



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**

***Situational Analysis and Policy Gap
Assessment on
Young Care Leavers in Ethiopia***

Introduction

This policy brief summarizes the key findings of the situational analysis and policy gap assessment on young care leavers in Ethiopia as well as recommendations for change. The research aimed to identify and determine the gaps in the current policy, operational frameworks, and implementation regarding young care leavers in Ethiopia. The research also aimed to generate evidence to advocate for a conducive policy environment for young care leavers in Ethiopia.

The research analysed a comprehensive list of legal and policy documents, government guidelines, and working approaches of the government pertinent to young people and young care leavers in particular. The findings show that although most care leavers had a positive experience while in the care system, they face significant challenges when transitioning to independent living, including a lack of education, training, employment opportunities, community integration, and performing basic life skills. This, in turn, increases their vulnerability to poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion.

The situational analysis and assessment used a mixed-methods research design. The data sources for the qualitative method included policy documents, legal documents, guidelines, manuals, etc. and perspectives of key informant interviews from government and non-governmental organisations through focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIs). For the quantitative data, youth in institutional/residential care centers and those who were currently out of the centers participated in a survey to share their experience in institutional care and their perspectives about young care leavers. The main target groups for the quantitative survey were youth in institutional care centers (aged 15 and above) and those who were currently out of the care system. Including an additional 10% anticipated non-respondents or incomplete questionnaires; the total sample size was 429. The actual number of survey participants was 356 selected from 25 organizations. Of these, 78.1% were care leavers who were leading their independent life while the remaining 21.9% were still in the childcare system. In terms of gender, 59 % of the respondents were male, while the remaining 41% were female. The mean age of the participants was 24.75 years, with a standard deviation of 4.34. 85 % of the respondents were from a residential child care institution or formerly from a residential child care institution.

Part One: Key Findings of the Situational Analysis

1. Most young care leavers are satisfied with the services they received in the child care system

Respondents were asked in the survey to rate the level of their satisfaction with the services they received in childcare systems. Accordingly, 72.2 % rated that the services they received were enabling them to make life decisions. However, for 27.8 % of the respondents, the services they received have never enabled them to make decisions about their lives. Quite a majority (80.1 %) of the respondents indicated that their personal experiences in the childcare systems were enabling them to build on their self-strengths. Such enabling experiential exposure was a usual encounter while it was sometimes for 48.9 % and 31.2 %, respectively of the respondents. 19.9 % of respondents did not feel it was an enabling environment

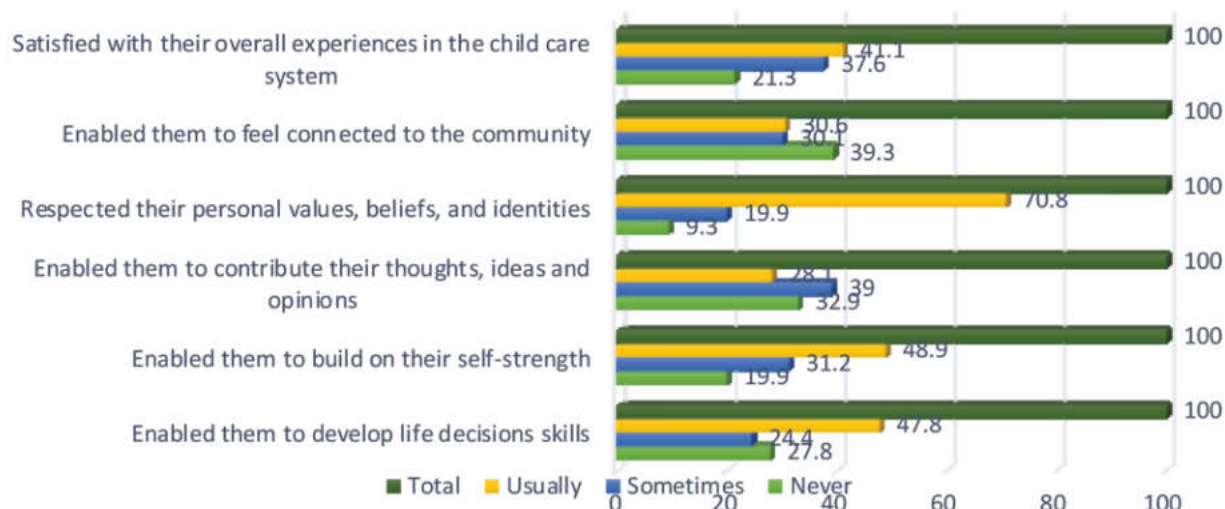
Of the total respondents, 67.1 % of them reported that the interactions they had with service providers within the childcare systems enabled them to contribute their thoughts, ideas and opinions freely. The frequency of such enabling interaction was however usual for 28.1 % and sometimes for 39 % of the respondents. Yet 32.9 % of the total respondents claimed that their interaction with the service providers has never been enabling at all.

A significant majority (90.7 %) of the respondents rated that the childcare systems they grew up respected their values, beliefs, and identities. With this, the frequency of such enabling conditions within the childcare systems was as usual for 70.8 % of the respondents and sometimes for the remaining nearly 20 %. Nevertheless, 9.3 % of the respondents reported that it has never been the same for them.

Much greater than half (60.7 %) of the respondents said that the childcare systems in which they grew up were enabling in helping them feel connected with the community. This was a usual feeling for 30.6 % of the respondents while the remaining 30.1 % did so only sometimes. Given that 39.3 % of the respondents declined saying that the childcare systems have never been enabling them to feel connected with the community.

78.6 % of the total respondents reported having felt contented with their personal experiences while growing up within the childcare systems. This was as frequently as usual for 41 % of the respondents and yet as occasionally as sometimes for 37.6 % of the respondents. 21.3 % of the respondents reported that it has never been enabling them to feel contented with their experience.

Figure 1 Respondents level of satisfaction with their experiences in the childcare system



2. Only half of the young care leavers feel they were adequately prepared to leave care

As indicated in Figure 2, 50.8 % of the respondents indicated that they acquired practical skills like cooking, shopping, budgeting and looking after themselves that subsequently supported them to be well prepared for leaving the care systems. 42.4 % however reported that they were not well supported for being prepared for independent living. The remaining 6.8 % of the respondents, whereas, took a neutral position in responding to this question in the survey.

70.2 % of the respondents said that they were not adequately provided with timely information about care leaving. Only 24.2 % of the respondents said that the childcare systems provided them with timely information that helped them prepare for their independent living. 5.6 % assumed a neutral position in responding to this question.

An important number (62.9 %) of the respondents indicated that they did not get training while growing up in the childcare systems that could help them prepare for care leaving. Only 37.1 % of the respondents acknowledged that they received training that got them prepared for care leaving.

56.7 % indicated that they were supported in the childcare systems to have developed an educational plan for their independent living in the post-childcare times. On the other hand, 43.3 % indicated that they did not get any training aimed at preparing them for care leaving.

A meaningful number (69.4 %) of the respondents indicated that they did not receive, within the childcare systems, any support that would help them develop an employment plan for their independent living in the post-childcare times. Only 30.6 % of the

respondents mentioned having developed their employment plans based on the support they got within the childcare systems.

Regarding having a health care plan for independent living, 51.4% of the respondents indicated that they were well-provided with support within the childcare systems. Yet, a bit closer to half (48.6 %) of the respondents countered indicating that they were not well provided with support for post-care health planning. Regarding having a financial plan, 66.9 % of the respondents indicated that they were not supported by the childcare systems in which they grew up. 33.1 % reported that they were well provided with support for the same.

53.1% indicated they were not well provided with support to help them prepare a life skill development plan for their independent living. In contrast, 46.9 % reported that they were well provided with support based on which they developed life skill plans for their independent living. Concerning accommodation plans for life after leaving the care system, 62.6% indicated that they were not provided adequate support. Only 37.4 % admitted that they supported in preparing accommodation plans.

Among the respondents, 60.7% indicated that they were not supported in developing plans for meeting their relationship/social needs in the post-childcare times. Only 39.3 % of the respondents reported that they were prepared to plan the same.

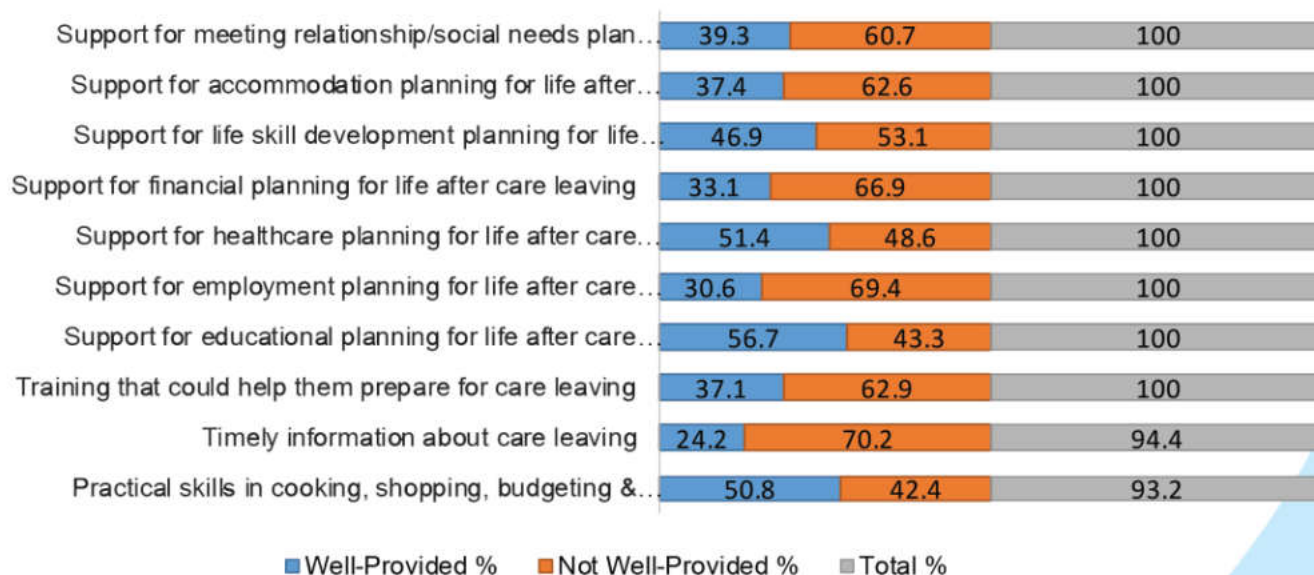


Figure 2: Respondent's rating of support received in preparing an aftercare plan

3. Despite facing many challenges, most young care leavers are satisfied with their lives after leaving care

Among the total respondents of 356, 278 were those who had left the childcare systems and started independent living. Of these, 64.5 % indicated that they were satisfied with their involvement in designing their aftercare plan (pathway). With this, 26.6 % were satisfied to a great deal while 38.8 % were satisfied to some extent. However, 14.7 % and 19.4 % of the respondents were not satisfied very much and were not satisfied at all, respectively. 32.7 % of the respondents reported that they were satisfied to some extent in terms of feeling safe in their current home or setting. 29.9 % were feeling safe a great deal while the remaining 21.6 % did not feel safe at all. 36.7% of the respondents felt independent to some extent in their post-care life while 21.9 % felt a great deal. 17.2% did not feel very much independent while the remaining 24.1 % did not feel independent at all.

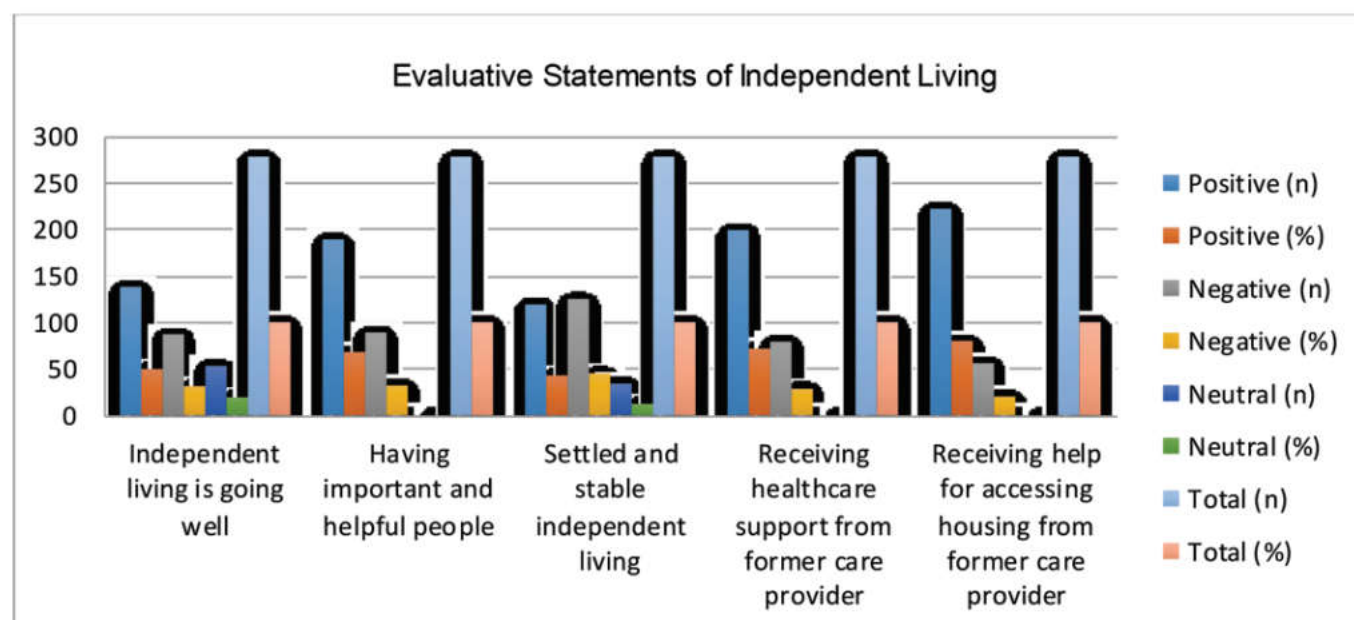
The respondents, who are currently leading their independent living were asked to evaluate the entire situation of their life after care. Out of the total respondents nearly half 49.6 % of them evaluated that their entire independent living is going well; 31.3 % evaluated it as negative, whereas the remaining 19.1 % assumed a neutral position. In the same vein, a large number (68 %) of the respondents positively evaluated that they have come across important and helpful people in their independent living. However, in another rating, 45 % of the respondents negatively reacted stating that they did not have a settled and stable lifestyle in their independent living.

119 (42.8 %) of them stated that they managed to have a settled and stable lifestyle while the remaining 34 (12.2 %) respondents responded neither negatively nor positively. Quite a significant number (199 – 71 %) of the respondents acknowledged in their evaluative statement that they have received healthcare support from their former providers of childcare services while only 79 (28.4 %) reacted negatively to this question. Receiving healthcare support from their former providers of childcare services was the final evaluative statement to which the respondents were asked to react. Accordingly, the significant majority (79.9 %) of the respondents reacted positively while 20.1 % of them reacted negatively.

The respondents were asked to rate the challenges they have faced in their independent living. Accordingly, 50.7 % of the respondents rated integrating with the community as very challenging, 24.8 % rated it as fairly challenging, and the remaining 14.7 % rated it as not challenging at all. 60.43% of the respondents rated leading an independent life as very challenging, 25.5 % rated it as fairly challenging and the remaining 14.1 as not challenging at all. In complying with societal norms and values,

38.1% indicated it as very challenging, 28.1% as fairly challenging, and the remaining 19.1% as not challenged at all. Generally, most of the respondents (76.6%) indicated that there was a vulnerability difference between boys and girls after leaving institutional care and other alternative childcare programs. In this regard, the majority of the respondents (62.9%) indicated that females are more vulnerable after exiting care programs.

A considerable number of participants indicated that society, in general, has a negative impression of young care leavers and believed that there is labeling, stigma and discrimination of these young care leavers.. Participants attributed some of the unhealthy behavioural problems observed to these factors while these behavioural issues could have emanated also from the lack of control from institutions.



Part Two: Key Findings of the Policy Gap Analysis

The lack of a care-leaving policy in Ethiopia has been a longstanding problem.¹ As mentioned above many care leavers in Ethiopia face significant challenges when transitioning to independent living, including a lack of education, training, and employment opportunities, integration into the community, performing basic life skills, and psychological and emotional development-related problems.² This, in turn, increases their vulnerability to poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion. Generally, care leavers in Ethiopia often lack access to support networks and are subject to discrimination and stigma.

The National Social Protection Policy (2016) although the policy recognizes vulnerable segments of society as its target group and outlines measures to support improving their livelihood, employment and living conditions, it falls short in several areas when it comes to young care leavers. For instance, it does not provide specific details on the types of assistance available to young care-leavers or how they can access such resources. Moreover, the policy does not address the specific needs of young care-leavers who have disabilities, which may require additional support. Its implementation has been slow and fragmented, with limited resources allocated to support its implementation. The implementation of the policy has been slow and fragmented, with limited resources allocated for its implementation.

The National Youth Policy (2004): Notwithstanding the national youth policy's emphasis on the importance of education, employment, health, and civic engagement for young people, the policy does not specifically address the needs and concerns of care-leavers, which is a group of young people who have experienced institutional care or alternative care arrangements during their childhood.

The National Children's Policy: There policy acknowledges the need to protect orphan and vulnerable children and aims to strengthen different alternative childcare settings. Yet, the policy does not specifically address young care-leavers as a distinct group requiring special care and support.

The Ethiopia 2030: The Pathway to Prosperity Ten Years Perspective Development Plan (2021 – 2030): Although the plan does not explicitly address the specific needs and challenges faced by care-leavers, it aims to enhance the social protection system and promote social justice, which may indirectly benefit care-leavers.

Gaps in implementation

Generally, there are limitations in preparing the care leavers for independent life. The support provided to them after leaving care varies from organization to organization. Some provide continuous support, while others stop their relationship after leaving care. The care leavers seem challenged by independent lives since they are unprepared for lives outside the care system. It was repeatedly mentioned that they were less trained to adapt the life outside the care system and obtaining different services has become challenging for them. They have also become victims of different abuses since they were not used to such a life condition. The government should play a part in ensuring that young care leavers face no systemic and institutional challenges once they leave the care facility. However, the government and care institutions are creating the necessary conditions for young care leavers to live independently. The current scenario seems that the young care leavers are forgotten by the care centers and the government after they leave the alternative child care systems.

¹ Takele et al., 2021

² Pryce et al., 2016; Takele, 2017; Takele & Kotecho, 2020; Takele et al., 2021.



In sum, due to the combination of these gaps, care leavers in Ethiopia often have trouble accessing vital registration documents, finding employment, accessing education, obtaining affordable housing, and accessing healthcare services right after leaving care from different alternative care programs. These challenges have led them to negative outcomes such as homelessness, poverty, begging, crime, addiction, prostitution and social exclusion. Young care leavers don't have anyone to talk to or discuss things with, so they don't have anyone to prepare them for what life is all about.

Recommendations

1. **Collective action from stakeholders:** To address the problems, challenges and issues identified in this study, governments and NGOs should work together to establish support systems that are more comprehensive for young people leaving care. Such initiatives could include job training and placement programs, affordable housing options, and healthcare access. Additionally, involving care leavers in the development and implementation of these programs is crucial to ensure that their experiences and needs are taken into account.
2. **Inclusion of young care leavers in policy and legal frameworks:** The identified gaps from the situational analysis call for the adoption of a standalone policy in Ethiopia. Crafting a stand-alone policy can give more advantages to the young care leavers and hence is recommendable. However, if a stand-alone is not feasible, a guideline for young care leavers needs to be in place that would give shape and elaborate the interventions targeting young care leavers within existing policies such as the Social Protection Policy, the National Children's Policy, and the National Youth Policy. As such using the revision of the National Youth Policy as a policy window, stakeholders should advocate for the inclusion of the issues of the young care leavers in the revised policy.

Thus, the youth policy document should recognise young care leavers as a vulnerable group of society and designate a section outlining their rights. The government should also have clear legal protections for care leavers that ensure they have equal opportunities to further education, employment, housing, and social services and follow up the enforcement of these rights.

3. **Provide comprehensive aftercare support and services:** The government and CSO working in alternative care should provide care leavers with comprehensive support services that include education, vocational training, housing assistance, and mental health counselling. These services should be tailored to the specific needs of care leavers and should be provided in a way that is accessible and responsive to their needs.
4. **Develop a national database of young care leavers:** The Ethiopian government should establish a national database of care leavers that tracks their progress and identifies areas where additional support is needed. This database should be used to develop evidence-based policies and programs that are tailored to the needs of care leavers.

5. **Increase awareness and advocacy about young care leavers:** CSOs, young care leavers, and the government should increase awareness and advocacy efforts to promote the rights of care leavers. This can be done through public awareness campaigns, training for social workers and other professionals who work with care leavers, and engagement with the community.
6. **Foster partnerships targeting young care leavers:** The Ethiopian government should foster partnerships with civil society organizations, private sector companies, and other stakeholders to leverage resources and expertise in support of care leavers. These partnerships can help to fill gaps in services and provide care leavers with additional opportunities for education, employment, and social support.
7. **Establishing and Strengthening Associations of Young Care Leavers:** It is crucial to facilitate the establishment of Young Care Leavers Associations. Already established Associations of Young Care Leavers need to be strengthened with capacity-building support so that they can play their roles of advocating for young care leavers' causes.