



**Life after institutional care project: International round table Bruxelles**

Brussels hosted, the 9th of July 2009 a specific international round table on care leaving in Europe; the event, organised by Amici dei Bambini, was part of the project carried out in five European countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Italy and France) whose aim is to increase knowledge and mutual exchange of positive solutions for the social inclusion of young care leavers - a category at high risk of social exclusion- in Europe.

The struggle against social exclusion is, in fact, one of Europe's key social policy goals, with the European Commission seeking to build a better understanding of this phenomenon across the EU and to spread good practice. Building a more inclusive Europe was considered to be an essential element of the EU's 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 implemented by the Association Amici dei Bambini (Italy) and involving partners' organizations from four more European countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and France), addresses (as specific priority area) the young people without parental care leaving institutes. The project overall objective has been, in fact, to promote the development of European social policies aimed to social inclusion and equal opportunities in favour of young care leavers, representing all those who have been discharged or that are leaving institutions after a long time spent in residential care.

Considering the stakeholders involved in the aforesaid subject, 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 strategy for the Social Inclusion Process: "participation by actors such as NGOs, social partners and local and regional authorities has become an important part of this process".

Therefore, mainly representatives of EU Members' central and local authorities took part in the round table, together with representatives of EC DG of Social Affairs, of the European network Eurochild and of the European Economic and Social Committee.

A specific topic of the international meeting was the **analysis of problems and lacks related to the management of the transitional services** available for young care leavers at local authorities' level (public and private services system who interacts at local level in the phase of transition to independent life experienced by institutionalised children).

Therefore, this international Round Table aimed at sharing the project outcomes related to the above mentioned topic and, starting from **a set of inputs** drawn on the project, the participants were invited to talk in an open discussion. The identified and agreed views have been drafted in a position paper to be presented to the European Institutions during the forthcoming project activities.

**These recommendations** contain useful indications to improve the transitional services at local level, enabling local authorities to fully implement their substantial role in supporting the social inclusion process for young care leavers.

The recommendations focus on the importance to introduce **specialized professional figures** fulfilling the task of supporting not only the transitional phase of young people without parental care, but also to be helpful in the middle/long-term after they had left the communities. Moreover, it appears essential to promote for them **quality life-long education** and a better specific tutoring on **money management**.

You can download the first version of these recommendations at [www.childout.org](http://www.childout.org) and you can comment upon them writing at [alessandro.negro@aiibi.it](mailto:alessandro.negro@aiibi.it)



## Leaving care in Bulgaria: the KID project

The **5th of June** in **Plovdiv**, (Bulgaria), in the 'Olga Skobeleva Institute for out-of-family children', was held a round table to sensitize public and private stakeholders on the need to activate new synergies to facilitate social inclusion of out-of-family youths leaving 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 Agency for Social Services, of the Municipality and of the Chamber of Commerce of Plovdiv, university professors, representatives of Italian enterprises and of Bulgarian social associations (Agapedia, FICE, SAPI, BBBS, SOS Kinderdorf, Bulgarian Human Relationships Foundation, etc.).

The event, drawing inspiration from the undertaken studies, was also an occasion to introduce the new effort of Amici dei Bambini in Bulgaria, that will be concretised through a new project (**the KID project**) that aims, starting from the outcomes of the research that have been carried out, to the professional integration of young people leaving the childhood protection system in the Plovdiv's region.

**Guidance through a socialization and professionalization specific path for young people** between 16 and 20 years old in a situation of possible social exclusion risk, with particular attention to young people without a family: this is the goal of the project co-financed by the European Social Fund 2007/2013 "Human Resources Development Project".

The aim of the event was to sensitize local social operators on the subject pointing out the necessity of more and better synergies to face the problem of the social integration of out-of-family children. The round table was fruitful – if we look at it from a practical point of view – and brought to a constructive debate between the speakers and the audience. The most significant element, which came clearly out from the debate, was the necessity of cooperation between public and private sectors in both the fields of business and social welfare. The speech of Professor Mihova of the New Bulgarian University is worth mentioning: "from the research that has been carried out comes clearly out how young people leaving prison before 29 years of age, after several years of detention, have more opportunities of social inclusion than those leaving institutes".

## Care-leavers and leaving care in Latvia

### Focus on care-leavers interviews

The problems pointed out by the young care leavers are mainly related to the very big amount of time they have spent in childcare institutions.

Almost all the young adults say that the skills they lacked the most were cooking, dealing with money and dealing with everyday responsibilities.

They note that these skills were not sufficiently taught in the childcare institution. Some say that there have been a few lectures on the issues, but very few practical lessons, where they would have had the chance to put theory into practice.

The advices relating to the above mentioned problems include more practical lessons in those areas, as well as the idea of having group apartments for soon-to-be care leavers, where they could get used to independent life, to cook for themselves, to pay bills, to arrange their own life and not to have someone taking care of them, but someone, who would check on them and help them out if necessary.

They also underlined the importance of a more or less regular check by Social Services on the care leaver after his/her turning 18 years old in order to make sure that he/she is behaving correctly in a middle term period (something that usually does not happen).

For what concerns the Social Services (or as the interviewees say – the State), the young adults, in fact, point out that they do not receive enough support turning 18 years old.

They underline, among all the problems related to starting an independent life, that material and financial support is not sufficient. Even when they received, at the turning point of 18 years of age, apartments to live in; these houses usually needed to be repaired.

Moreover, they are not given any additional material support to do this; they usually receive an apartment with no or very few furniture and the technologies and the money they receive are not enough to buy all that they need. For instance, most of them cannot afford to buy a washing machine or a refrigerator, and they are forced to live without it until they can afford them (sometimes this means a couple of years).

A short period after leaving the childcare institution there is almost nobody who would help them to look for a job or to find a suitable educational institution. They are not prepared for this, and therefore often struggle in search of

a job and most of them (if they are not still studying when they leave the childcare institution) do not study anymore. As mentioned before, this is another reason why the care leavers wish they had someone who helps them to find the right path for the future.

Basically, from the interviews that have been made, what emerged is:

- A poor preparation for independent life after care leaving.
- Young adults have certain difficulties in understanding where to go if they are facing certain problems
- Young adults point out that the support they receive from the state, the Social Services or any other institutions is not sufficient– even though most of them note that they were not ready to deal with money
- Most of the interviewees have basic or vocational education and they point out the fact that their education is not adequate to find a job they would like to have
- For young people who have poor education, it is difficult to discuss their mid-term future. Generally men with basic education have no plans – “just live and get money”.
- There is no evidence of a clear plan of integration that could be agreed between the municipal social services and a young person after institutionalisation.

*Adapted from “Leaving the orphanage (draft), Life after institutional care, Ilze Trapenciere, University of Latvia.*

## Upbringing emergency: Education and leaving care

The conference “**Upbringing emergency**” was held in **Cervia (Italy) the 24th and 25th of August 2009**. Starting from the results of the “Life after institutional care” project dealt in particular (focusing specifically on the Italian situation) with the necessity of high quality education in order to facilitate social inclusion of out-of-family children.

The importance to grant a good and accessible education for everyone is now universally acknowledged as a key factor in order to contribute to a wider and sustainable growth and to improve social cohesion. In particular, the necessity of a good education is clearly pointed out as facilitating the social integration of those children, boys and girls living in disadvantaged situations or at risk of social exclusion<sup>1</sup>.

The **integration**, at school, of those children who do not

live with their families, comes in a moment in which the teachers’ behaviour may influence not only the child’s perception of him/herself, but also the way in which he or she might be received in the social context. At school, in the relationships with teachers and classmates, children not living in a family put themselves in another situation of estrangement.

These children need, at school, particular attention and a sensible and caring behaviour towards them, in order to prevent the possible uneasiness connected to their troubled familiar relationships (that may still continue in some way or may be completely missing) that can interfere even with the ordinary didactical activities.

A hospitable environment, created by a particularly sensible teacher, aware of the pupils’ needs can stimulate a supportive behaviour among classmates, thus giving a clear sign that the problems that one of the members of the group is facing in a certain period of his/her life can be understood and emphatically shared also by the other members. This can encourage the full inclusion in the group and an attentive and caring behaviour towards the pupil who is living a phase of his childhood or adolescence far from family love.

School should be able to receive out-of-family children and youths and to create an educational and didactical project that helps him to grow up, to learn, to enjoy the company of other people and, above all, to face the educational difficulties that, for those youths, can be various and can manifest themselves as the consequence of multi-problematic situations.

Upbringing is one of the most delicate and complex topics for care-leaving boys and girls, because the absence of the family comes out in a more evident manner. School, in fact, is often seen as a mere instrument, that is, as a tool that may be useful to get a job and not as a place of personal growth in which the student can invest in him/herself. School is perceived as very far from the real problems of the boys and girls that are about to leave residential care.

When boys or girls are 17 or 18 years old and (as usually happens, for instance, in Italy) are in a hurry to find a job and a place to live in because their time in the institution is nearly over, it becomes difficult for these young people to reflect upon their own studies and think to continue or even to complete them.

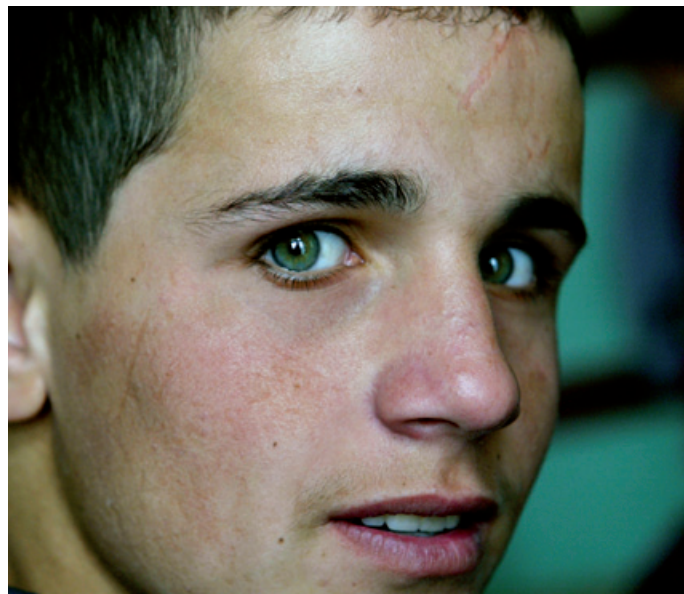
The incoherence between educational and welfare system may result in **real paradoxes**: for instance in Italy foreign boys and girls living in community care are at risk of not being allowed to finish secondary school because, in order

to remain legally in Italy after turning 18 years old, they have to find a job.

As boys and girls usually turn 18 years old when they are still at school, they do not obtain their secondary school diploma and they remain trapped in a vicious circle of unskilled labour, lack of qualification and hard and low-paid jobs, thus increasing the possibilities of social exclusion.

In order to facilitate the educational (and social) inclusion of out-of-family children, boys and girls, during the meeting, in cooperation with local authorities, representatives of the institutions and of the educational system, **specific guidelines** have been set and will be soon presented to the appropriate State Boards.

For further information please visit:  
[www.childout.org](http://www.childout.org)



## FROM THE WORLD

### Bolivia: national meeting of care-leavers

**Cochabamba (Bolivia) hosted, the 24th and 25th October, the second national meeting of young care-leavers:** four regional groups (Ajuca, Jovisdeibis, Asca e Cuentas Conmigo) - members of the international network **Il Melograno** - participated.

The meeting was an occasion to talk about actual policies concerning leaving residential care and social inclusion of young people without parental care.

For further information about the conclusions of the workshop please contact: [melograno.bolivia@gmail.com](mailto:melograno.bolivia@gmail.com)  
If you want to watch the video recording of the intervention of the Jovisdeibis group (in Spanish, soon in English) please visit: <http://www.youtube.com/AmicideiBambini#p/u/0/rgCHb5blfPY>

### Kenya: born the first care-leavers' group

Young people declared: **"We want to be the change.** We want to be the ambassadors for all those young people living in institutes in Kenya in order to help them as well as to advocate for adequate social policies for them".

This is the conclusion of the workshop made in Nairobi last June with 19 young people - who are leaving or have recently left institutes in the country - in order to analyse the life in institute and the path of leaving care from their point of view.

**The results was a specific report** on the life as a care-leaver in Kenya and the constitution of the first organised group of young people who have experienced life in institute; that group wants to be the voice of all those young people without a stable family and at high risk of social exclusion in the country.

For further information please visit [www.childout.org](http://www.childout.org)  
*(Life as a care-leaver in Kenya)*

## Life After Institutional Care



### **Ai.Bi. - Amici dei Bambini**

[www.aibi.it](http://www.aibi.it)

Tel +3902988221 - Fax +390298232611

#### Contacts:

**Monica Barbarotto**

[monica.barbarotto@aibi.it](mailto:monica.barbarotto@aibi.it)

**Filippo Agostino**

[filippo.agostino@aibi.it](mailto:filippo.agostino@aibi.it)

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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 Asistentă Socială și Protecția Copilului, 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:**

November 2009 (Rome, Italy) – Final 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)**

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