

ARGENTINA BOLIVIA BRAZIL COLOMBIA MÉXICO PERÚ

MORE
AUTONOMY



RIGHTS

INFORMATIONAL PAGE

Research on methods of supporting the transition of adolescents and young people from the alternative care system to independent living in six Latin American countries Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru.

A descriptive exploratory qualitative research approach was used. The fieldwork was carried out from June to August 2019 and consisted of:

30 Interviews with key informants: national and provincial authorities, directors and staff at residential care facilities and mentors who support young people (staff on residential care or care leavers support programs, community volunteers, or other informal supporters).

6 focus groups with adolescents in residential care and 6 focus groups with young care leavers, plus 1 pilot focus group.

A systematic survey of **documentary and statistical sources** to describe the National Protection Systems in terms of legislation, organization, and procedure.



Profile of the Participants

100 adolescents and youngsters

participated in focus groups

13 to 27 years old

Situation

Self-perceived gender identity

65%
female

35%
male

50% were preparing to transition out of residential care

50% had already made the transition to independent living.

* None of the participants chose a different gender identity.

Time spent in alternative care

22%
less than 4 years

41%
4 to 9 years

37%
10 years or more

Main Findings

The regulations established by different legislations ignore the reality of the children that have been separated from their families.

- 🍷 Residential care facilities **vary enormously in the ways they are organised and operate**, in the resources they have, and also in their understanding of adolescents' and children's rights. All this creates great inequalities in the provision of care.

“Sometimes it also depends on the institution and who is your caregiver”
(Young female care leaver, Argentina)

- 🍷 **The transition to independent living** is more difficult for adolescents separated from their families than for other young people. This inequality deepens when insufficient support is provided by the State to the families and communities of adolescents in care.

“In my case I had no one, absolutely nothing, I had spent so many years there”
(Young female care leaver, Peru)

- 🍷 **There is little coordination** among the different agencies within Child Protection Systems. Resignation prevails, as well as the idea that there is nothing to be done but “wait” for children to reach the legal age, which makes the agents in the system unaccountable.



Alternative care and leaving care have increasingly become an item on the political agenda in recent years in Latin America. **Argentina** has a specific Law on adolescents leaving care. Colombia has a program that is part of a nation-wide strategy. In **Bolivia, Brazil, Peru and Mexico** the legal frameworks mention, albeit in general terms, the responsibility of residential care services to gradually prepare adolescents for leaving care.



For young people, preparation for leaving care either does not exist or comes too late. **Adolescents** are discharged from care because they have reached the age of majority, not to restore their rights.

“When I was growing up they never told me anything, I just knew it. When girls turned 18 years old, they were gone”.

(Young female care leaver, Mexico)



An **idealized concept of leaving care is promoted**, by means of which a person who “successfully” leaves care knows how to express his/her feelings, can handle emotions, is stable, tolerant and proactive, can administrate and save money, and has a “good attitude”. Moreover, this person is expected to have a job and housing at the time of leaving. Hence, the focus is on the individual and personal conditions of adolescents - seen through a meritocratic and stigmatizing lense- while the issue of young people’s rights is left aside.

“Lots of control and little dialogue”

(Young male care leaver, Brazil)



Most of the actions **supporting transition** are oriented to job training and, to a lesser extent, to finishing school. Experiences of **halfway housing for leaving care** are key in Argentina and Brazil.



Young people use broader and more complex categories to explain their transitions than the leaving care types ordinarily defined (family reintegration, adoption or reaching the age of majority). Because of a nuanced look into these processes, **the policies supporting transition are oversimplified, fragmented and restrictive** and do not take into account the complexity of the different ways of leaving care.



Housing, education and employment are priority issues for young people. However, young people agree that an excessive and exclusive focus on these matters limits other key aspects of leaving care plans like emotional support, family and community support and access to sports and cultural activities.

“I’d like the whole family to have access to therapy so that when we are living independently, we can still be in a good relationship with our families. Family is very important. Whether we like it or not, they give us identity.”

(Young male care leaver, Mexico)



The support actions that young people value most are: **1)** Having the support of mentors outside the institution, and of adults with whom they have established long term bonds; **2)** Being heard and having their preferences respected; **3)** Having a stable income for some time; **4)** Entering a halfway house or assisted living.

“When you leave the institution they support you for a while. After that, you feel alone. It’s like they forget about you”

(Young male care leaver, Bolivia)



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RECOMMENDATIONS

IN LIGHT OF THE FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH, NATIONAL STATES ARE RECOMMENDED TO:

- 1.** Prevent separations and **strengthen family reintegration** or permanent family-based solutions that prioritize family and community environments.
- 2.** Ensure real and **accessible participation** for children, adolescents and young people, both on a day to day basis in alternative care settings and in designing and implementing policies that affect them.
- 3.** **Set standards and ensure the quality** of alternative care with a rights-based approach that enables the design, implementation and assessment of improvements in alternative care practices.
- 4.** **Review periodically the separation** of children and adolescents from their families.
- 5.** Include leaving care as a **planned process** in the care plan for each child, adolescent or youngster and involve the family and community at every stage.
- 6.** Design **policies aimed at supporting the transitions** of young people, with a comprehensive and rights-based approach, that are sensitive to the different paths followed.
- 7.** **Make the responsibility of the State in**



supporting adolescents and young people the same as that of the family by offering continuous support until each young person feels ready to live independently. Take into consideration Argentinian Law N° 27.364 as a reference for the region, since it provides that the transition to independent living is a right of children, adolescents and young people.

8. Raise awareness and build the capacity of all the agents working with children, adolescents and young people (educators, health teams, etc.) **to avoid stigmatising** those who have been separated from their family environment.

9. Improve registration, **record systems and analysis on the trajectories of children and adolescents** who enter and leave the protection systems. This will improve decision-making processes.

“We aren’t prepared to face life. We are kept in a bubble and in reality that’s not how society works”

(Young woman in care, Colombia)



This research project was carried out by the **Latin American Network of Care Leavers** (Red Lationamericana de Egresados de la Protección). It was coordinated by **the CSO Doncel** from Argentina working with with research teams from the **University of Monterrey** (UDEM) in Mexico, the organization **Fazendo História** from Brazil, **Buckner** from Perú, **The Colombian Association of Care Leavers** from the **Child Protection System** (ASCEP), and **TIA Foundation** from Bolivia. The project was supported by **UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, and Hope and Homes for Children.**

AIM: To document and analyze policies, strategies and actions aimed at promoting and supporting the transition of adolescents from the alternative care system to independent living in the countries of the region.

PURPOSE: To provide insights and recommendations for developing public policies to support the transition of adolescents and young people from the alternative care system to independent living, and to contribute to the reform of child protection systems with a rights-based approach, moving from models based on residential care to models based family and community care.

The Latin American Network of Care Leavers was founded in 2013 to improve the lives of adolescents and young people who are or have been in state care. <http://redegresadoslatam.org>

Network supported by:



Coordination:

