

Aftercare for Care Leavers: Learning lessons from across Europe

Conference concept note & programme

Date and Time: 13 October 2020 10:00-15:30. Online – hosted by Eurochild

Setting the scene for the conference

The transition out of public care is a challenging period for every young person concerned, particularly as they are likely to have experienced significant trauma in childhood. The process of ‘ageing out’ of care is supported very differently between and within countries across the European Union (EU). Some national child protection systems provide support for young people preparing to leave care and provide psychosocial aftercare support, while others offer little to no preparation for an independent life after their time in care. Given that children and young people with care experiences are a highly vulnerable group, not receiving support during their transition from care risks failing to prevent life lasting costs for both the individual and wider society.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has only served to exacerbate these risks, as the pandemic heightens risks of isolation and separation from peers, lacking access to education and livelihood opportunities, including financial support, housing, and other forms of support for their daily needs.²

With this reality in mind, Eurochild, together with our international partners, is convening a final online conference for the [CarePath project](#). The partnership involves 7 organisations working across four EU countries (Belgium: Eurochild; Greece: E-trikala, ERGO and ReadLab; Hungary: the Cordelia Foundation for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims; and Italy: the Institute for the Person-Centred Approach and the University of Torino’s Departments of Psychology and Law) working together to promote a trauma-informed care approach for children and young people ageing out of care. The conference will comprise of two sessions:

- a morning session (10h-12h30, CET) to exchange lessons on promising EU aftercare practices, identify gaps in national policy, legislation and service provision, and investigate how the EU can drive change; and
- an afternoon session (14h-15h30, CET) that will showcase how trauma-informed care is helping children and young people as they make the transition from care across Europe, especially during COVID19.

Attendees will be engaged from the EU institutions and international organisations, (sub-)national public authorities, NGOs, universities, corporates, as well as care professionals and, most importantly, young people with experiences of care themselves. While the CarePath project is EU-focused, given the online format of this event, participants will also be welcomed from beyond the EU. This conference will take place in an important crossroad in EU legislature, as the EU prepares to roll out its new Budget for 2021-2027, including the new

¹ Children with experiences of living in alternative care are over-represented in (available) national statistics relating to a host of social outcomes, in terms of physical and mental health costs, labour activity and costs to social, education and criminal justice system. For example see Heckman, J. and Karapakula, G. (2019) [The Perry Preschoolers at Late Midlife: A Study in Design-Specific Inference: working paper](#), National Bureau of Economic Research; and OECD/EU (2018) [Health at a Glance: Europe 2018: State of Health in the EU Cycle](#), which showed the costs of mental ill-health in Europe reaching 4% of GDP in 2018. Further, see OECD (2019) [Changing the Odds for Vulnerable Children: Building Opportunities and Resilience](#); and UNESCO (2019) [Policy Paper 38: Education as healing: Addressing the trauma of displacement through social and emotional learning](#).

² Better Care Network, the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and UNICEF (2020) [Technical note: Protection of Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Children in Alternative Care](#); Hope and Homes for Children and Lumos (2020) [Call to action to protect vulnerable families and children in alternative care across Europe](#); 1st International Care Leavers Convention (2020): [Declaration on Responding to the transnational needs of Care Leavers amidst COVID-19 and beyond](#).

Child Guarantee initiative within the European Social Fund+ and the EU's Recovery Package to support Member States' economic recovery from the pandemic. These instruments must be focused on enhancing the protection of all vulnerable children and young people, including those who age out of the care system during these times.

Background and context for the conference

By the best available estimates, approximately 1 million children are in alternative care across Europe.³ When these children reach the age of majority (18 in most European countries), they age out of child protection systems and transition to independent living. This is often a turbulent and exciting time for children from all backgrounds, as they rapidly gain independence through greater financial autonomy, the transition from education to employment, and to a new social environment. However, for children in alternative care this is an especially vulnerable time: the formal support network provided by integrated child protection systems, including foster families and/or other care professionals, may cease to support the care leaver once they have aged out of care. International human rights frameworks identify this period, referred to as aftercare, as an important and necessary area for State support.⁴

Aftercare should involve psychological and social support tailored to each individual, delivered by professionals who are trained to work with children who may have experienced trauma. With appropriate aftercare support, care leavers can transition to adulthood and independent living. Such aftercare needs to be focused on building resilience and self-reliance, as outlined in the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care. This type of psychosocial support is referred to as trauma-informed care approach, which is gaining prominence in a number of European countries.⁵

For over 10 years, Eurochild has continually advocated to end institutional care for all children in Europe. In line with the implementation of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, Eurochild promotes family strengthening and family- and community-based care for children in alternative care. This includes aftercare for care leavers that is integrated into national and local child protection systems, which is not currently available for every care leaver across Europe. Together, the project partners of the CarePath project are advocating to address this European-wide gap of aftercare services.

³ Eurochild (2010) [National Surveys: Children in Alternative Care](#).

⁴ The [United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child \(Article 20\)](#) outlines that children deprived of a family environment are entitled to special protection and assistance by the State. The [UN Guidelines on Alternative Care \(paragraphs 131-136\)](#) outline how aftercare should prepare children for self-reliance and full integration into wider society.

⁵ Trauma-informed care is increasingly seeing adoption in Europe. In addition to the CarePath project, in Sweden, [Save the Children \(Rädda Barnen\)](#) have been delivering trauma-informed care training to professionals for several years alongside Australian expert Dr Howard Bath. In Scotland, the [National Health Service Education for Scotland](#) have been implementing a National Trauma Training Framework across its services. There is also increased professional activity in this field amongst professionals in [Ireland](#) and the wider [United Kingdom](#)

Conference purpose & aims

- The online conference will raise the crucial need for the reform of national and local child protection systems across the EU so that all children and young people receive aftercare upon leaving care, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶
- Given the potential benefits for care leavers and society at large through quality aftercare, the conference will engage participants through exchange of existing practices, identifying gaps in provision, and investigate the role that the EU could play as a driver for change.
- Importantly, the conference will engage young people with experience of care. Therefore, the conference seeks to provide an opportunity for young care leavers to give guidance to EU decision makers on inclusive participation practices of children and young people who are ageing out of care.
- The conference will also disseminate resources and policy guidance developed under the *CarePath project: Empowering public authorities and professionals towards trauma-informed leaving care support*.
- During and following the conference, the CarePath partnership will engage attendees to show their support for mainstreaming trauma-informed care in European child protection systems by endorsing a Memorandum of Understanding.

⁶ The conference builds on the important momentum of other projects advocating for strengthening aftercare for young people leaving care, including the *CarePath project*, SOS Children's Village International's *Leaving Care* project, the European Care Leaver Network and other projects funded under the EU *Rights, Equality and Citizenship Action Grant*

Online conference programme

<p>10.00- 10.10</p>	<p>The online conference room opens at 10.00.</p> <p>At 11.05, as host Eurochild will open the conference with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome & introductions • Guidelines & <i>digital</i> housekeeping for the day
<p>10.10- 10:40</p>	<p>Opening session – introductory remarks and setting the scene</p> <p>- Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General, Eurochild (CarePath partner) – (chair)</p> <p>-- Dr Luca Rollé, Professor / Aggregate Professor, Department of Psychology at University Turin & CarePath project coordinator</p> <p>- Member of the European Parliament (TBC)</p>
<p>10:40- 11:10</p>	<p>Key note speech followed by Q&A</p> <p>Chair and moderator: Dr Luca Rollé</p> <p>'Supporting young people from care to adulthood: policy and practice in European countries'</p> <p>- Professor Mike Stein, Emeritus Professor in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York and joint founder and coordinator of the International Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood from Care (INTRAC) between 2003 and 2018</p> <p>Q&A</p>
<p>11.10- 11.20</p>	<p>10 minute break</p>
<p>11:20- 12:20</p>	<p>'How can Europe better provide for care leavers?'</p> <p>Roundtable panel linking policy, practice, & lived-experience to demonstrate opportunities for positive system reform and change for care leavers after they have left care.</p> <p>Chair & moderator: Professor Alberto Zucconi, Institute of Person-Centred Approach (CarePath Partner)</p> <p>Potential panellists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. International Civil Society: Richard Pichler, Special Representative for External Affairs and Resources, SOS Children's Villages International 2. Lived experience: Youth Council representatives from Empowering People in Care Ireland with CEO Terry Dignan 3. Lived experience: Ian Thomas, Practice Development Officer, Martin James Foundation 4. European Commission: Valeria Setti, Coordinator for the Rights of the Child & Rights Equality and Citizenship funding programme (DG JUST)

	<p>Q&A</p> <p>Closing remarks by Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General, Eurochild</p>
12.20	CONFERENCE BREAK / END OF MORNING SESSION
14.00-14.30	<p>The afternoon session examines how national practices are working to best support children and young people leaving care using a trauma-informed approach, especially during Covid19</p>
14.00-14.05	<p>Opening session and admitting participants.</p>
14.05-14.30	<p>Presentation of the CarePath project, partnership, key project outcomes and outputs for more trauma-informed care for care leavers across Europe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr Luca Rollé, Professor / Aggregate Professor, Department of Psychology at University Turin & CarePath project coordinator - Christina Karaberi, Psychologist at the Department of Research and Communication, e-trikala - other CarePath partners will have an opportunity to present their organisation and discuss how CarePath has impacted on their work.
14.30-15.20	<p>Roundtable panel: Discussion on how national practices are rising to the challenge to support care leavers during this traumatic period of pandemic across Europe.</p> <p>Chair and moderator: CarePath partner (TBC)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ioanna Georgouli and Panagiotis Sofios, Ergo (CarePath partner) – working with refugee care leavers in Greece. 2. Bálint Dóra, Cordelia (CarePath partner) / Ágnes De Coll, Hungarian Baptist Aid – supporting victims of sexual violence and trafficking in Hungary. 3. Care experienced advocates, SOS Children’s Villages International ‘Leaving Care’ project – what is been done across Spain, Romania and Austria (TBC) to support young people leaving care <p>Q&A</p> <p>Closing remarks by Sara Murali, Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, European Commission and Dr Luca Rollé, Professor / Aggregate Professor, Department of Psychology at University Turin & CarePath project coordinator</p>
15.20	CONFERENCE CLOSE