



A Brief for
Policy Makers

Leaving Care Policy Development - “Nothing About Us Without Us”

Listening to the Care Leavers

“I want to enable a world where investments are made to ensure those from public care and others affected by adversity everywhere, can reconnect, build and heal, free from shame and public stigma. This would be socially just, fiscally prudent and frankly just plain easier and better for the whole of society.”

“Those who decide about our lives have not lived our lives!”

“Not all wounds are visible, and just because they are not visible, doesn't mean that it doesn't hurt or needs no treatment, care or attention.”

“We don't need handouts but hand ups”

Young people transitioning from alternative care settings, often called Care Leavers, are identified globally as a vulnerable group. “Leaving Care” is globally defined as the point where the state ceases legal responsibility for a child receiving care and protection under the alternative care or juvenile justice system, generally occurring at their 18th birthday, when they are no longer deemed as a ‘child’ and hence are expected to age out of the care system. Unfortunately, most often, these young people face significant barriers during their transition to independence, the most critical being, left unprepared to leave care and not being supported after leaving care.

The process of leaving care is a transnational and global challenge. Even though there are several variations between care-leaving policies and the availability of support worldwide, the challenges faced by Care Leavers are similar everywhere.

Most countries lack a clear policy on leaving care. Care Leavers often become nobody’s responsibility and data

systems in most countries are not well established. Consequently, most Care Leavers worldwide face challenges in housing, education, employment, mental health and psycho-social wellbeing and social support networks.

A policy on leaving care must primarily aim to improve the life opportunities of Care Leavers as they transition to independent living. Any such policy must aim to improve their life outcomes and prepare them to leave care smoothly; support their active participation in decision making; and provide adequate and appropriate aftercare support.

This policy brief puts together the key guiding principles that can support policy makers while developing policies on leaving care, as expressed by Care Leavers themselves, during the 1st International Care Leavers Convention 2020.



International Care Leavers' Convention
November 23-25, 2020

Delegates from **83** Countries including **dignitaries, world-reputed researchers, child's rights advocates, policy-makers and Care Leavers**

2500+ Participants
(50% Care Leavers)

4 Pre Events	3 Main Days	1 Café Session	1 Closure Session
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Key discussion points



Better Preparation: Care Leavers must and want to be better prepared for leaving care. They need life skills training to live independently, financial skills training to be financially secure, education and vocational skills training to be employed. Also needed are emotional and interpersonal skills to navigate their way in the real world.



Participation and Inclusion: Care Leavers must be heard and allowed to participate in every policy that is made for them. They must be included in forums like UN Day of General Discussion (UNDGD) so that they can ensure genuine change for children and young people around the world. Care Leavers want to be included at the policy level and practice collaborating with researchers and practitioners.



Government and Civil Society: Most support from government and civil society goes to children in care. Adequate support mechanisms need to be developed for Care Leavers as well for their transitioning out of care especially in the trioka of needs, employment, housing and education.



Continuity of Relationship with Care Givers: Continuity of relationship is most important when a young adult leaves care. Often Care Leavers wish to continue to keep in touch with their children's homes social workers and other staff members but are unable to do so.



Safety Net: It is important to support the transition from care to independent living and creating a "safety net" for Care Leavers, with focus on housing support, job opportunities, vocational training, emotional support, social relationships and mental health.



Age of Care Leaving: The age of care leaving varies across countries. In most countries it is still 18 years, which is too early. Most of their peers at 18, who live with their parents, relatives, guardians in a family home, still continue to get support emotionally, physically and financially, unlike Care Leavers, who often have difficult childhoods, are expected to leave support unprepared on turning 18 years of age, which is just not fair. There was a consensus that "25 should be the new 18". It was shared that the age of 'readiness' to leave care differs from individual to individual and is not the same for everyone. It was noted

that in November 2020, the Victorian Government (Australia) announced that they would extend out-of-home care (OOHC) on a universal basis from 18 to 21 years of age, starting 1st January 2021. This shows the renewed interest by policy makers in improving outcomes for young people transitioning from care.



Housing: Several housing programs have been done for lower and middle income people by governments in different countries, however, Care Leavers have been missed out from such benefits. Most of them take temporary shelter in hostels, without basic services, in friend's houses and at facilities that impose restrictions on their mobility and freedom. Frequently, care leavers experience a higher risk of getting homeless.



Partnerships: Effective collaboration and partnership among various agencies are needed for improved access to services.



Adequate data systems and Information: The need for a proper Information Management System, including a tracking system for Care Leavers is much needed in all countries.



Power of story-telling and sharing: It is important that Care Leavers are not what they went through but what they became from it, thus narratives must exhort and focus on their strengths and resilience.



Care Leaver Networks: Peer led networks of Care Leavers act as a safe space for youth to connect and support each other. A Care Leaver thus shared her experience: "Some of the strongest and longest standing form of friendship is born from networks, as long as we have a strong network of care leavers and supporters, we can also be confident that someone within ourselves will be able to answer our hardest question."



Peer-Support: Care Leavers love to give back and must be encouraged in becoming "a giver than a receiver". Care Leavers themselves can teach younger Care Leavers in better preparing them for a life out of care. This participatory approach gives care professionals the opportunity to hear first-hand how young people are experiencing the leaving care process and to reflect together on how to improve these experiences for future generations of Care Leavers thus providing both the care professionals with care experience and Care leavers with agency, i.e. ability to make mindful choices.

Key considerations when developing a policy on Leaving Care

A. Co-creating policies with effective participation of Care Leavers

1. Each country must formulate clear policies on Leaving Care: currently, there are no major policies or laws on Leaving Care/Aftercare in many countries.
2. It is important that the policies are **co-designed** with Care Leavers at the center. This principle, should include the following factors:
 - i. Rights based approach that is empowering and strength based
 - ii. Social justice and non-discrimination
 - iii. Participatory
 - iv. Collective social responsibility
 - v. Global – make use of forums such as the UN Day of General Discussion
3. Care Leaver networks at country, regional and global levels: which act like a family of and by the Care Leavers. These networks must be encouraged, promoted and supported by policy makers.
4. Care Leavers Networks at national, regional and global levels must be encouraged, promoted and supported by policies on Leaving Care.
5. Care Leavers should participate in the shaping of services and policies aimed at children in care as well.
6. Policy makers must work with Care Leavers on enhancing their skills and leadership roles. Care Leavers must be given the space to speak out and express themselves and their issues through various methods and by abiding with proper structure and procedure.
7. **International Day of Care Leavers:** The UN may approve an International Care Leavers Day.
8. Policy makers must support Care Leavers to create their own agency and drive out dependence.

I. Financial Support

1. **Availability of adequate funding support:** Donors and agencies must commit resources to support research, programmes and interventions on Leaving Care.

2. Care Leaver Networks should be well resourced and funded since these networks can provide access to services to the Care Leavers directly and also these networks amplify the collective needs and aspirations of Care Leavers.
3. The pandemic has caused financial, food, housing and well-being constraints to the Care Leavers. Government must provide financial support, jobs, scholarships and reservations to Care Leavers, subsidized access to mental health services and other forms of support for a smooth transition to independent living.

D. Enable Smooth Transitioning for Youth Leaving Care

1. Policies must consider the stage and not the age of a Care Leaver. Leaving Care is a process rather than a point in time and hence it must be ensured that those who grew up in alternative care are not at disadvantage with respect to their peers who grew up in their families. The average age of People leaving their parent's home is 25, but Care Leavers, it is the tender age of 18 in many countries.
2. While making new policy or reviewing existing ones, efforts must be made to increase the age of care leaving from 18 to 25. The average age of people leaving their parent's home is 25 but for Care Leavers, they leave at the tender age of 18 in many countries and this must be re-looked.
3. Policies must ensure that Care Leavers are provided an option of keeping in touch with their caregivers from the child care system, as this supports their continuum of care and emotional connect.
4. The standard for operations and management of residential child care settings should always include by way of a clear policy, a pathway/reintegration plan in accordance to individual needs and interest of the child and provide opportunities, assigning clear responsibility to concerned agencies for social development, vocational training, etc., so that their employment opportunities can be increased and social protection measures be expanded¹.
5. Policies must ensure that a safety net for supporting Care Leavers has focus on housing support, vocational training, emotional support, social relationships, health issues, legal supports

¹In Nepal there is a National Council for Youth in Nepal for youth, belonging to 16-40 years age bracket, which ensures no youth is left behind. It works in partnership with Govt, Non Govt and Private sectors. The Council provides information and support for easy access for the resources. It also works as a youth incubation centre where they fund ideas and enterprise models and bridges the gaps with opportunities for the youth. The Care Leavers can be linked and integrated to the activities of the Youth Council and thus be part of the mainstream society.

Leaving Care Policy Development

- and provision of mentoring as well as employability support for a decent and dignified career option.
6. Policies must ensure that efforts are made to provide Care Leavers with access to the digital world so that they can have access to information, education, employment and other services including healthcare (both physical and mental), legal support and knowledge about their rights.
 7. All policies must always adopt a proactive rather than a reactive approach to mitigate the challenges and difficulties faced by Care Leavers.
 8. All policies must take extreme care and attention to issues of Care Leavers with disabilities as their needs are complex. They need better preparation in transitioning out of care and their places of accommodation, education and employment must always be safe and amenable to their unique needs.

I. Public Sensitization

1. Policies must focus to raise awareness on Care Leavers' situations among the communities, relevant government authorities, educational institutions, employers and all sections of society.

2. There must be a clear policy mandate to develop a database of Care Leavers in each country where there is a record of where they are, as well as their situations and needs. This will would help Policy Makers to have a real time data to take affirmative action for Care Leavers that is based on evidence.

Way forward

The "1st International Care Leavers Convention 2020" was a landmark event that brought together the Care Leavers from across the globe, and provided an opportunity to voice their issues globally, regionally, nationally, and locally.

It is time that the care leaving policies of different nations are reviewed to recognise Care Leavers as a vulnerable population that can yield multi-fold dividends to that country and its communities, if properly supported. "Nothing about us without us", must remain the key principle of policy making for Care Leavers.

This policy brief has been developed to serve as a guidance to policy makers while developing any policy on leaving care. It aims to stimulate further discussion amongst policy makers and reach a common professional consensus on formalised guidelines towards leaving care at global, national and local levels.

It is based on the deliberations of the "1st International Care Leavers Convention 2020" (ICLC) held from November 23-25, 2020, with a concluding session held on December 11, 2020 with policy makers from 9 countries. The ICLC also had a series of four pre-events that focused on specific themes. This brief also references the 11 gaps as outlined in the "Declaration of the Care Leavers", a consultative advocacy tool developed by 100+ Care Leavers, from over 25 countries, over several webinars held from July 2020.

This policy brief has been developed by the Organising Committee of the 1st ICLC 2020, comprising of Care Leavers Association and Network (India), Generations Never Give Up (Sri Lanka), Kinderperspectief (Netherlands), Latin American Care Leavers Network, SOS Children's Villages, International Office (Asia); Udayan Care (India), University of Hildesheim (Germany); Zimbabwe Care Leavers Network.

The Organizing Committee is grateful to all the Care Leavers, for their strategic inputs in framing this policy brief.

Follow these links to know more _____

[The Care Leavers Declaration](#)

[The takeaways from the 1st Care Leavers Convention, 2020](#)

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 [UC509HMTU0uz0JUSinlCINhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC509HMTU0uz0JUSinlCINhA)

 [Careleaverscommunity](https://www.facebook.com/Careleaverscommunity)

 [voicesofcareleavers](https://www.instagram.com/voicesofcareleavers)

 [CareVoices](https://twitter.com/CareVoices)