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COALITION FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN THE WIDER BLACK SEA AREA



Georgian Coalition for Child and Youth Welfare

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NO CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION: AGEING OUT OF CARE IN GEORGIA

Georgia's Child Protection Landscape

Georgia's social protection system has reached a tipping point. The State has made significant progress to reduce the numbers of children living in large scale residential care (from 6,000 children to 200 children). With increased numbers of family-style small group homes and foster care families in place, thousands of children once vulnerable have been given a new start. The transition from large scale residential care to alternative family-based care is an important step for Georgia's most vulnerable children.

However, the care system does not yet consider Georgia's most vulnerable youth: youth aging out of institutions or alternative family-based care who are not yet equipped to independently survive. There is a cliff or drop off point in Georgia's state care system that is extremely dangerous; state regulations stipulate that youth leave state care at the age of 18. Whether in large scale institutions, foster care or small group homes, a child's 18th birthday party is not cause for celebration. Every year, approximately 35-45

youth age out of state care alone; without social support, education, a place of permanent residence or employment opportunities, many are unable to provide for themselves and alternatively turn to criminal activity or prostitution to survive. The opportunities for education, vocational and life skills building are extremely scarce for these adolescents. Without social capital and a preparation process to equip adolescents with necessary skills for independent living, those able to avoid crime and prostitution often depend on the goodwill of service providers or former caregivers. The Committee on the Rights of the Child Report also identified this issue, stating, "[I]nstitutionalized children form a segregated underclass and face significant disadvantages in adapting to mainstream society once they 'age out' at the age of 18." The situation is particularly alarming for youth with disabilities and special needs. Against a backdrop of high youth unemployment (38%) generally, these youth walk towards a cliff at 18. At present, this vulnerable group is not on the priority agenda of the government action plan.

There is no single, integrated database on young people ageing out of care. For the situation analysis prepared by SOS Children's Villages, the Ministry of Education and Science collected data on 15 to 18-year-olds in state care who



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returned to their families of origin. Of these children, 199 teenagers left state institutional care in 2007, 15 left foster care, 14 left small-group homes, and 8 left SOS care (aged 15–23). In 2008, there were 679 young people aged 15 to 18 years living in care: 74 with foster families, 12 in small-group homes, and 31 in youth facilities run by SOS Children’s Villages. The responsible services do not have a unified database of care leavers and do not collect information on indicators such as education, employment and training, homelessness, health and well-being, delinquency and offences, or parenthood of young care leavers.

Youth leaving large scale residential care facilities are the most disadvantaged group, as they have the lowest level of education (in terms of academic achievement and enrolment in higher education) and face the most obstacles in securing employment. Group discussions with youths in residential care facilities reveal that few have been taught the skills of successful study and work habits; without parental guidance to build these habits and a sense of worth and potential, these youth do not have the motivation to perform. Most of these care leavers had no idea what they wanted to do in the future. Without role models and a sense of potential, they do value education and remain skeptical about finding employment. Many male focus group participants expressed a desire to join the army. They do not have the basic skills needed for independent living, such as communication or budget management skills, nor do they have appropriate study and work habits. Without these skills, many care leavers become homeless living on the street or in dire poverty, with some engaged in prostitution and criminal activities.

The situation is not as dire for youth leaving small-group homes as they receive more individual attention and the skill building opportunities within these environments. Although their enrolment in higher education is low, many go on to receive vocational training and employment assistance; their employment potential is good.

Fostered youths seem to have the same educational and employment opportunities as their peers who live with their families of origin. Young people in SOS youth care settings are better prepared in terms of communication skills, educational achievement, attitudes towards work and study, and employability, re more confident about their abilities, and receive emotional and social support. In SOS Children’s Villages, 63 per cent of youths attend vocational training courses, 28 per cent have certified vocational training, and 34 per cent pursue higher education. The employment rate among care leavers is 42 per cent; 26 per cent have an income above the minimum wage; yet only 3 per cent have social security. Only 17 per cent have inadequate housing arrangements; 9 per cent require medical support; 3 per cent are alcoholics; 8 per cent are young parents; and 2 per cent are single parents. (SoS Kinderdorph, 2008). This successful transition of care leavers to adulthood can be attributed to the following factors: 1) Clear and exact preparatory care leaving plan; 2) Effective mobilization of resources for care leavers; 3) Continuous support and supervision system. On the contrary, the number of homeless care leavers from other state care providers remains unknown.

Currently, forms of state care include: foster care (930 children are placed in all forms of foster care), small group homes (340 children), and institutional care (approximately 200 children). This data does not include private shelters and the institutions run by Georgian patriarchy.

Young people ageing out of care

There is no single, integrated database on young people ageing out of care. The estimate, provided by the member organizations of Georgian National Coalition on Child and Youth Welfare amounts to 35-40 care leavers on an annual basis.

The primary responsibility for providing child welfare services rests with the central government. Government



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commitments to child protection include “Law of Georgia on Social Assistance, 2006”, “Law of Georgia on Preventing Domestic Violence, 2006”, “Law of Georgia on Foster Care and Adoption”, “National Action Plan on Child Protection 2012-2015”, “State Child Care Program 2014”, etc.

The responsibility for child welfare and protection functions is fulfilled by Social Service Agency under the Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Affairs. Currently the Child Welfare Department of the Social Service Agency develops strategies to improve services and outcomes for children and families, monitors child welfare programs; and handles the financial and support services. The Child Welfare Department of the Social Service Agency works with state and local agencies to develop and implement programs in the child welfare field. For example, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) receive contracts to run and provide day-to-day management of small-group homes and day-care centres. The main organizations working on child and youth issues include [the UN specialized agency \(UNICEF\)](#), the Georgian Association of Social Workers, SOS Children’s Villages Georgia, EveryChild, World Vision, Breath Georgia, and Save the Children. They assist the state in the development of an appropriate legislative base and policy environment through consultations, training, study visits, and the financing of pilot projects. Local NGOs are involved in the implementation of government programs related to child welfare issues. The European Union Support to Child Welfare Reform Project, which started in 2006 and ended in mid-2010, had the following goals: to support the development of secondary legislation and child welfare policy for implementing reforms.

Legal and policy framework

To ensure that Georgia’s vulnerable youth have a future with potential and hope, joint efforts of state and non-state actors must focus on establishing support mechanisms for those youth who age out of care.

Leaving care has not been a political priority for many years; legal provisions regarding the organization of after-care services and support for care leavers are almost nonexistent. Although the National Action Plan on Child Welfare (2012-2015) includes the section on care leavers education and life skills acquisition, it does not provide any specific support with regard to housing, subsidizing utilities, employment and career counseling, psycho-social support, etc.

Based on the above-mentioned, Georgian Coalition for Child and Youth Welfare puts forwards the following recommendations that are deemed to be appropriate deriving from landscape analysis and consultations with the target group (mainly youth committee members of national coalition):

- **Youth empowerment with lifeskills** that implies development of such everyday practical skills and capacities among the youth that are essential in everyday life, for example, healthcare, sexual education, visual appearance, meeting everyday household needs, budget management, development of interests, relations with the state institutions, etc (MoLHSA, SSA, Service provider NGOs, Foster Parents, Social Workers, Caregivers, Youth workers, etc) (Local authorities and municipal social programs)
- **Emotional stability of youth** that implies self care, readiness to support others, realistic and optimistic anticipation and assessment of future (MoLHSA, SSA, MoES, Service provider NGOs, Foster Parents, Social Workers, Psychologists, Caregivers, Youth workers, etc)
- **Development of cognitive and social skills of youth** that implies development of skills for communication, conflict management, critical thinking, relationship building, networking and others. (MoLHSA, SSA, MoES, Service provider NGOs, Foster Parents, Social Workers, Psychologists, Caregivers, Youth workers, etc)



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- **Supporting vocational education of youth** that implies enrollment in general education, based on interests and skills of the youth, additional vocational education, professional or higher education, in order to support acquisition of profession (MoES, MoSY, Service provider NGOs, Foster Parents, Social Workers, Caregivers, Youth workers, etc)
 - **Youth employment and income** that implies job searching, employment and access to stable source of income (Service provider NGOs, MoLHSA, MoES, SSA, Local Business Partners, Municipalities, Job Councilors, Social Workers, Youth workers, etc) (Parliament and ministry of finances)
 - **Housing solution** that implies temporary or permanent housing options for the youth (MoLHSA, MoSY, MoE, Local Government, Mayor's Offices, City Assemblies, etc)
 - **Piloting/Development of those professions**, which will support youth in the transition periods (that implies further development of existing institutions, as a caregiver, foster parents, as well as introduction of new professions, such as youth workers). (MoLHSA)
 - **Accessible programmes / services** for all children and youth regardless of their sex, ethnical background and health status or other limitations. (MoLHSA) (Local authorities and municipal social programs)
- The concept of leaving care is concerned with the process that prepares the youth in state care (14-18 years) to transition into the adult life and facilitates the process of independent living after exiting the state care (18-23 years). The proposed recommendations will be programmatically outlined in a detailed concept note after the generic agreement from the responsible government agencies.

