



CARE4YOUTH
Inclusion for Youth in the Care System
through Non-Formal Learning and Outdoor Sports

National Report

Serbia



Co-funded by
the European Union

National Reporting

In the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by young individuals transitioning from care systems to adulthood, the CARE4YOUTH project delves into various facets of their lives. This comprehensive Annex. 1 National Reporting Template acts as a valuable tool, focusing on critical areas such as demographics, educational needs, social and employability challenges, sports and leisure opportunities, and successful practices. Through in-depth focus group discussions, online surveys, and analysis of sports and leisure avenues, this report sheds light on the multifaceted lives of the participants in the different partner countries.

Section 1: Demographic Overview The report outlines the demographic landscape, offering insights into the total population, age distribution, and gender ratios of young individuals within or exiting the care system. Additionally, it delves into immigration and migration data, providing a holistic view of the participants' backgrounds.

Section 2: Needs Analysis Educational, social, and employability needs are scrutinized, including the accessibility of education, existing support systems for mental health, vocational training programs, and challenges faced in finding employment. The section provides a comprehensive analysis of the hurdles faced by the target demographic.

Section 3: Employment Opportunities Examining the local job market, government initiatives, and private sector engagements, this section unveils the opportunities available for the participants. Success stories of young individuals finding employment underscore the potential within the region.

Section 4: Challenges and Barriers Addressing discrimination, legal hindrances, and institutional challenges, this section paints a vivid picture of the barriers that need dismantled. Strategies to combat these challenges are imperative for creating a level playing field.

Section 5: Sports and Leisure Opportunities and Facilities From existing facilities to youth engagement programs and success stories, this section explores the role of sports and leisure activities in the participants' lives. Financial constraints, lack of awareness, and discrimination are pinpointed as barriers, highlighting areas for intervention.

Section 6: Best Practices and Success Stories Detailed reports on identified good practices offer valuable insights into what works. These reports, aligned with CARE4YOUTH's objectives, provide a blueprint for effective interventions.

Sections 7 and 8: Findings from Focus Groups and Online Survey By analyzing focus group discussions and online survey responses, the report dissects participants' career dreams, employability skills, challenges, and leisure preferences. The data showcases the participants' diverse aspirations and areas where support is critically needed.

Section 9: Conclusions The holistic understanding gained through focus group discussions, surveys, and sports and leisure analyses forms the bedrock of the report's conclusions. It emphasizes the multifaceted needs and aspirations of the participants. These insights are pivotal, in shaping overarching recommendations for the development of tailored programs and initiatives.

Section 1: Demographic Overview

Regarding the data available in Serbia up to the current date, there is a lack of official statistics concerning young individuals within or leaving the care system for the specified age range. The information provided in this report is based on consolidated data gathered from various reports and research conducted by institutions such as the Republic Institute for Social Protection, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Tourism and Youth, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration Republic of Serbia, the National Employment Service, and numerous civil society organizations (CSOs).

Based on the available data, in 2022, there were 574 children under the age of 18 without parental care utilizing residential care services, while 4,869 were in foster care, totaling 5,443 children. However, it's important to note that the number of children in shelters is not included due to the Republic Institute for Social Protection only having data on children placed in licensed shelters, despite shelters being considered as accommodation services according to the Law on Social Protection.

Within the aforementioned residential facilities catering to children and youth without parental care, there were 135 young people aged between 18 and 25. Among them, 53.3% were male and 46.7% were female. The rate of children in residential and foster care by the end of 2022 stood at 45.8 per 10,000 children in the population, marking the lowest rate in the past decade. Specifically, the rate of children in residential care was 4.8, placing Serbia among European countries with the lowest rates of children in such care, with a reduction of 31.9% from 2013 to 2022.

According to UNICEF data from 2021, over 1.5 million refugees and migrants have passed through Serbia since 2015, with between a quarter and a third being children, among whom 10–50% were unaccompanied or separated. Despite the effective closure of the Balkan route in early 2016, refugees and migrants continue to arrive in Serbia, albeit with increasingly limited legal avenues to proceed to their intended destinations. Unaccompanied children registered along this route are often older male children from their families of origin, whom parents deemed old enough to assume responsibility for their own and their families' welfare.

According to the latest UNHCR Statistical Snapshot, the total number of unaccompanied children in centers as of January 2024 was 28, compared to 111 at the end of December 2023. Predominantly, migrants from Syria constitute the majority in both Asylum and Transit centers, although nationality claims are undocumented due to the nature of the persons on the move.

The 2022 Migration Profile of the Republic of Serbia indicates 4,179 issued registration certificates for foreigners expressing their intention to seek asylum, including 679 minors, of which 82 are unaccompanied (79 boys and 3 girls).

Sources:

1. <http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs/media/2573/izvestaj-o-rad-u-ustanova-za-decu-i-mlade-2022.pdf>
2. <http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs/media/2572/izvestaj-o-rad-u-csr-u-2022-godini.pdf>
3. <https://www.unhcr.org/rs/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2024/02/JAN-Stat-Snapshot.pdf>
4. [Refugee and Migrant Response | UNICEF](#)
5. [МИГРАЦИОНИ ПРОФИЛ РЕПУБЛИКЕ СРБИЈЕ ЗА 2022. ГОДИНУ](#)

Section 2: Needs Analysis

In facilities catering to children and youth without parental care, merely 1.1% of primary school-aged children are excluded from educational opportunities. Over the past three years, there has been a noticeable uptick in the enrollment of children in mainstream primary schools, surpassing those attending special schools for the first time in 2022. Diverse educational avenues engage young individuals, with only a marginal 3% dropout rate or professional unpreparedness, while a notable 25% pursue higher education at colleges or universities.

During the 2022/23 academic year, 131 students from migrant backgrounds were admitted, constituting 87% of the migrant school-aged population. Among elementary and high school students, there were 14 and 12 unaccompanied minors, respectively.

In terms of support systems and existing social programs, research¹ reveals notable deficiencies in preparing young individuals for independence, particularly within the framework established to aid those without parental care. Professionals often prioritize their own perceptions of independence over the needs of youth transitioning from alternative care. Furthermore, transitioning youth require comprehensive support encompassing not only vocational skills but also practical life skills crucial for independent living.

The role of CSOs in addressing social needs is paramount. For instance, the Psychosocial Innovation Network operates the Solidarity Program, offering free psychological assistance to vulnerable groups, including children and young people without parental care, through individual and group therapy sessions. The Center for Positive Youth Development (CEPORA) offers the Youth Support Center program, which includes career guidance, social skills development, individual counseling, peer mentoring, and a Youth Club fostering constructive leisure activities and social connections. Participants actively shape the program's activities under the guidance of CEPORA's expert staff.

Based on field research on the position and needs of young people in the Republic of Serbia from 2022², 26% of respondents cited unemployment and economic problems as the biggest challenge they face. Despite the availability of vocational training programs and job prospects, young individuals lack adequate awareness of these opportunities and the resources provided by relevant institutions. Highlighted below are some of the key findings, indicating specific areas for youth empowerment.

Did you receive external support for personal development and skill enhancement in the past year, apart from your family? 95.7% answered negatively.

Have you undertaken any additional courses or training outside of regular academic programs? 79.6% answered negatively.

Have you utilized or are you currently utilizing any non-formal education programs facilitated by youth workers? 97.9% answered negatively.

Have you participated in an internship program thus far? 87.4% answered negatively.

¹ <https://rfpn.fpn.bg.ac.rs/bitstream/id/477/688.pdf>

² [ИСТРАЖИВАЊЕ ПОЛОЖАЈА И ПОТРЕБА МЛАДИХ У РЕПУБЛИЦИ СРБИЈИ](#)

Are you acquainted with any existing support measures for self-employment and social entrepreneurship? 75.4% answered negatively.

Section 3: Employment Opportunities

Based on the data³ from the Infostud Employment Center in 2022, trade, sales, IT, mechanical engineering, administration, and hospitality were the fields with the most employment opportunities in the previous year. The highest number of job ads were for salespeople, drivers, warehouse workers, administrative staff, and production workers. Shortages of labor were observed in low-skilled jobs, particularly in various craft professions, leading to the import of labor from abroad.

Jobs requiring lower qualifications were still in higher demand. The majority of ads (61%) were aimed at individuals with vocational education, while only 35% were targeted at candidates with higher qualifications or college degrees. Employers were more accessible in hiring students, resulting in over 10,000 ads (14%) being available to students who are just entering the job market.

The number of unemployed young people aged 15–24 in the fourth quarter of 2023⁴ was 55,100. The rate of NEET i.e. the share of young people aged 15-24 who neither work nor are in the process of education or training in the total population of young people was 13.8%.

*My First Salary*⁵ program aims to encourage the training of young people for employment and to provide support to the economy in addressing the issue of labor shortages. Under this program, the Government of Serbia offsets the costs for young people, under the age of 30, with no work experience with a high school or college degree, to work for selected companies by providing “a salary subsidy grant” for nine months.

However, according to the on-field research on the position and needs of young people in the Republic of Serbia from 2022, 96.3% of young respondents said they haven’t participated in the program so far.

Also, the Government of Serbia and the National Employment Service offer a subsidy⁶ to employers, in a one-time amount, for the purpose of employing unemployed individuals from the *hard-to-employ* category, including young people up to 30 years of age - without completed secondary education, young people in residential care, foster families and guardian families.

Additionally, the pilot of *The Youth Guarantee*⁷ program will be implemented by the end of 2026. It entails that young people up to 30 years of age receive quality job offers, continued education, or apprenticeships within four months of entering unemployment status or completing formal education. In order to effectively implement this program, the need for establishing strong partnerships has been recognized, especially among authorities responsible for labor and employment, social affairs, education, youth, economy and finance, with employers, as well as with civil society organizations, youth offices and other labor market stakeholders.

3 <https://poslovi.infostud.com/vesti/Prethodna-godina-u-znaku-deficita-i-uvoza-radne-snage/56404>

4 <https://www.nsz.gov.rs/filemanager/Files/Dokumenta/Statisti%C4%8Dki%20bilteni/2023/Bilten%20NSZ%20-%20Decembar%202023.pdf>

5 <https://mojapravlata.gov.rs/o-programu>

6

<https://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/nudite-posao/subvencija-za-zapo-ljavanje-nezaposlenih-lica-iz-kategorije-te-e-za-po-ljivih.cid266>

7 <https://nsz.gov.rs/filemanager/Files/Dokumenta/Garancija%20za%20mlade/Youth%20Guarantee%20Implementation%20Plan%202023-2026.pdf>

The National Employment Service offers a few training courses, an active labor market policy measure primarily aimed at the unemployed. The objective of this measure is to enhance the competency level, competitiveness, and employability of the unemployed by acquiring additional knowledge and skills for performing tasks within their acquired or new profession.

After her mother's death, M.M. was placed in a foster family. After experiencing difficulties during eight years spent in that system, she left it and came to the *House of Opportunities*, a program run by the NGO Center Zvezda. There, she found peace and a sense of belonging and stayed until she found a job abroad after a few months.

As M. said before leaving the program: "The House helped me a lot at a time when I couldn't understand what had happened to my life, I had nowhere to go. I constantly think about what would have happened if I hadn't had the opportunity to be here. But I know that I wouldn't have been able to make this decision if things were different and if it weren't for the House and all the people who helped me."

Section 4: Challenges and Barriers

[[min. 2000 – max. 3000 characters]

*Desk-research

- Discrimination and Social Stigma: Instances and effects on employability.
- Legal Barriers: Any laws hindering employment for care leavers.
- Institutional Challenges: Challenges within the care system affecting the transition to employment.

Instances of discrimination against care leavers in Serbia are not uncommon. They often face social stigma due to their background, which can affect their employability. Discrimination may manifest in various forms, such as reluctance from employers to hire individuals with a history of being in care or societal biases that undermine their capabilities. The social stigma attached to being a care-leaver can lead to self-doubt and low self-esteem, further impacting their chances of securing employment.

Legal barriers may exist in Serbia that hinder the employment prospects of care leavers. These barriers could include discriminatory hiring practices or a lack of legal protections specifically for individuals with a history of being in care. In some cases, there might be legal restrictions on accessing certain professions or obtaining licenses for employment, which disproportionately affect care leavers. Addressing these legal barriers requires advocacy for inclusive employment laws and policies that protect the rights of care leavers and ensure equal opportunities in the job market.

Within the care system in Serbia, there are institutional challenges that impede the successful transition of care leavers to employment. This challenge is manifested by the lack of standardized practices concerning the assistance provided to care leavers at the national level. Disparities in support provision are evident across municipalities, with less attention afforded to care leavers in underdeveloped locales compared to their counterparts in larger urban centers.

Also, lack of adequate support and resources for vocational training, education, and career guidance within the care system can hinder care leavers' ability to develop the skills necessary for employment. Transitioning out of care can be a daunting process for many young people, and without proper support structures in place, they may struggle to navigate the complexities of finding and maintaining employment.

Addressing institutional challenges requires comprehensive reforms within the care system to prioritize the transition to independence and employment for care leavers. This includes providing tailored support services, mentorship programs, and partnerships with employers to facilitate smoother transitions into the workforce.

However, tackling these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving government agencies, NGOs, employers and the wider community to dismantle discriminatory practices, reform outdated laws and improve support systems for care leavers transitioning to employment.

Section 5: Sports and Leisure Opportunities and Facilities

When considering the situation at the national level, conditions and opportunities for engaging in sports vary significantly. In larger cities, there are outdoor gyms available to all citizens free of charge. However, these gyms have limited capacity and become impractical during inclement weather. Opportunities in smaller towns are significantly fewer. Additionally, during school breaks in the previous year, free sports activities were organized for elementary and high school students, but for a limited number of participants and unfortunately, only in the capital.

Regular physical activities should be imperative for the healthy development of children and youth. However, considering the specific context in which children without parental care develop physically and emotionally, it is necessary to consider how physical activity can contribute to their overall development. Today, due to the influence of the broader social context alongside a lack of professionals engaged in their care, a significant problem is the organization of time for young people in institutions, especially concerning physical activities, as there is no specifically designated individual within the institution responsible for this area. The structuring of staffing solutions within the sphere of social protection does not recognize the importance of professionals in the field of physical education and sports in working with youth from institutions, thus this situational context provides a good initial space for the civil sector to contribute through the action of CSOs by organizing projects of a sports and recreational nature, which are competent and professionally grounded in working with young people. If viewed through the aspect of the social protection sector, the role of the civil sector can be defined as an external collaborator to the internal social protection system, thereby representing an "extended arm" of alternative measures for caring for children.

One of the inspiring success stories in the realm of sports is that of Džavid Jašari (1993). Džavid spent the majority of his life in social care facilities. Upon losing his student status, he had to depart from the Center for Children and Youth without parental care. It was at this juncture that he became involved in the *House of Opportunities* program. Spearheaded by the NGO Center Zvezda, the program aims to assist young adults without parental care in transitioning to independent life after leaving the social care system.

With the program's support, he intensified his focus on exam preparation and began successfully passing exams at the College of Sports and Health. Simultaneously, he continued his pursuit of rugby. Presently, he represents both the Serbian National Rugby Team and the Rugby Club Partizan. His journey serves as a bright example of how individuals raised within social care facilities can excel in sports, serving as role models for younger generations, particularly those facing similar circumstances.

Section 6: Best Practices and Success Stories

Good Practice Title: House of Opportunity	
I. Good Practice Overview	
Location	Belgrade, Kragujevac, Nis (Serbia)
Year and length	2014 - ongoing
Author	Center for Social Integration of Children and Youth "Zvezda", Belgrade
Description	Every child's story without parental care is unique, but one thing is common to all - how and where to go after leaving foster families and institutions for neglected children? Their independent life starts at the age of 18, but the question is are they mature and ready enough to navigate the waters of adulthood where they will take care of themselves? The fact that in our society young people are separating from their parents later (on average at 31.1 years old) still suggests that 18 years old is too early. Law on social protection does not sufficiently recognize the needs of young people transitioning out of the care system, leaving them ill-prepared for real-world challenges. Essential life skills such as cooking, crafting a CV, maintaining hygiene, securing employment, and more are often lacking. To address this gap, the <i>House of Opportunity</i> program has been devised. It offers accommodation and essential life skills training to empower these young adults for independent living. At the moment, there are three houses - in the cities of Belgrade, Kragujevac and Nis.
Target Group(s)	The initiative supports young individuals aged 18 to 26 transitioning out of the social protection system, including foster care and relevant social institutions (Institution for children without parental care, Shelter for children and youth, institutions for children and youth with behavioral problems). It also extends support to young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds as they navigate their journey towards independent living.
II. Relevance to CARE4YOUTH and EU Youth Strategy	
Social Inclusion	In the <i>House of Opportunity</i>, young people are supported daily by educators – <i>house parents</i>, who help them learn life skills, but also overcome difficulties in all aspects of their best functioning. Among them are building solid social networks and increasing social engagement. Living with peers from similar life backgrounds, and with continuous support from expert social workers, they are motivated to cultivate stronger social ties, fostering a sense of belonging and care often absent in governmental social facilities and foster families.
Employability	Within the framework of the Center Zvezda, there is a creative workshop called the <i>Center Zvezda Souvenirs</i> , where young people craft scented candles, decorative arrangements for various celebrations, wooden ornaments, New

Good Practice Title: House of Opportunity	
	Year's ikebana, and more. Young participants afterward showcase their souvenirs at sales booths, often and mostly before New Year's and Christmas, as that's when people order souvenirs more frequently. Young individuals actively involved in crafting souvenirs have the opportunity to earn pocket money and be adequately rewarded for their efforts. While getting the know-how on this craft, they also gain entrepreneurial and sales skills through these activities.
Sports Inclusion	No sports activities were officially included in this good practice.
Leisure Engagement	Throughout the day, youths are engaged in their academic or professional pursuits. Some are pursuing higher education, others are employed, while those lacking previous support often complete their secondary education and contemplate future career paths. Regarding leisure engagement, workshops for souvenir crafting are the main activity. Also, young individuals living in the <i>House</i>, often visit cinemas, theatres, cultural events, and similar outings with their <i>house parents</i>.
Alignment with EU Youth Strategy	The House of Opportunity program and the Center Zvezda Souvenirs workshop exemplify initiatives that align closely with the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. By offering accommodation and essential life skills training, the program empowers young adults transitioning out of the social care system, fostering their independence and social inclusion. This addresses a critical gap in support for youth leaving care systems, as recognized by the EU strategy's focus on providing opportunities for learning, training, and employment. Furthermore, the Center Zvezda Souvenirs workshop not only provides young people with valuable entrepreneurial and sales skills but also offers them opportunities to earn income and gain recognition for their efforts.
III. Target-tailored approaches and methods	
Personal Development	Young people who were or still are part of the <i>House of Opportunity</i> often emphasize the importance of the program and the support they get through it for their skills development, motivation and self-confidence, which is crucial for their transition to independent life.
Stakeholder Perspectives	People from the Center say, that although their program has a huge impact on young people exiting the care system, there is a noticeable absence of system support ensured by the relevant state institutions. That support should start while the young people are still within the care system, slowly preparing them for an independent life. As one of the young men who grew up in social protection institutions pointed out: "There are two major shocks in the life of a child without parental care - the

Good Practice Title: House of Opportunity	
	first one is entering the social care system and the second one is leaving it.”
Learning Outcomes	Living in the <i>House of Opportunity</i> considers gaining life skills such as cooking, managing household chores and so on. Additionally, the Center assists young people in engaging with the education system, supporting them in completing language courses, computer literacy training, obtaining a driver's license, and acquiring various skills that are necessary for employment. Through the social entrepreneurship aspect of the program, which serves as one of the funding avenues, young individuals cultivate invaluable skills such as teamwork, patience, and self-confidence through the creation and subsequent sale of products. While the opportunity to earn money serves as a motivating factor, the primary importance lies in the development of certain habits and the understanding of the entire work process, from conceptualization to realization and ultimately marketing. Participants are engaged in every step according to their preferences and capabilities, thereby acquiring skills that prove beneficial for their future endeavors. Additionally, some participants have indicated an elevated sense of tolerance and empathy towards one another, originating from a shared understanding of the numerous challenges they faced during their childhood and adolescence.
Long-term Effects	Two years ago, a dog grooming salon was opened in Nis, by twenty-two-year-old M.M., who had been residing in the <i>House of Opportunity</i> with a clear idea and desire for her future occupation. To realize her ambition, she received the necessary support from the Zvezda Center. "I completed a year-long dog grooming course. When I started the course, nobody told me I would receive assistance to open a salon; it seemed they wanted to see if I truly desired it. However, I was determined to open the salon regardless. Eventually, I received funding, and now I'm engaged in a job I love. It's not easy, but I believe I will succeed," says M.M.
IV. Digital and Non-Formal Learning Tools	
Use of Digital Tools	N/A
Non-Formal Learning Tools	Workshops for souvenir crafting are for sure one of the most valuable learning tools for the young individuals within the program.
V. Impact and Outcomes	
Outcomes and Achievements	Currently in Serbia, there are three <i>Houses of Opportunity</i> - one in Belgrade accommodating nine young people, one in Kragujevac with four residents, and

Good Practice Title: House of Opportunity

	a third one in Nis housing six individuals. Over the ten years of operation of the Zvezda Center, nearly 100 young people have gone through the program. Each of them received support during their most vulnerable moments, often feeling abandoned by social care institutions. The Zvezda Center demonstrated that there is someone who acknowledges them even after they depart from the social care system, offering hope that they can pursue meaningful paths in life amidst confusion and fear. Nevertheless, while the Center offers them a temporary “safe place”, relevant institutions should prioritize providing comprehensive mental health support to help these individuals overcome the lifelong traumas they have endured. Social workers from the Center recognized that as an extremely important link in the chain.
Measuring Impact	Although there are no formal metrics for assessing the program (besides the number of young individuals who went through it), people from Zvezda Center tend to stay in touch with the users who finished it. That’s how they stay informed on their future steps while being there to provide them additional support if and when possible.
VI. Potential for Integration into CARE4YOUTH	
Key Lessons	Young people need support and a sense of belonging when they are in the transition process to independent life. They need someone they can rely on.
Feasibility of Integration	One of the aspects of the program can be integrated within the Care4Youth project, and that’s equipping the young individuals with a diverse set of life and job skills that will be useful for them while pursuing an independent life after leaving the care system.
Challenges and Adaptations	The possible challenge can be a lack of time, which is among the crucial factors regarding skill development. The solution could be reflected in adapting the learning model so they can continue to work on that on their own once the project activities end.
Other	Center Zvezda activities
Consent	/

Good Practice Title: Career Center *Strong Youngsters*

I. Good Practice Overview

Location	Belgrade, Serbia
Year and length	2017 - ongoing
Author	SOS Children's Villages Serbia
Description	Considering the great unemployment rate in Serbia and the challenges that young people from vulnerable families are facing in searching for jobs and becoming independent, SOS Children's Villages Serbia has set in a comprehensive program called "Strong Youngsters – Social Inclusion and Economic Sustainability of Young People at Risk", with the aim of their economic strengthening. Within this project, a Career Centre <i>Strong Youngsters</i> was opened in Belgrade in 2017.
Target Group(s)	The main role of such a Center is to support the increasing employment of youngsters from 16 to 30 years old within the territory of Belgrade, who have had or still have the status of a child without parental care or are involved in programs of supporting families in risk guided by SOS Children's Villages.

II. Relevance to CARE4YOUTH and EU Youth Strategy

Social Inclusion	The Center regularly attracts a diverse group of young individuals, fostering social connections and enhancing social engagement through various activities and workshops. Furthermore, following their participation in numerous workshops and trainings, these individuals are better equipped to secure employment opportunities and experience a greater sense of inclusion within society, thus contributing positively to their overall well-being and community integration.
Employability	The Centre offers a comprehensive range of services tailored to the specific needs of young individuals. These services go beyond mere job placement, encompassing individual psycho-social counseling and empowerment aimed at not only securing employment but also maintaining it. This approach is essential due to the prevalent lack of life skills and self-confidence among this target group. Aligned with personalized development plans crafted in collaboration with their counselors, young individuals have access to the following activities: - Professional training programs designed to enhance employability - Language courses

Good Practice Title: Career Center *Strong Youngsters*

	- Computer literacy courses to develop essential technical skills - Driving education for obtaining category B licenses - Opportunities for internships or on-the-job training with employers - Access to a computer classroom equipped with 9 computers, a printer, and a scanner. Furthermore, for those interested in entrepreneurship, specialized training is available to support the establishment of their own businesses. Upon completion of the training, participants may receive non-refundable financial assistance from the Centre to kickstart their ventures, covering equipment purchases and ongoing support to ensure the success of their endeavors.
Sports Inclusion	No sports activities were officially included in this good practice.
Leisure Engagement	Beside the above-mentioned activities, the Center also provides a space for young people (for their meetings, socializing, creative workshops and similar).
Alignment with EU Youth Strategy	The comprehensive range of services offered by the Centre aligns closely with the objectives outlined in the EU Youth Strategy. By providing tailored support beyond job placement, including individual psycho-social counseling and empowerment activities, the Centre addresses the multifaceted needs of young individuals, promoting their social inclusion and active participation in society. The emphasis on personalized development plans and access to professional training programs, language courses, and computer literacy classes reflects the strategy's goals of enhancing employability and providing opportunities for learning and training. Furthermore, the provision of specialized training for entrepreneurship and financial assistance for business start-ups corresponds with the strategy's focus on promoting entrepreneurial skills and economic empowerment among young people. Through these initiatives, the Centre contributes to the EU Youth Strategy's overarching aim of ensuring the holistic development and social inclusion of young people across Europe.
III. Target-tailored approaches and methods	
Personal Development	Youth workers within the Center pointed out that young people from this target group are often not able to introduce themselves, they don't know how to put that in words. That's also where these people help them - through different workshops and discussions, they navigate them to recognize their strengths so they can point them out, but weak points as well, in order to work on them and overcome them in the future.
Stakeholder Perspectives	The goal of the project is to draw attention from both the general public and experts to the need for services that support young individuals from vulnerable and less employable groups. This is because social exclusion and

Good Practice Title: Career Center *Strong Youngsters*

	unemployment have a negative impact on the social and emotional lives of young people, hindering their development and contributing to the intergenerational cycle of poverty. With decades of experience in caring for young people without parental care, SOS Children's Villages has come to understand that tailored and timely support is crucial for the empowerment and sustainable livelihoods of young individuals. Consequently, they have directed their efforts towards creating and implementing innovative programs. What sets these programs apart from others in the realm of youth employment is our emphasis on individualized approaches and the provision of psychosocial and counseling support to each young person.
Learning Outcomes	Through this program and its educational activities and workshops, young individuals are able to acquire both tangible and intangible skills. On one hand, they are developing skills such as computer literacy, language proficiency and job skills, while also improving the communication skills, building self-esteem, etc. They are getting more familiar with the concept of teamwork, as well as the responsibilities job-wise.
Long-term Effects	In collaboration with partners, SOS Children's Villages facilitate connections between young people and potential employers, offers training for starting their own businesses, provides mini grants to kickstart entrepreneurial ventures, offers mentorship, and supports other institutions and organizations aiding youth employment.

IV. Digital and Non-Formal Learning Tools

Use of Digital Tools	N/A
Non-Formal Learning Tools	Some of the non-formal learning tools used in this good practice: - Series of educational workshops for young individuals (topics such as self-esteem and self-understanding, conflict management, communication skills development) - CV crafting workshops - Job interview simulation workshops - Workshops about employment and economic empowerment, in partnership with companies

V. Impact and Outcomes

Outcomes and Achievements	So far, more than 700 young people used the services of the Center. During 2023, a total of 164 young individuals participated in the Strong Youngsters Center's activities. 85 youths completed the life skills and
----------------------------------	--

Good Practice Title: Career Center *Strong Youngsters*

	employment training. 21 youth clubs were held with the participation of 43 young people. Among them, 14 found employment, while 13 gained work experience. In addition to career guidance and counseling services, 74 young individuals received psychosocial support. Also, since 2020, the Center has aided the employment and empowerment of 400 young individuals in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, and Kragujevac, in collaboration with partner organizations.
Measuring Impact	The Center keeps the record regarding the number of people using their services, being involved in the activities, workshops, etc, and also tracking the employment stats for the youngsters who went through their programs.
VI. Potential for Integration into CARE4YOUTH	
Key Lessons	Both people within the organization and young people who are involved in Center's activities emphasize the significance of psycho-social counseling and support, which is one of the most crucial aspects when it comes to leaving the social care system and transitioning to the independent life.
Feasibility of Integration	Examples such as a conflict resolution workshop could be implemented within the Care4Youth project, since it is undoubtedly something of immense importance - both in everyday life and a work environment.
Challenges and Adaptations	It can be adapted if needed, considering the time frame, the precise target group, etc.
Other	N/A
Consent	/

Good Practice Title: To Align Life and Law: Enhancing Support Systems for Youth Aging Out of Care

I. Good Practice Overview

Location	Belgrade, Serbia
Year and length	2022-2023
Author	Informal network <i>The Circle of Support</i> (CSOs: CEPORA, GRiG Center, My Circle)
Description	General project aim was to enhance procedures for implementing services intended for youth leaving residential or foster care in the City of Belgrade. Through the project, they aimed to contribute to:

Good Practice Title: To Align Life and Law: Enhancing Support Systems for Youth Aging Out of Care

	- a more transparent implementation of existing forms of support for independent living, - recognition and active utilization of other forms of support intended for youth leaving care who cease to use accommodation services, - increasing the number of youth leaving care who successfully utilize services and realize their rights upon exiting residential or foster care.
Target Group(s)	Primary target group: - Youth aging out of care - The City Center for Social Work - Secretariat for Social Welfare of the City of Belgrade Secondary target group: - General public (raising awareness)

II. Relevance to CARE4YOUTH and EU Youth Strategy

Social Inclusion	As part of the project, a play titled “Missed Chance” was staged, and created with youth from residential care and foster families. It addresses the personal, social, and systemic challenges these youth encounter in their upbringing and transition to independence. Performances in one of the city halls provided a unique opportunity for the audience to gain deeper insights into the life stories of youth without parental care, and to understand their circumstances and the accompanying challenges. Also, additional showings were organized for other youth from residential care and foster care, as well as their caregivers and foster parents. The play opened up space for exchange, connection, and empowerment among youth and adults involved in their transition to independence.
Employability	The problem youth aging out of care often face is a lack of information, as well as the lack of adequate timely systemic support. That’s why, as part of the project activities, efforts were made to enhance the social welfare framework in Belgrade by proposing amendments to the City of Belgrade’s Decision on social welfare rights and services. Additionally, informational materials were developed and distributed to youth, outlining procedures and available forms of support and employment.
Sports Inclusion	No sports activities were officially included in this good practice.
Leisure Engagement	The abovementioned play emerged from a series of applied theater workshops involving youth in residential care and those who have recently left such environments or foster families, drawing from their personal experiences.

Good Practice Title: To Align Life and Law: Enhancing Support Systems for Youth Aging Out of Care

	Volunteers and experts from the social welfare system were also involved in the preparation of the play. This collaborative effort aimed to provide a platform for these young individuals to express their stories and challenges through the medium of theater, fostering understanding and empathy while highlighting the importance of support and empowerment within the social care system. As part of the project's multimedia outreach, a documentary short film capturing the challenges faced by youth upon leaving care was produced, featuring the participation of care leavers themselves. This film aimed to provide a poignant and authentic portrayal of the experiences and obstacles encountered by these young individuals as they navigate the transition to independent living. By amplifying the voices of care leavers, the documentary sought to raise awareness and foster empathy among viewers regarding the complexities of their journeys. Through its digital presence, the film served as a powerful advocacy tool, advocating for policy changes and community initiatives to better support the needs and rights of care leavers.
Alignment with EU Youth Strategy	All the activities mentioned closely align with the EU Youth Strategy's goals and principles. Through preparation workshops, play creation, and documentary film production, the project fosters active citizenship, participation, and social inclusion among youth. Providing informative materials and an online platform for youth supports the strategy's objectives of learning, training, and employment opportunities. Additionally, advocacy for policy change and increased support for care leavers contributes to the strategy's goal of ensuring inclusive education, training, and employment for all young people. Overall, these efforts work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for young people across Europe, promoting their engagement and empowerment in society.
III. Target-tailored approaches and methods	
Personal Development	This multifaceted approach not only facilitated self-expression and emotional growth but also equipped them with practical knowledge to navigate the complexities of transitioning into adulthood. Through this journey, they discovered the power of their voices and the potential for positive change within their communities.
Stakeholder Perspectives	
Learning Outcomes	During the process of creating the play, youth were afforded the opportunity to unleash their creativity while also delving into emotions that this vulnerable group often suppresses and struggles to address. They found empowerment in publicly addressing the challenges they face, experiencing firsthand the validation and understanding that comes when citizens listen and engage with

Good Practice Title: To Align Life and Law: Enhancing Support Systems for Youth Aging Out of Care

	their stories. Furthermore, the project provided a platform where they can find information regarding their rights and opportunities for support and employment, offering them valuable information that they often struggle to access elsewhere. This multifaceted approach not only facilitated self-expression and emotional growth but also equipped them with practical knowledge to navigate the complexities of transitioning into adulthood. Through this journey, they discovered the power of their voices and the potential for positive change within their communities.
Long-term Effects	Long-term effects are yet to be seen, but as for now, it tackled the pressing issues when it comes to youth aging out of care.
IV. Digital and Non-Formal Learning Tools	
Use of Digital Tools	Recognizing the importance of digital platforms in today's world, an interactive and user-friendly website tailored specifically for youth was developed. This website served as a centralized hub of resources, offering guidance on various support options, legal procedures, and practical tips for navigating life after leaving care. Through these initiatives, the project aimed to empower youth with the knowledge and resources they need to make informed decisions and successfully transition to independence.
Non-Formal Learning Tools	The project encompassed a series of preparatory workshops aimed at crafting the theatrical production, followed by the actual performance of the play. Additionally, it involved the filming of a documentary to capture the essence of the experiences shared during the workshops and the play itself. These preparatory workshops served as a platform for participants to delve into their stories, emotions, and perspectives, which were then translated into both the theatrical performance and the documentary film. Through this multifaceted approach, the project facilitated a comprehensive exploration and portrayal of the challenges and triumphs faced by youth transitioning from care to independent living.
V. Impact and Outcomes	
Outcomes and Achievements	So far, the project has undoubtedly heightened visibility for this vulnerable group and the challenges they face upon exiting the social welfare system, contributing to greater social inclusion. As it has just concluded, it is anticipated that the project will lead to the long-term establishment of additional support mechanisms for youth leaving care. Furthermore, it has facilitated increased transparency in the implementation procedures for temporary housing and ongoing financial assistance for youth without parental care within the territory of the City of Belgrade. Additionally, there is an expectation of a rise in the number of youth without parental care annually utilizing available forms of support. Through these outcomes, the project has laid a foundation for sustained efforts to improve the well-being and prospects

Good Practice Title: To Align Life and Law: Enhancing Support Systems for Youth Aging Out of Care

	of youth transitioning from care to independent living.
Measuring Impact	/
VI. Potential for Integration into CARE4YOUTH	
Key Lessons	Institutions must provide timely, systematic support to youth—not just when they exit the social welfare system but much earlier on. Forms of support need to be adaptable to individual needs and equally accessible across the country. It means a great deal to youth when both the community and the state recognize their needs and offer support, particularly concerning various aspects of social inclusion.
Feasibility of Integration	Crafting the creative leisure activities through which young individuals can express their emotions, but also problems and challenges they are facing.
Challenges and Adaptations	A possible challenge can be a lack of resources for this activity, as well as a lack of interest among the youth to participate in such activity.
Other	Play performance Documentary Informative webpage
Consent	/

Section 8: Findings from online survey

[Online survey responses - Serbian](#)

[Online survey responses - English](#)

Summarised Findings:
Understanding Career Dreams and Aspirations:
Not all of the participants answered, but those who did, wrote the following: - For now I don't really know - Film Industry, IT - Pilot - Manager - To work at the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs - In the agency - Veterinary medicine, Animal husbandry
Demographic Information:
All of the respondents currently live in Belgrade, Serbia. Two of them are born in Belgrade, three in other cities within the country, and four of them are migrants coming from Niger, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. $\frac{1}{3}$ is female and $\frac{2}{3}$ male (among which all four migrants). Five respondents are between 18–21 years old, three of them between 22–25 and one is older than 26.
Current Employment Situation:
Four participants are employed full-time, two of them half-time and three of them are studying (among whom one is working as well). One participant is seeking employment.
Education and Training:
$\frac{2}{3}$ of the participants have never received any kind of vocational training or job-related education, while $\frac{1}{3}$ of them have.
Living Situation:
$\frac{1}{3}$ of the respondents live within social care facilities, almost half of the respondents live independently, while two participants preferred not to say.
Professional Aspirations and Employability Skills:
<i>[Discussion on the career opportunities participants are interested in and the employability skills they deem important.]</i> Most of the participants are interested in having full-time employment. Young individuals from Serbia are additionally interested in apprenticeships, VETs, entrepreneurship and pursuing higher levels of education, which was not the case for young migrants.
Employability Skills and Support Expectations:
- Leadership: 4/9 participants (all of them male migrants) - Teamwork: 8/9 participants - Digital communication: 1/9 - Problem-solving: 4/9

- Self-autonomy: 4/9
- Entrepreneurial spirit: 3/9
- Language training: 6/9
- Job placement assistance: 5/9
- Vocational training: 5/9
- Career counseling: 5/9
- Financial support for education: 4/9
- Mentorship programs: 3/9
- Networking opportunities: 3/9

Challenges and Confidence Levels:

[Overview of challenges faced by participants in pursuing their desired career paths. Include confidence levels reported on a scale from 1 to 5 regarding finding stable employment or pursuing higher education.]

- Lack of educational resources: 4/9
- Limited job opportunities: 5/9
- Financial constraints: 6/9
- Lack of mentorship: 3/9
- Discrimination: 2/9 (both migrants)

Regarding the confidence levels on finding stable employment or pursuing higher education, 3 of them are not confident at all, 5 of them are in between, and one participant chose 4 on the scale from 1-5.

Leisure Activities and Sports:

[Insights into participants' preferred leisure activities and sports.]

- Sports: 4/9
- Reading: 4/9
- Art and Crafts: 2/9
- Music: 5/9
- Cooking: 6/9
- Outdoor activities: 5/9

Five of nine participants practice sports (mostly going to the gym). Only one participant pointed out challenges in practicing sports - financial challenges and nutrition.

Seven of nine participants deeply believe that engaging in sports and leisure activities can contribute to the development of essential skills for your future.

Consent and Contact Preferences:

Eight of nine participants gave consent for data use, ensuring anonymity.

Only 1/3 of the participants expressed interest in staying in touch with the project team.

Section 9: Conclusions

The findings from the desk research highlight several critical issues facing young people transitioning out of the care system.

Firstly, there is a significant lack of timely and systemic support provided by institutions. This deficiency leaves many vulnerable young people without the necessary resources and guidance during a crucial period of their lives. Also, the absence of adequate psychological support within or upon exiting the care system exacerbates the challenges faced by these individuals. Without proper mental health resources, they may struggle to cope with the transition to independent living.

The lack of ongoing support after leaving the care system leaves many young people feeling abandoned and ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of adult life. This absence of support contributes to higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, and mental health issues among care leavers. The failure to develop proper individualized transition plans for each youngster by their social worker is concerning. A tailored approach is essential to address the unique needs and circumstances of each individual as they prepare for independent living.

Additionally, the unequal distribution of support and opportunities across the country further disadvantages care leavers. Disparities in access to resources and services perpetuate social and economic inequalities among this vulnerable group. Consequently, the lack of awareness among young people about their rights and available support systems post-care contributes to their vulnerability. Providing clear and accessible information is crucial in empowering care leavers to advocate for themselves and access the assistance they need.

Lastly, the absence of sports activities for this vulnerable group represents a missed opportunity for holistic support and development. Engaging in sports can promote physical and mental well-being, foster social connections, and provide valuable life skills.

In conclusion, addressing these systemic shortcomings requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, institutions, social workers, and community organizations. By prioritizing timely and comprehensive support, advocating for equal access to resources, and promoting holistic well-being, society can better support young people transitioning out of the care system and empower them to lead fulfilling lives.