare and health care (these last two issues often represent a problem), making a family of their own and finding some friends. A house and a job are their bigger priorities, while education may be more or less important according to the country's social context.

The youths showed to be able to plan their own future, even if they divide their life in consecutive steps: (first they would like to find a job in order to be able to rent a room, so they may have a certified residence in order to obtain access to social welfare, etc...) rather than see it as an interconnection of all these different elements.

### **From the experience of Italian youths:**

*... Our biggest fear is not being able to do it: we are scared of loneliness, of the lack of protection, of not being able to find a job and a house...*

### **From the experience of a young Moldovan :**

*...I immediately liked the topic of the meeting and the working atmosphere. I also liked the friendship given from the adults that organised the event and the friendship that started*



*among us, the youths. Above all I liked the things said by the adults and by other youths, their experiences and problems, that helped me to reflect upon what I did and what I can do. I learned many useful things that I can take as examples. I would like to propose to organize this kind of meetings more often, presenting the positive and negative results of neighbouring countries...*

## **Life after institutional care: the KID project**

The last **5th June**, in the Olga Skobeleva Institute for Children without Family Care in **Plovdiv** (Bulgaria) took place the first European debate for the sensitization of public and private operators on the necessity to create new joint-ventures to help the social inclusion of youths without a family that leave the childhood protection system.

The event is part of the **"Life after institutional care"** project, co-financed by the European Commission and among the participants there were representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs, of the National Welfare Agency, of Plovdiv municipality and Chamber of Commerce, university professors, representatives of Italian industry and of the Bulgarian charities and social associations.

The debate, starting from the exposition of the accomplished researches, was a good occasion to introduce the commitment of "Amici dei Bambini" in Bulgaria through a new project (The KID project) that, starting from the researches' results, aims at giving employment opportunities to the young care leavers of Plovdiv region.

The goal, to be achieved in the next six months, of the KID project co-financed by the European Social Fund 2007/2013 is to support the socialization and professionalization path of young people between 16 and 20 years of age in a social risk situation, paying particular attention to the ones who do not have a family.

The event's target was to sensitize public and private agencies on the topic by proposing the necessity to enforce joint efforts to improve the opportunities of social inclusion for young people who grew up without family care. The debate was rich in contents and brought forth a concrete discussion between speakers and public during the morning. The issue that emerged more clearly was the necessity of collaboration between Public agencies and boards and private ones as well as private businesses, to help the social integration of young people after they leave institutional care.

Integration is very hard to achieve, as Professor Mihova of the New Bulgarian University points out: "It comes clearly out that youths that leave prison before being 29 years old have much more possibilities of social inclusion than youths leaving institutes".

## NEXT EVENTS

### European round table in Brussels - 9th July.



The struggle against social exclusion is one of Europe's main social-policy goals and the European Commission is trying to promote awareness on this issue, along with the spreading of good practices to fight it, all across the EU.

Building a more social inclusive Europe was considered an essential point of the EU ten-year strategic goal of becoming "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

Within the above mentioned framework, the project brought forth by the Italian association "Amici dei Bambini" involving partner-organizations from four other European countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and France) points out the issue of young care leavers risking social exclusion.

Considering the stakeholders involved, it is evident that local and regional authorities have always played a key role in developing and promoting social inclusion policies as stated by the European Union in defining the strategies to strengthen the Social Inclusion Process: "the participation of bodies such as NGOs, social partners and local and regional authorities has become an important part of this process".

The main topic of this international meeting will be the analysis of the problems and of the weak points of the management of the transitional services available to young care leavers at local level from governmental boards (i.e. the system public and private services providers interacting, at local level, in the phase of transition towards independent life experienced by institutionalised youths).

This international round table will aim at sharing the project outcomes related to the above mentioned topic and, starting from a set of inputs drawn from these outcomes, the participants will be invited to an open discussion. The commonly identified points of view will be transcribed in a position-paper that will be presented to the European Institutions during the forthcoming project activities.

For further information or to take part to the event please write to [alessandro.negro@amicideibambini.it](mailto:alessandro.negro@amicideibambini.it)

These recommendations will contain useful indications to improve the transitional services available locally enabling local authorities to implement their substantial role in supporting the social inclusion process for young care leavers.

## Life after Institutional Care



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#### Partners:

##### Italy

Istituto Ricerca Synergia

Regione Emilia Romagna, Ufficio Cooperazione Internazionale

##### Latvia

Ministry for Children and Family Affairs

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia

Latvian Foster Family Society

Centre Limbazi

##### Romania

Ministry of Labour, Family and Equal Opportunities, of Rumania

Directia Generala de Asistentia Sociala si Protectia Copiului, Sector 1, Bucharest.

##### Bulgaria

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Bulgaria

New Bulgarian University

##### France

Association pour la prévention et la Promotion de la Santé Psychique of France

Conseil Général de Loire-Atlantique

Université de Nantes

#### Forthcoming Events:

- July 2009 (Brussels, Belgium) - Second round table
- August 2009 (Cervia, Italy) - Final European conference
- September 2009 (Rome, Italy) - Third round table

For any further information about the project as well as about activities of Amici dei Bambini's Research Area, please visit the new forthcoming web site

[www.childout.org](http://www.childout.org)

This newsletter has been financed by the European Community. The sole responsibility on the content lies in any case on Amici dei Bambini.

