AGEING OUT OF CARE INTO AUTONOMOUS LIVING

WHITE PAPER

INTEGRA

Supporting Youth Ageing Out of Care

INTEGRA PROJECT:

The project INTEGRA: Multidisciplinary Mentorship program to support the entrepreneurship of children in care and young care-leavers addresses the need to ease the social, cultural and economic integration of children ageing-out of care towards autonomous living, by equipping residential care professionals to successfully support the transition to autonomous living of young care leavers.

Designed within a holistic approach to full integration, the project aims to:
1. **Train and empower caregivers** working with children in care and young care leavers to become **Leaving Care Mentors (LCM)** through a Mentoring Integration Programme (MIP).
2. **Create and develop a multi-agency** Collaboration Continuum Network of interested stakeholders.
3. **Build and support a Platform4Cooperation** to connect state parents, care leavers and stakeholders.

The practical tools and the network are envisioned to address expressed needs of children and professionals and to support the collaboration between national stakeholders and target groups, while prioritizing an individualized approach avoiding one-size-fits-all mechanisms to child-care in relation to diversity issues and policy.

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS:

The participating organisations are "Hope For Children" CRC Policy Center (CY), Mediterranean Management Center (CY), CESIE (IT), Smile of the Child (GR), CEPS Projectes Socials (ES) and APCdP – Division M (PT).
These specific southern EU countries, as increasing migration wave receivers of unaccompanied children, have been carefully chosen in order to create a front line of specialised professionals that will have the know-how and abilities to support the transition from state care towards autonomous living.

At the moment, none of the above-mentioned countries present formal structures or holistic strategies for the transition of children in care, except for a few initiatives run by local NGOs.

Notable is the Personalized transition plan to adulthood implemented by Smile of the Child that aims to offer a multi-leveled support in the process of transition to autonomous living.

The plan starts one year before ageing out of care and covers the following areas accommodation, financial support, education, health care, bureaucracy and paperwork and psychological and emotional support, Nonetheless, according to experienced caregivers the plan, although it is an initiative with potential, lacks consistency indicators and sustainability vision.

Likewise noteworthy, in Italy, the Law no. 47 of 7 April 2017 ("Protection Measures for Unaccompanied Minors", (Zampa Law) established that each minor should be entitled to receive the assistance of a volunteer guardian or tutor that is trained according to a designed curriculum. In these respects, the law symbolizes the pioneering mentoring model in Italy for the assistance and support of unaccompanied children. The law in actions still proves that there is still need of support and creation of a connected mechanism of action. Additionally, across the mentioned countries, the observed residential care facilities implement sporadic activities to support an autonomous lifestyle among children in care. Nonetheless, the choice of the areas to invest in, the defined aims, the selected methodologies, activities and strategies, and the evaluation process (if any) rely solely on the local professionals' knowledge, skills and willingness.

STRUCTURE OF THE WHITE PAPER

The report consists of 5 main sections: (1) The purpose of the White Paper; (2) Inference method and procedures; (3) Children's Needs; (4) Professionals' Needs; (5) Suggestions and recommendations.

1. The purpose of the White Paper, Ageing out of Care into Autonomous Living

The White Paper, Ageing out of Care into Autonomous Living presents and reviews the findings of the ethnographic research in the framework of the INTEGRA project. The paper does not intend to promote *a one size fits all approach* to all country contexts that emerged from the national reports, but to give a bird's eye view to the common essential elements for a fruitful and autonomous living process, as a foundation for the Mentoring Integration Programme (MIP) under development by INTEGRA network partners.

Within the context of the research findings, the White Paper aimed to ascertain a core of essential **Pillars for Autonomous Living** for young care leavers and essential **Capacity Building Pillars** for professionals connected to the ageing-out of care support and coordination. Each set of pillars offers details on the common view over the needed competences and the requested essential elements that would contribute to a sustainable transition.

2. Inference method and procedure

The presented collections of Pillars among the selected EU southern countries Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, display particular characteristics on the identified needs of the children in care and young care leavers and the needs of the professionals.

According to the described features, each Autonomy and Capacity Building Pillar was associated the desired key competences that have to be reinforced in order to address the initial expressed needs.

The White Paper is reflecting also the voices of the children in care as each ethnographic research in the 5 countries has organised 1 Children Consultancy Group according to the complete Lundy model of participation.

3. Children's needs as Pillars for Autonomous Living

"I feel a lot of missing in my life"
18 years old care leaver

The findings revealed evolving national needs and trends as well as topics and challenges that seem to have strong resonance among all 5 countries and consequently, most of the needs are to be tackled cooperatively.

Overarching perspective:
The all-encompassing approach of addressing the expressed needs of the children in care is that everything is interconnected: for example, enrolling the children in the educational system connects them to a potential life-plan and practical skills, extends the formal and informal networks, all of which in turn offer opportunities and empowerment to seek psychological support and physical health care, find a job easier, participate in different educational activities or establish long lasting and healthy relationships.

According to the developers of Self-determination Theory, Deci and Ryan (2008) each human being has three essential needs:

- **Autonomy:** the need for some control over their lives and to be in control of their own behavior;
- **Competence:** the need to build competence and develop mastery over tasks that are important to them;
- **Relatedness (Connection):** the need to have a sense of belonging and connectedness with others.

Analyzing the findings of the ethnographic research, all the recurring themes that emerged across national boundaries can be associated or integrated under one of the three essential needs mentioned above.
The findings highlight the importance of:

1. designing a systematic, specialised and personalised multidisciplinary support for children in care from the age of 16;

2. Introducing national standards, based on specific/local/regional evidence-based guidelines;

3. Investing in mentoring approaches and capacity building for caregivers;

4. Developing alternative care systems that allow for a family/community setting;

5. Building on the existing, yet sporadic, good practices and evidence-based initiatives.

Breaking it down in specific segments, the holistic approach of **Ageing out of Care into Autonomous Living** is targeting:

1. The need for a balance between a safe environment where the child receives a complete support on resilience, exercising rights and responsibilities, and developing their sense of self awareness and healthy ownership;

2. The strategy to address the fear and uncertainty of living independently and nourish responsible and forward projection attitudes and behaviours through a balanced support from a trustworthy reference figure/mentor;

3. Creating and immersing the child in real life experiences or semi-independent living while in care that could cultivate an entrepreneurial drive and motivation;

4. Supporting and connecting the child to strong, healthy informal and formal networks while in care in order to develop a naturally occurring multi-layered support system for the ageing out of care process;

5. Focusing on establishing trust relationships between children in care and post-care stakeholders to achieve a positive impact after the ageing out period;

6. The design of a gradual and systematic transition plan and offer support to care leavers until they are at least 21 years of age for a smoother but also more stable independent living into the local community.
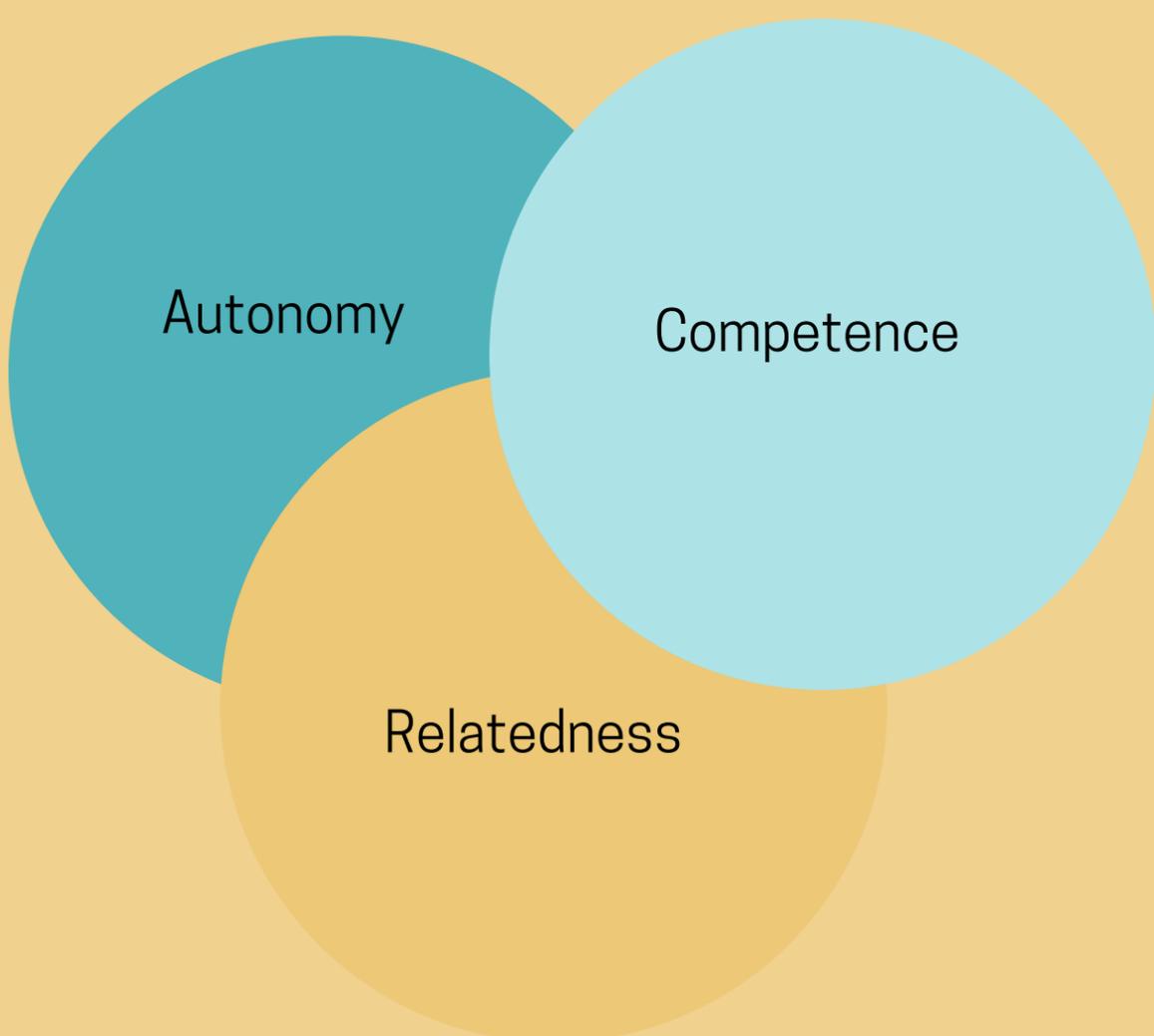
Autonomy

Competence

Relatedness

Self-determination Theory, Deci and Ryan

Overall, the core pillars for **CHILDREN** transitioning out of care would involve needs related to:

Education
Community participation
Health
Interpersonal relationship establishment
Career and employment
Financial/money management skills
Self-determination and autonomy skills
Bureaucracy / document / legislation interpretation
Housing

Each pillar is presented with associated competences and essential elements for optimal development and contribution to the transition process.
Across the ethnographic research the list of key competences related to the Autonomy Pillars are:

1. Communication competences
2. Mathematical competence and basic competence in science and technology
3. Digital competence
4. Learning to learn
5. Social and civic competence
6. Sense of initiative & entrepreneurship
7. Cultural awareness and expression
8. Transversal elements

The frequency representation of key competencies related to the needs of the children

PILLARS FOR AUTONOMOUS LIVING
NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN

EDUCATION

Transversal Elements

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

Learning to Learn

Communication

The educational opportunities are valued when they connect the child with a life project, offer practical skills, promote knowledge and/or skills about learning to learn within a learning-by-doing approach. Interactive language lessons are essential for Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Spain.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation is valued when implemented within a holistic strategy with systematic support from professionals aiming to connect the children with local people, local and same background teenagers and post care stakeholders, leading to strong and positive informal and formal networks that prove to be sustainable.

Transversal Elements

Social &Civic

Learning to Learn

Communication

Cultural Awareness & Expression

HEALTH

Social & Civic

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

Communication

This pillar is essential when promoting and implementing a holistic approach for healthy physical, mental, emotional and social development, with consistent and supported psychological mechanisms that allow care leavers to know their rights and developing their life skill of getting the proper care when needed.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Transversal Elements

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

Social & Civic

Communication

Positive, health, adaptive and diverse interpersonal relationships are valued when promoting a sense of belonging that can last even after ageing out of care into adulthood. The one-to-one mentor approach is needed to develop social skills in Cyprus and Italy.

CAREER & EMPLOYMENT

This pillar is valued when including vocational guidance on job searching, internship opportunities, development of transversal elements and entrepreneurship, preparing for job interviews, and connecting with employers both in real life and on online platforms.

Transversal Elements

Social & Civic

Communication

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

Learning to Learn

Transversal Elements

Social & Civic

Learning to Learn

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS

This pillar is valued when promoting money managing skills for the daily life, learning about the importance of savings and long term value of certain things, and the regulations for paying rent, bills and taxes.

SELF-DETERMINATION

This pillar is valued when endorsing a participatory approach and simulation of real life experiences as a common practice, where the child receives personalized support, exercise his/her responsibilities thus developing a sense of healthy self-awareness and ownership.

Transversal Elements

Social & Civic

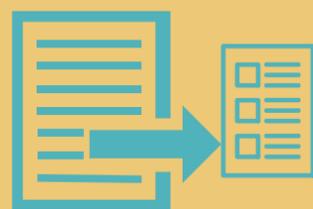### Learning to Learn

Transversal Elements

Social & Civic

Learning to Learn

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

BUREAUCRACY

This pillar is valued when including participatory and practical activities, ongoing interpretation services and frequent informative meetings related to the social and legal status.

HOUSING

This pillar is essential within a participatory approach on the development of house seeking, house maintenance skills and communication with the landlord. Semi-independent living opportunities are highly recommended.
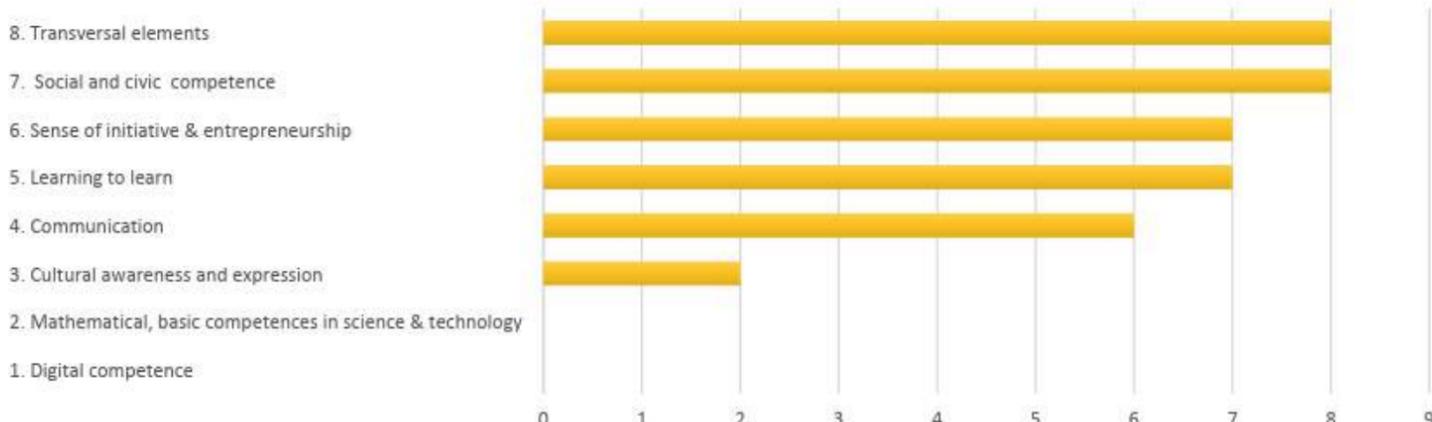
Communication
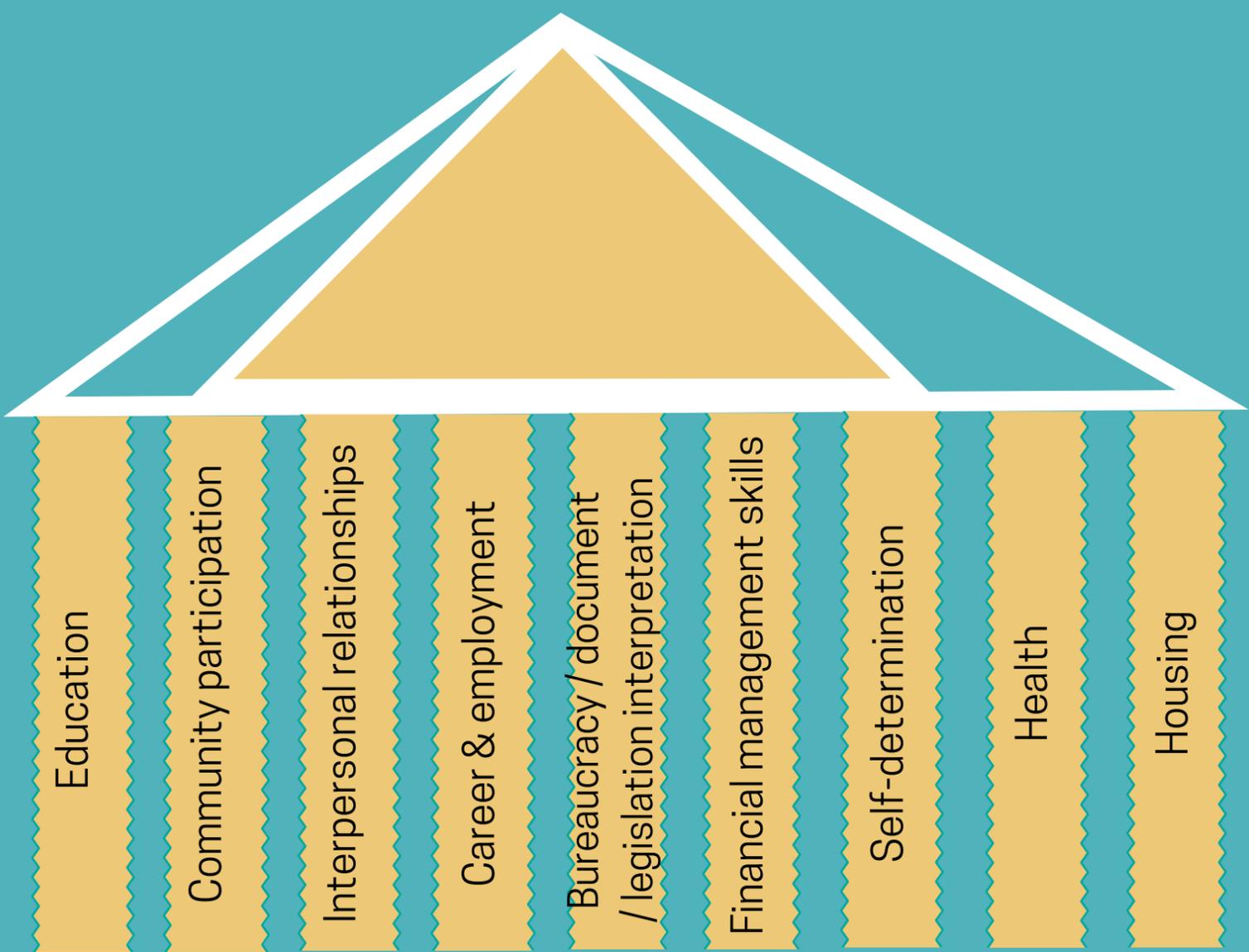
Transversal Elements

Social & Civic

Learning to Learn

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

ERF Competences Frequency
Needs of the Children

	Value
8. Transversal elements	8
7. Social and civic competence	8
6. Sense of initiative & entrepreneurship	7
5. Learning to learn	7
4. Communication	6
3. Cultural awareness and expression	2
2. Mathematical, basic competences in science & technology	0
1. Digital competence	0

The most frequent ERF competences that need to be developed or reinforced are transversal elements, social and civic competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and learning to learn.

Education

Community participation

Interpersonal relationships

Career & employment

Bureaucracy / document / legislation interpretation

Financial management skills

Self-determination

Health

Housing

The 9 pillars for Autonomous Living

Autonomous Living process as a tree

As with all things in nature, growth, maturing and development happens organically over time with the right care and support. Seeing the Autonomous Living process as a tree, one can imagine each branch representing a developed competence, that will nourish the diversity of leaves symbolizing the desired pillars. An autonomous tree is a well-grown rounded and connected tree.
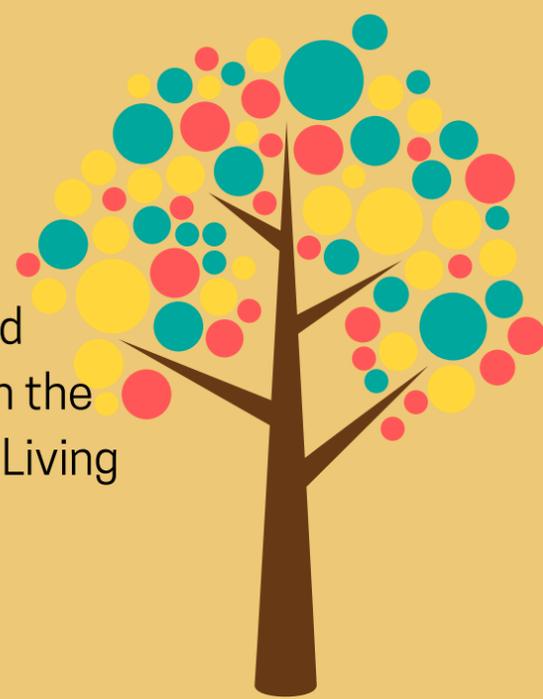
The needed competences can be absorbed in different rhythms and incorporated in a daily practice through a tailor-made approach, which will reflect in the stability and sustainability of the pillars. The envisioned Leaving Care Mentor, therefore, being aware of all this complex system, becomes a gardener making the needed sustenance available at the right time for each child.
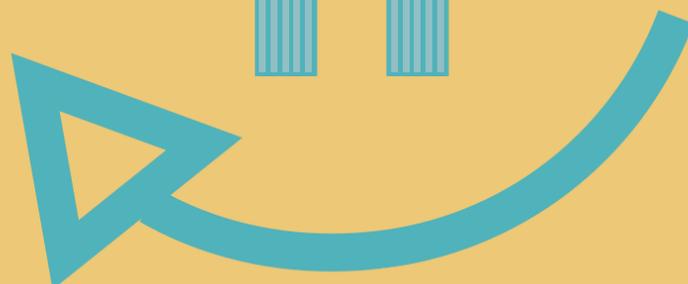
Expressed needs

Designed autonomy Pillars
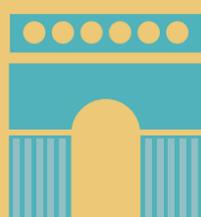
Reinforced ERF competences

The flow, the rationale and vision of INTEGRA project

4. Professionals' Needs as Capacity Building Pillars

The core pillars for PROFESSIONALS working with children in care and young care leavers involve needs related to:

Education promotion
Cultural awareness diversity
Health promotion
Knowledge about teenagers' development
Stakeholders network
Financial management skills promotion
Promotion of self-determination, learn how to learn and autonomy skills
Knowledge about legislation
Promotion of Housing seeking/maintenance skills
Communication skills

Overarching perspective: Across the 5 countries, the common perspective and need is the creation of an active and multi-layered network of actors with different roles in the ageing-out-of-care process. This network would follow a continuous collaboration framework that enables constant communication, maps needs collectively, and designs multidisciplinary responses.

The visual representation of key competences for Professionals

CAPACITY BUILDING PILLARS
NEEDS OF THE PROFESSIONALS

EDUCATION PROMOTION

Transversal Elements

Learning to Learn

Digital

This pillar is valued when it involves training on the ability to lead educational and vocational trainings that help participants identify practical life projects and technical skills, and develop a personalised educational path. Knowledge of specific culture characteristics is highly recommended.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS

This pillar is valued when promoting a multicultural team, trainings on intercultural competencies as an intercultural mediator, initiatives that address cultural diversity awareness. For Cyprus, Greece and Spain special training regarding North African political and social aspects is needed.

Transversal Elements

Cultural Awareness & Expression

Communication

HEALTH PROMOTION

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

Transversal Elements

Learning to Learn

This pillar is valued when includes training on understanding the mental health of children in care, promoting autonomy in health care, knowledge for hygiene rules and access to the healthcare system. Psychological support for professionals is highly recommended.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT TEENAGERS DEVELOPMENT

Transversal Elements

Learning to Learn

Cultural Awareness & Expression

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

This pillar is valued when promoting a broader multidisciplinary diagnosis considering multiple aspects (beyond the age factor as the cultural determinants) of the teenagers' development to better understand their needs. Special focus on non-regular development paths (e.g. cognitive issues, PST syndrome) is required.

STAKEHOLDER NETWORK

This pillar is valued when developing a tailor-made network-oriented mentality with post-care stakeholders, good collaboration among different actors and sensitized communities. An active, connected and acknowledged portal is highly recommended.

Social & Civic

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

Communication

PROMOTION OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Social & Civic

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

Transversal Elements

Learning to Learn

This pillar is valued when in a safe environment a learning by doing practice on management skills is promoted that allows space for mistakes and includes training and knowledge on technical strategies to promote efficient money management skills.
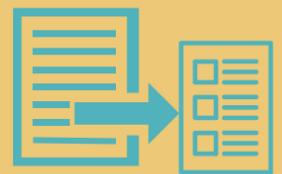
PROMOTION OF SELF-DETERMINATION

This pillar is valued for systematic approaches on evidence-based programmes or methodologies to diminish the passive status of the children in care and increase their sense of control over their care and life.

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

Transversal Elements

Learning to Learn

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LEGISLATION

Transversal Elements

Communication

Digital

This pillar is valued when entails training for legislation interpretation, guidance from governmental agencies and know-how to present specific legislation associated to the current legal status of the children in care. The goal is to minimize uncertainty and increase the feeling of participation.

PROMOTION OF HOUSING SEEKING & MAINTENANCE

This pillar is valued when a holistic and systematic framework for house maintenance activities is to be developed and applied as soon as the child enters the residential care system and increases responsibilities gradually until the ageing out period. House seeking skills are to be developed from the age of 16.

Social & Civic

Sense of Initiative & Entrepreneurship

Transversal Elements

COMMUNICATION

Social & Civic

Learning to Learn

Transversal Elements

Cultural Awareness & Expression

Communication

This pillar is valued when creating an honest space of communication with children, and includes training for professionals on oral expression, specifically on positive/assertive oral communication with vulnerable groups.

For more national themes and nuances please see National Reports available at www.integra.uncrcpc.org

5. Recommendations for a comprehensive and inclusive transition into autonomous living

Each child has a different story and background and, thus, expresses different needs and challenges. Moreover, the time they spend at the reception centres varies, therefore their preparation has to be tailor-made for a specific path. These guidelines are indicative for a plan towards an optimal transition into autonomous adulthood.

1. **Building a relationship before planning**: The most comprehensive transition plan will fail without an informed and trust-based relation between caregiver and child.

2. **Guiding Supportive Figure**: Train and empower the caregiver as Leaving Care Mentor, who is the professional safe attachment figure that has the knowledge and the abilities to guide and connect the care leavers towards an independent and active life.

3. **Personalised approach and avoiding one-size-fits-all approach:** The mentors need to support the children in a personalised approach, design a tailor-made plan for each child according to their personal needs and dreams. Any specific services should also follow the same approach.

4. **Smooth and gradual transition out of care place into adulthood:** Providing integrated models of support that could start as soon as a child enters the residential care and are provided through a stable, continuous relationship with the child where the transition plan is adjustable according to the time in the care centre.

5. **The transition plan should include a personal life project:** The transition plan should always involve the development of a life project that is connected to their strongest passion and interests.

6 . **Tailored-made educational opportunities**: these educational opportunities should address (a) engagement in educational and vocational activities where different communities come together and the audience is mixed; (b) Language lessons that will support their connection to the local community; (c) fast track educational opportunities for children in care that enter the system after 17 years old.

7. The presence and the quality of informal and formal support network: There is a need for a system that envisions the growth of significant, long-term relationships and social networks at its heart; building a safe community around the children so the care leavers do not feel that they get out into a social "empty space".

8. **Focus on the integrity of identity:** Children in care in general, and unaccompanied children specifically, have unique cultural references deeply connected to their identity and their sense of being an individual. Caregivers and mentors should be aware of how to keep that connection alive.

9. A continuous collaboration among different agencies and sensitised actors: this collaboration is required in order to prevent hindering the progress achieved while in care, either by the mentor or by any other agencies involved in the support care-chain.

10 . **Be aware of unpredictable elements and obstacles:** The obstacles might come either from the care system, community or even the children in care. In some cases, the children are not interested or are afraid of entering adulthood and, thus, refuse to engage in any empowerment or rehabilitation activities.

11. Terminology: The "ageing out of care" expression indicates that the child exits a status, an identity, and does not point to post care support. The suggested expressions "ageing out of care towards autonomous living" or "ageing out of care into adulthood" could contribute to a new mind-set and become a constant reminder to all professionals that the final goal of this inclusive process is a confident, autonomous and integrated adult, instead of just the completion of the present state of care when they become 18 years old.