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Skills4Life

Supporting the socio-economic integration of youth leaving child protection systems by developing their skills and capacities through more inclusive leaving care policies in the Danube region

D1.1.4 – Assessment of the actual need and challenges of target group

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
Abbreviation	Description

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from three Austrian surveys conducted within the Skills4Life project: **care leavers (22 respondents), employers/HR professionals (15), and trainers/professionals working with care leavers (47)**. Together, they provide a clear overview of care leavers' situations, labour market expectations, and support system gaps.

Main Findings

Care leavers report significant challenges in **financial security, housing stability, mental health, and navigating bureaucracy**. Many feel unprepared for adult responsibilities and lack reliable support networks. Their biggest fears include **unemployment, homelessness, and not being able to afford basic needs**. Despite these difficulties, care leavers show strong **resilience, adaptability, and motivation** when supported appropriately.

Employers express **high openness** to hiring care leavers, especially if they are well-prepared. They value **reliability, teamwork, communication, and willingness to learn** more than formal qualifications. Their concerns mainly relate to **confidence, emotional stability, and limited experience**. Many are willing to offer **internships, trial days, mentoring, or entry-level jobs**, but request clearer **onboarding support, contact persons, and job coaching**.

Trainers and professionals identify urgent needs in **mental health support, mentoring, job readiness, and financial literacy**. They report barriers such as **fragmented services, limited time/resources, insufficient aftercare**, and abrupt termination of support at age 18. Many also feel undertrained in **trauma-informed and mental health-related approaches**.

Key Recommendations

- Strengthen **long-term, relationship-based support**, especially mentoring and mental health services.
- Improve **aftercare and coordination** across institutions.
- Provide **practical life skills and financial literacy training**.
- Expand **job readiness programmes and structured employer partnerships**.
- Invest in **professional training** for those working with care leavers.

Overall, care leavers have strong potential but require **stable, coordinated, and holistic support** to succeed in education, employment, and independent living.

1. Introduction

The Skills4Life ONLINE surveys in Austria were jointly distributed by the project partners **ÖJAB** and **ipcenter** using a wide range of communication channels. To ensure broad participation, the questionnaires were shared not only within the Austrian stakeholder network, but also across **external stakeholder networks**, including vocational education and training centres, youth work organisations, residential care providers, social service institutions, employer networks, and professional associations. This approach made it possible to capture insights from participants who work with or employ care leavers but were not directly involved in the project, thereby strengthening the representativeness of the data.

Three target groups were surveyed:

1. **Care leavers** aged 18–29 living in Austria who shared their experiences with housing, education, employment, finances, well-being, and social support.
2. **Employers and HR professionals** from different sectors, including private companies, NGOs, public institutions, and vocational training bodies.
3. **Trainers and professionals** such as social workers, youth workers, educators, counsellors, job coaches, and project staff who regularly support care leavers in their transition to adulthood.

The respondents represent a diverse range of backgrounds, experience levels, and institutional contexts. Their insights provide a multi-perspective understanding of the needs, challenges, and opportunities surrounding care leavers' access to education, employment, and stable support structures in Austria. This triangulated dataset forms the empirical basis for the findings and recommendations presented in this report.

2. Methodology

This report is based on data collected through three **online surveys** conducted within the Austrian component of the Skills4Life project. The surveys targeted (1) care leavers, (2) employers and HR professionals, and (3) trainers and professionals working with care leavers. All surveys were administered digitally using structured questionnaires and were designed to capture the experiences, expectations, and perspectives of all three groups.

Data Collection Approach

The surveys were disseminated by Austrian project partners **ÖJAB** and **ipcenter** through a wide range of internal and external communication channels. The online distribution enabled broad outreach and participation from individuals and organisations both inside and outside the direct project network. Surveys were shared through:

- project mailing lists and partner networks,
- vocational training centres and social support services,
- residential care providers and youth work organisations,
- employer networks and HR platforms,
- NGOs, educational institutions, and other relevant stakeholders.

This approach ensured that responses were not limited to project-affiliated individuals but also included broader actors from the Austrian support landscape.

Tools and Questionnaires

All three surveys were created and distributed using **Google Forms**. Each questionnaire included a mix of closed-ended questions (multiple choice, scales, checkboxes) and open-ended items to capture qualitative insights. The instruments were tailored to each participant group:

- The **Care Leaver Survey** focused on housing, finances, education, employment, emotional well-being, skills, support networks, and future hopes or fears.
- The **Employer & HR Survey** explored hiring attitudes, skill expectations, perceived challenges, supportive practices, and willingness to collaborate.
- The **Trainer & Professional Survey** examined frontline staff perspectives on care leavers' support needs, strengths, common barriers, skill gaps, and systemic shortcomings.

Respondent Profiles and Sample Size

A total of **85 respondents** completed the Austrian surveys:

1. Care leavers (23 respondents)

- **Age range: 16 to 29 years**, living in Austria in diverse housing, employment, and educational situations.
- Their responses reflect significant variation in independence levels, emotional well-being, and access to support.

2. Employers and HR professionals (15 respondents)

- Representing private companies, NGOs, public institutions, and vocational training providers.
- Participants work across sectors such as education, health and social care, manufacturing, construction, IT, and administration.
- Organisations ranged in size from micro-enterprises to large employers with over 250 staff.

3. Trainers and professionals (47 respondents)

- Including social workers, youth workers, educators, counsellors, job coaches, vocational trainers, and project coordinators.
- Working in NGOs, VET centres, residential care, public social services, and related fields.
- Their experience with care leavers ranged from under one year to more than seven years.

Data Use and Analysis

The report relies exclusively on the insights provided through these online surveys. Quantitative data was analysed to identify recurring patterns, while qualitative responses were coded and summarised to highlight themes, concerns, and recommendations across participants. No interviews or supplementary desk research were conducted beyond the survey analysis.

3. Experiences of care leavers after leaving care

This section summarises the lived experiences of care leavers in Austria after transitioning out of care, drawing on the 23 survey responses collected in the Skills4Life project. The analysis focuses on five domains: **education, employment, housing, health, and social inclusion**.

3.1 Housing Situation after Care

Housing plays a crucial role in stabilising young people's transition to adulthood. The results show that many care leavers manage to secure a permanent living arrangement, but with varying degrees of independence:

- **50% (11 out of 22)** live in their **own (rented) flat/house**
- **18% (4 out of 22)** live **with parents or relatives**.
- **18% (4 out of 22)** live **with a partner**.
- **14% (3 out of 22)** share a flat or house with friends.
- **9% (2 out of 22)** reside in **temporary housing** such as hostels, shelters, or supported accommodation..

This distribution indicates that while half of the respondents achieve full housing independence, a substantial share still rely on family, friends, or transitional housing arrangements. The presence of young people in shelters or temporary accommodation suggests ongoing vulnerabilities and the need for continued housing support.

3.2 Employment Situation

Employment outcomes are mixed. Of the 21 respondents who answered this question:

- **4** are employed **full-time**.
- **3** work **part-time**.
- **6** are **not employed but actively looking for work**.
- **5** are **neither working nor looking**, often due to schooling, care responsibilities, or other personal reasons..

This means that **one-third of respondents are in work**, while the majority are navigating unemployment or job search challenges. Combined with later responses on skill gaps, the data suggests that care leavers perceive the job market as difficult to enter, especially without targeted support.

3.3 Education and Training Participation

Education and training form another important pillar in the transition to adulthood:

- **7 out of 22** respondents are **studying full-time**.
- **3** are studying **part-time**.
- **9** are **not engaged** in any education or training.

Thus, **almost one-half** of the respondents continue some form of formal education or vocational training, which can act as a protective factor against unemployment and social exclusion. However, a significant proportion has already disengaged from education—often

shortly after leaving care—highlighting the need for better guidance and smoother transitions into vocational pathways.

3.4 Financial Stability and Readiness for Independent Life

Financial security is a consistent challenge:

- **5** report they **“manage well.”**
- **7** say they **“get by but it’s difficult.”**
- **9** say they are **“struggling a lot.”**

More than **70%** experience some degree of financial hardship.

When asked how prepared they felt at age 18 to handle adult life, including housing, money, and responsibilities:

- **3** felt **very prepared.**
- **9** felt **somewhat prepared.**
- **8** felt **not prepared at all..**

The majority therefore entered adulthood with insufficient preparation—an important structural insight for aftercare policy.

The **hardest aspects of leaving care** included:

- Taking full responsibility (8)
- Finding a place to live (6)
- Finding a job (6)
- Managing money (5)
- Knowing who to ask for help (6)
- Feeling lonely (4)
- Handling stress/emotions (4).

These challenges map closely onto typical transition needs and underline that leaving care often involves multiple simultaneous responsibilities without adequate scaffolding.

3.5 Health and Well-Being

Mental health emerged as a significant area of vulnerability:

- **7** struggle with mental health **often.**
- **5** struggle **sometimes.**

- **4** rarely struggle.
- **6** report **never** struggling..

This means **over half (12 out of 22)** experience ongoing mental health issues.

The emotional support care leavers would find most helpful includes:

- **17** – having a **mentor or buddy**
- **15** – learning to **manage stress and emotions**
- **14** – access to **free counselling/therapy**
- **6** – joining a peer group.

These findings point to a strong desire for regular, personalised support and mental health services.

3.6 Social Inclusion and Support Networks

Social connectedness is a core indicator of well-being. The results show both support sources and gaps:

Support networks

When asked who supports them when they need help:

- **7** rely on **friends**.
- **5** on **family**.
- **4** on **former carers or social workers**.
- **4** selected **“other.”**
- **1** has **no one** to rely on.

While most care leavers have some form of support, the fact that **only 4** still receive support from former carers highlights a steep drop-off in relational continuity.

Loneliness

Care leavers' experiences of loneliness show clear patterns:

- **2** feel lonely **almost every day**.
- **13** **sometimes**.
- **7** **rarely**.

This means that **15 of 22 (68%)** feel lonely at least sometimes or daily.

Confidence in seeking help

- **4** feel confident **“always.”**
- **12** **sometimes.**
- **6** find it **very hard..**

Many care leavers hesitate to reach out for support even when they need it.

3.7 Biggest Fears for the Future

The fears expressed by care leavers reveal deep concerns about stability, safety, and long-term prospects. The most frequently mentioned fears include:

- **Not being able to afford basic necessities** such as food, rent, and bills (4 mentions)
- **Not finding stable employment** (4 mentions)
- **Mental health problems** (3 mentions)
- **Having no one to support them** (3 mentions)
- **Becoming homeless** (3 mentions)
- **Being judged because of their background or care experience** (2 mentions)
- **Not knowing what to do with their life** (1 mention)
- **Other personal fears** (1 mention)

These concerns show that care leavers’ anxieties centre around **economic survival, mental and emotional wellbeing**, and **the risk of isolation**. Fear of homelessness and unemployment reflects the structural vulnerabilities they face, while worries about lacking support demonstrate the emotional burden of navigating adulthood largely alone. The recurring fear of stigma indicates that many are aware of societal biases linked to their background.

Overall, these fears underline the urgent need for continuous aftercare services, tailored mental health support, more accessible pathways to employment, and efforts to combat stigma.

3.8 Summary of Key Insights

The Austrian survey responses demonstrate that care leavers' experiences after leaving care are shaped by a combination of **structural barriers** and **individual resilience**:

- Housing independence is common, but some remain in unstable or temporary accommodation.
- Employment rates are low, and many feel underprepared for the labour market.
- A significant proportion continues education, though many disengage early.
- Financial insecurity and lack of preparedness for adult life are major concerns.
- Mental health challenges are widespread, with a strong demand for counselling, mentoring, and emotional skills training.
- Social isolation is common, and reliance on peer networks outweighs formal aftercare connections.

Overall, the data highlights a clear need for **structured aftercare support**, especially in mental health, financial literacy, career preparation, and social integration.

4. Expectations and feedback from Employers and HR Professionals

This section explores employers' and HR professionals' perspectives on hiring care leavers, with a focus on expectations, skills needs, employability challenges, and examples of supportive practices. The insights are based on 15 survey responses from Austrian employers and HR professionals across different sectors and organisation types, as presented in the *Austria Employers & HR Professionals Survey* dataset. The findings provide a valuable understanding of how the labour market views young care leavers and what support structures could enhance their employability.

4.1 Profiles of Responding Organisations

The employers and HR professionals surveyed represent a broad range of industries and organisational sizes. Most respondents come from:

- **Private companies (6 respondents)**
- **Non-profit organisations (7 respondents)**
- **Vocational training providers (2 respondents).**

Organisation size varies considerably:

- **6 organisations** employ **1–10 employees**,
- **2 organisations** employ **11–50**,
- **7 organisations** employ **more than 250 employees**.

Sector representation is similarly diverse, with the highest numbers in:

- **Education and training (8)**
- **Health and social care (4)**

Other sectors include manufacturing, construction, IT, and administrative services.

This diversity adds weight to the findings, as they reflect perspectives across several major employment fields relevant to care leavers.

4.2 Employers' Awareness and Attitudes Toward Care Leavers

Awareness of the term “care leaver”

Only **5 out of 15** respondents had heard the term before, while **9** had never heard it, indicating a **low awareness level**.

Past hiring experience

Only **1 employer** knowingly hired a care leaver before, and **13** believe they have not. This suggests that care leavers enter the labour market largely **invisibly** and that employers rarely identify them as a specific group requiring tailored support.

Openness to hiring care leavers

Despite limited awareness, attitudes are overwhelmingly positive:

- **5 employers** are **absolutely open** to hiring care leavers,
- **9** say **possibly, if well-prepared**,
- Only **1** is unsure, and **none** said “no.”

These findings show a **high willingness to engage**, provided that care leavers receive sufficient preparation and support.

4.3 Employers' Perception of Employability and Work Readiness

Employers were asked to identify concerns and expectations regarding the potential hiring of care leavers.

Perceived challenges

The most commonly noted concerns include:

- **Low self-confidence or motivation (6 responses)**
- **Emotional or social challenges (4)**
- **Need for extra support or mentoring (4)**
- **Lack of job experience (3)**
- **Unstable living situation (3)**
- **Gaps in education or work skills (3)**
- **Concerns about workplace fit/team dynamics (3).**

Only **4 employers** indicated “no concerns.”

Overall, employers do not view care leavers as incapable but rather as **potential employees who may require additional support**, particularly in confidence-building, stability, and soft skills.

Soft skills considered essential

The soft skills employers consider most important for entry-level employees include:

- **Punctuality and reliability (9)**
- **Teamwork (9)**
- **Communication (7)**
- **Willingness to learn (7)**
- **Problem-solving (5)**
- **Resilience (2)**

These results reflect clear expectations for basic workplace behaviour and interpersonal skills—areas where care leavers sometimes need additional support but can improve significantly with guidance.

Hard skills expected by employers

Key hard skills mentioned include:

- **Basic computer skills (11 responses)**
- **Language and communication skills (9)**
- **Manual/technical skills (6)**
- **Industry-specific technical knowledge (6)**

- **Customer service skills (3)**

These competencies align with the profiles of common entry-level jobs and indicate that **basic digital literacy, communication skills, and applied technical skills** are central to employers' expectations.

4.4 How Employers Assess Work Readiness

When evaluating young applicants, employers rely on a combination of formal and informal tools:

- **Interviews (13 responses)**
- **CV/application screening (9)**
- **Trial days or internships (7)**
- **Formal qualifications (6)**
- **References (1).**

Notably, informal impressions and attitudes (3) also play a role.

This highlights that **even with limited formal qualifications**, care leavers can demonstrate motivation, interpersonal skills, and commitment during trial periods and interviews.

4.5 Qualities Employers Value in Candidates with Difficult Backgrounds

When asked what strengths might make a young person with a difficult background stand out, employers highlighted:

- **Motivation to learn and grow (13 responses)**
- **Being proactive and showing initiative (10)**
- **A positive attitude (7)**
- **Openness to feedback and learning (6)**
- **Willingness to accept guidance or mentoring (4)**
- **Personal resilience (2)**
- **Life experience and maturity (1).**

These answers indicate that employers recognise the **strengths inherent in young people who have overcome adversity**. They value persistence, initiative, and growth-oriented mindsets.

4.6 Support Measures Employers Would Consider Offering

Employers express willingness to provide several supportive entry opportunities for care leavers:

- **Internships (11 responses)**

- **Entry-level jobs (7)**
- **Apprenticeships (3)**
- **Mentoring or buddy systems (3)**
- **Shadowing days (3)**
- **CV or interview preparation workshops (2).**

This demonstrates a strong potential for **structured partnerships** between care leaving services, youth organisations, and employers.

4.7 What Support Employers Need to Successfully Hire Care Leavers

Employers identified several types of support that would help them feel confident hiring or mentoring a care leaver:

- **Clear onboarding guidelines or toolkits (6 responses)**
- **Contact persons from youth services (6)**
- **External mentors or job coaches (5)**
- **Better awareness about the care system (5)**
- **Training on inclusive hiring (3)**
- **Financial incentives/support (3).**

A majority want **external structures or partners** to guide the process. This is a major opportunity for Skills4Life: employers seek coordination, information, and ongoing support.

4.8 Willingness to Cooperate with Care Leaver Support Projects

Interest in cooperation with the Skills4Life project is high:

- **10 employers** said **yes**,
- **4 maybe**,
- **1 not sure**.

In addition, **4 employers** said they would “definitely” like more information, and **8** said “maybe.”

This strong interest suggests that employers are open to partnerships that help them hire and support care leavers effectively.

4.9 Factors That Would Encourage Employer Participation

Employers highlighted several motivations for joining a project like Skills4Life:

- **Having a clear contact person or project coordinator (12 responses)**

- **Understanding the positive social impact (6)**
- **Recognition or certificates for participation (5)**
- **Seeing success stories/testimonials (4)**
- **Access to a talent pool of motivated young people (4)**
- **Being able to co-design activities (2)**
- **Having a low-risk trial period option (2)**

These insights show that employers need **clarity, structure, and reassurance**, but are open to contributing meaningfully once these conditions are met.

4.10 Summary of Key Insights

The survey results paint a positive but realistic picture:

- Employers **want to hire care leavers**, especially with preparation and support.
- They value **soft skills**, motivation, and attitude more than formal qualifications.
- They recognise potential challenges — particularly confidence, stability, and emotional resilience — but these concerns are **manageable**.
- Employers are willing to offer **internships, entry-level jobs, trial days, and mentoring systems**, which are precisely the pathways care leavers need.
- With external coordination, toolkits, and youth service support, employers feel prepared to create inclusive work environments for care leavers.

Overall, the findings highlight a major opportunity for the Skills4Life project: **Austrian employers are open, motivated, and ready to collaborate — provided they receive structured guidance and tangible support.**

5. Perspective of Trainers & Professionals Working with Care Leavers

This section summarises the perspectives of 47 Austrian trainers, social workers, counsellors, youth workers, educators, and project staff who work directly with care leavers. Their responses provide crucial insight into the training needs of young people, barriers within the support system, and effective or missing elements in service provision.

5.1 Views on Care Leavers' Needs and Everyday Challenges

Professionals describe care leavers as facing a multidimensional set of challenges during their transition to adulthood. The most frequently cited issues include:

- **Mental health and emotional well-being (30 responses)**
Anxiety, unprocessed trauma, depression, and difficulties regulating emotions are mentioned as major obstacles that affect participation in training and employment.
- **Finding employment (22)**
Care leavers often struggle with motivation, communication, reliability, and a lack of work experience.
- **Navigating bureaucracy (16)**
Tasks such as applying for benefits, health insurance, or legal documents can quickly become overwhelming.
- **Managing money and finances (14)**
Professionals observe recurring difficulties with budgeting, saving, paying bills, and avoiding debt.
- **Housing insecurity (18)**
Accessing and maintaining stable accommodation remains difficult for many.
- **Gaps in life skills (10)**
Including cooking, cleaning, structuring daily routines, and self-care.
- **Loneliness and lack of a support network (11)**
Many young people have no emotionally reliable adult in their lives.

Despite these challenges, professionals emphasise that care leavers also possess significant **strengths**. The most frequently mentioned are:

- **Adaptability (27 responses)**
- **Motivation to improve their situation (25)**
- **Resilience and perseverance (24)**
- **Problem-solving ability (19)**
- **Independence and self-reliance (15)**

Trainers repeatedly describe care leavers as capable, resourceful, and creative once trust has been established. This combination of vulnerability and resilience underpins many of the recommended support approaches.

5.2 Support Needs and Effective Approaches in Practice

Professionals were asked which forms of support they believe are most urgently needed. Their answers highlight the importance of **holistic, relationship-based assistance**:

- **Mental health support (31 responses)**
- **Mentoring or a trusted adult (27)**
- **Job readiness support (26)**
- **Financial literacy (15)**
- **Peer support and community building (9)**
- **Housing assistance (10)**

Mental health support and mentoring were cited overwhelmingly as the two pillars on which all other progress depends. Professionals note that without emotional stability and a trusting

relationship with at least one supportive adult, care leavers often disengage from learning or work.

Regarding which forms of support care leavers respond to best, **one-on-one mentoring** is seen as most effective (27 responses). Group formats such as workshops or peer-led sessions can complement this but are not sufficient on their own. Digital tools are valued mainly as **add-ons**, not as replacements for personal contact.

Professionals also identified common skill gaps in care leavers that limit their employability or ability to live independently. The most frequently mentioned include:

- **Motivation and goal-setting (20 responses)**
- **Problem-solving (17)**
- **Time management (16)**
- **Job-seeking skills (14)**
- **Financial planning (13)**
- **Self-confidence and emotional regulation (15 each)**

These gaps align closely with the challenges noted above and reinforce the need for structured, practical training formats.

Confidence among professionals varies when supporting young people with emotional or psychological needs:

- 11 feel **very confident**,
- 23 **somewhat confident**,
- 13 **not very confident**.

This highlights the importance of improving training and professional development in trauma-informed and mental health-related areas.

5.3 Barriers in Service Provision and Systemic Gaps

Professionals identified several barriers that limit the effectiveness of current support structures. The most frequently mentioned include:

- **Time and resource limitations (23 responses)**
- **Mental health issues that exceed organisational capacity (21)**
- **Lack of consistent, long-term support (19)**
- **Difficulties building trust due to instability and repeated loss (17)**
- **Low motivation or engagement among young people (16)**
- **Bureaucratic hurdles and funding constraints (11)**
- **Insufficient training for specific needs (10)**

Open comments point to several systemic issues, including:

- abrupt termination of support at age 18,
- lack of coordination between institutions,
- inconsistent expectations or procedures between services,
- insufficient time for truly relational work,
- missing materials and tools for trainers, especially digital or documentation tools.

Professionals were also asked to assess the quality of Austria's current support system for care leavers. Only **3 respondents** rated it "very good," 7 "good," and 12 "adequate," while **20 respondents** consider it "poor."

These ratings show a clear consensus that the current system is **fragmented, stretched, and not sufficiently equipped** to meet the needs of care leavers.

When asked what is missing from the system, professionals emphasised:

- **consistent aftercare and follow-up services (32 responses),**
- **holistic and trauma-informed approaches (15),**
- **affordable housing (15),**
- **better coordination between services (11),**
- **public awareness and stronger policy support (16),**
- **financial and legal guidance (7).**

Many note that care leavers must achieve a level of independence at 18 that many of their peers only reach years later. This expectation, professionals argue, is unrealistic and requires a fundamental shift in policy and practice.

5.4 Training Needs of Professionals and Reflections on Digital Tools

The survey reveals a significant lack of specialised training for those working with care leavers. Only 3 respondents received relevant training within the last year; 8 received training more than a year ago, and 26 would like training but have not had access to it.

Professionals expressed strong interest in capacity-building, especially in:

- **legal rights and administrative processes (29 responses)**
- **mental health first aid (27)**
- **trauma-informed care (22)**
- **conflict management (25)**
- **career guidance and job coaching (14)**
- **intercultural/diversity training (12)**

Digital tools are seen as potentially helpful:

- 6 respondents said they could improve support,
- 30 said "maybe,"
- 6 said "no."

For digital tools to be useful, professionals request:

- resources for trainers (23 responses),
- chat/mentoring functions (19),
- information on rights and housing (16),
- templates and guides such as budgeting tools (15),
- e-learning modules for care leavers (15),
- planning and calendar tools (6).

Importantly, digital tools are seen as **complements**, not substitutes for personal relationships.

5.5 Summary of Key Insights

Professionals working with care leavers describe a landscape marked by **high needs**, **fragmented structures**, and **significant gaps in long-term support**. They highlight mental health challenges, housing insecurity, weak support networks, and life skills deficits as major obstacles to independence. However, they also recognise care leavers' resilience, adaptability, and motivation when provided with stable relationships and tailored guidance.

Effective support requires **holistic, trauma-informed approaches**, consistent mentoring, improved coordination between services, and significantly more training opportunities for staff. Digital tools can strengthen practice, but cannot replace the human relationships at the core of successful support.

Overall, the perspectives of trainers and professionals strongly reinforce the need for **policy changes**, **systemic improvements**, and **enhanced professional training** to ensure care leavers can successfully transition into adulthood.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings from the three Austrian surveys—care leavers, employers/HR representatives, and trainers/professionals—provide a comprehensive view of the challenges care leavers face and the systemic conditions shaping their transition to adulthood. Across all groups, clear patterns emerge: care leavers demonstrate motivation and resilience, employers are willing to support them if structured frameworks are in place, and professionals consistently highlight gaps in mental health support, aftercare, and coordination. Together, these insights inform the recommendations below.

6.1 Conclusions

Care leavers face significant and interconnected barriers

Care leavers report challenges across nearly all domains of life: housing insecurity, financial instability, limited life skills, mental health difficulties, and weak support networks. Many feel underprepared for adult life and lack long-term emotional and practical guidance. Their biggest fears—homelessness, unemployment, lack of support, and financial hardship—reflect real structural vulnerabilities. Despite this, they show strong adaptability, motivation, and problem-solving capacities, especially when provided with stable guidance.

Employers show openness but need structured support

Employers express willingness to hire care leavers, particularly when they are well-prepared and supported. They value motivation, reliability, teamwork, and willingness to learn over formal qualifications. However, concerns regarding emotional stability, confidence, and lack of experience persist. Employers emphasise the need for clear contact persons, job coaches, onboarding guidelines, and opportunities for low-risk entry, such as internships or trial days.

Professionals highlight systemic fragmentation and lack of resources

Trainers and social workers identify mental health support, mentoring, job readiness, and financial literacy as urgent needs. They describe the existing support system as fragmented, underfunded, and inconsistent, with abrupt termination of support at age 18 being a critical structural gap. Many professionals feel insufficiently trained in trauma-informed and mental health approaches but express willingness to strengthen their skills. Strengthening coordination across sectors is seen as essential.

A coordinated, long-term, and relationship-based approach is crucial

Across all groups, the most consistent message is that care leavers need stability: stable relationships, stable guidance, stable housing, and stable access to services. Fragmentation between child and adult systems, unclear responsibilities, and time-limited support directly

undermine outcomes. The Skills4Life project is well-positioned to bridge these gaps by strengthening cooperation between training providers, employers, and youth support services.

6.2 Recommendations

For Policymakers

1. **Extend and stabilise aftercare**
Introduce or strengthen aftercare services beyond age 18, ensuring continuity rather than abrupt termination of support. Promote flexible, long-term engagement based on individual needs.
2. **Improve coordination between services**
Encourage cross-sector collaboration between child welfare, adult services, employment agencies, VET providers, housing authorities, and NGOs. Establish clear referral pathways and shared responsibilities.
3. **Increase access to mental health support**
Expand low-threshold, trauma-informed mental health services tailored to young adults. Ensure short waiting times and continuity of care.
4. **Strengthen housing stability**
Invest in supported housing models for care leavers, including transitional flats, shared accommodation, and rent subsidies.
5. **Provide financial literacy and life skills programmes**
Integrate budgeting, household management, and administrative guidance into publicly funded youth support.
6. **Support professional training**
Fund capacity-building for frontline staff in trauma-informed care, legal rights, intercultural competence, and mental health first aid.

For Employers and HR Professionals

1. **Offer low-threshold entry opportunities**
Provide internships, job shadowing, trial days, and entry-level positions to help care leavers gain experience and confidence.
2. **Establish clear onboarding routines**
Use structured induction plans, expectations checklists, and regular feedback meetings to support young employees in the early months.
3. **Collaborate with youth services**
Designate a contact person and build communication channels with care leaver support organisations for ongoing guidance and problem-solving.
4. **Consider mentoring or buddy systems**
Pair care leavers with a supportive colleague who can help them navigate workplace norms and challenges.

5. **Focus on strengths**

Recognise care leavers' resilience, adaptability, and motivation as valuable assets in the workplace.

For Trainers and Professionals

1. **Prioritise relational, trust-based work**

Mentoring, coaching, and regular check-ins improve engagement and stability. Consistent relationships are a cornerstone for all other interventions.

2. **Strengthen practical life skills training**

Integrate budgeting, time management, meal planning, organisation, and administrative guidance into training curricula.

3. **Use trauma-informed approaches**

Apply methods that acknowledge past adversity, support emotional regulation, and create safe, predictable environments.

4. **Enhance job readiness training**

Provide hands-on support with CVs, applications, interviews, workplace behaviour, communication, and problem-solving.

5. **Promote peer networks**

Support peer-led groups or shared activities to address isolation and foster a sense of belonging.

6. **Advocate for systemic change**

Use professional networks to push for better funding, stronger aftercare models, and coordinated services.

For the Skills4Life Project

1. **Develop a structured transition and mentoring model**

Create a framework that combines emotional support, practical guidance, and job readiness training, delivered by trained mentors.

2. **Strengthen partnerships with employers**

Provide employers with onboarding toolkits, training modules, and a clear project contact person. Facilitate internship placements and job shadowing formats.

3. **Build a digital support tool**

Include:

- information on rights, housing, and support options;
- e-learning modules;
- budgeting templates;
- a mentoring or chat function;
- tools for trainers (case documentation, follow-up, planning).

4. **Create training offers for professionals**

Focus on trauma-informed care, mental health first aid, administrative/legal knowledge, and youth engagement strategies.

5. **Ensure care leavers' voices remain central**

Include young people in co-designing activities, validating tools, and developing training content.

6.3 Overall Summary

The Skills4Life findings show that care leavers in Austria have strong potential but face structural obstacles that require coordinated, long-term, and holistic support. Employers are willing to engage, professionals are committed, and care leavers bring resilience and motivation—yet the system around them must be strengthened. Consistent aftercare, trauma-informed services, practical life skills, and structured employer partnerships are key to supporting successful transitions into adulthood.

Annex I – Aggregated surveys results

D1.1.4 – Assessment of the actual needs and challenges of the target

AUSTRIA Responses of the Care Leavers Survey

[Return Google form link](#)

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe_Bqyn7DZcFwBdYmL_MtAQM4MwKvGzP7yTadE1P3gJkxjmgQZnagp/viewform?usp=sfview&hl=en&as=1677548975639333261

Section 1: About You											Answers to the survey		INSERT Total number of respondents to the survey	
Survey questions														
1. What country are you from?	Austria 22	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bulgaria	Croatia	Czech Republic	Romania	Serbia	Slovenia	Ukraine					
2. How old are you?	16 5	17 /	18 3	19 1	20 2	21 2	22 2	23 6	24 1	25-29 5	Total number of answers collected	22		
3. Where do you live now?	In temporary housing (hostel, shelter, supported accommodation) 2	Shared flat/house with friends 3	With my parents or relatives 4	With a partner 4	In my own flat/house 11							Total number of answers collected	22	
4. Are you currently working?	No, but looking for work 6	Yes, full-time 4	Yes, part-time 3	No, and not looking for work right now. Why? 5							Total number of answers collected	21		
5. Are you currently studying or in training?	Yes, part-time 3	Yes, full-time 7	No 9							Total number of answers collected	22			
6. Do you feel financially secure right now?	Yes, I manage well 5	It's difficult, but I get by 7	No, I'm struggling a lot 9							Total number of answers collected	22			
Section 2: Your Experiences After Leaving Care														
7. When you left care at 18, how ready did you feel to handle adult life, like finding a place to live,	Very prepared 3	Somewhat prepared 9	Not prepared at all 8							Total number of answers collected	20			
8. What was the hardest part about leaving care? (select up to 3)	Finding a place to live 6	Finding a job 6	Managing money 5	Being alone / feeling lonely 4	Handling stress and emotions 4	Knowing who to ask for help 6	Cooking, cleaning, and taking care of myself 2	Having to take full responsibility for everything 8	Something else 2			Total number of answers collected	19	
9. Who supports you now when you need help or advice?	Friends 7	Former carers/social workers 4	Family (biological or foster) 1	No one 1	Other 4							Total number of answers collected	21	
10. How often do you feel lonely?	Almost every day 2	Sometimes 13	Rarely 7	Never /							Total number of answers collected	22		
11. Do you feel confident asking for help when you need	Yes, always 4	Sometimes 12	No, I find it very hard 6							Total number of answers collected	22			
12. Which skills do you feel confident about? (select all that apply)	Writing a CV and applying for jobs 11	Preparing for job interviews 11	Managing my money (budgeting, saving, paying bills) 4	Cooking and planning meals 12	Managing my emotions and stress 1	Building good relationships (friends, colleagues, partners) 10	Something else 1						Total number of answers collected	20
13. Which skills do you feel you need the most help with? (select up to 3)	Writing a CV and applying for jobs 6	Preparing for job interviews 3	Managing my money (budgeting, saving, paying bills) 9	Cooking and planning meals 3	Managing my emotions and stress 8	Building good relationships (friends, colleagues, partners) 7	Something else 1						Total number of answers collected	20
14. What training topics would interest you the most? (select all that apply)	Job search & applications 8	Money & debt 7	Self-confidence & mental health 11	Finding and keeping housing 3	Cooking & managing daily life 3	Digital skills 6	Other 1						Total number of answers collected	22
15. If we created free training for care leavers, would you join?	Yes, definitely 10	Maybe, if the topics are useful for me 12	Probably not /							Total number of answers collected	22			
16. How would you like to do the free training we provide?	Online (on my phone/laptop) 2	In person (with other care leavers) 7	Both are fine 11	Not sure 2							Total number of answers collected	22		
Section 4: Emotional & Mental Health Support														
17. Since leaving care, have you struggled with mental health?	Yes, often 7	Sometimes 5	Rarely 4	Never 6							Total number of answers collected	22		
18. What kind of emotional support would help you most right now? (select up to 2)	Having someone to talk to regularly (mentor or buddy) 17	Joining a group of care leavers to share experiences 6	Free counseling/therapy 14	Learning how to manage stress and emotions 15	I don't need support right now 5	Something else 4						Total number of answers collected	21	
Section 5: Future Hopes & Fears														
19. What do you hope to achieve in the next 5 years? (Select up to 3)	Get a stable job 10	Finish school or vocational training 6	Have my own apartment or house 3	Feel emotionally stable and confident 8	Start a family or have a healthy relationship 3	Start my own business or become self-employed 1	Learn how to manage my money better 7	Improve my mental health and wellbeing 7	Build a strong group of friends or support network 3	Volunteer or give back to the community 5	Something else 3	Total number of answers collected	22	
20. What is your biggest fear for the future?	Not finding a stable job 4	Ending up homeless 3	Struggling with mental health 3	Not being able to afford basic things (like food, rent, bills) 3	Being judged because of my background or care experience 2	Not having anyone to support me 3	Not having my own family /	Not knowing what to do with my life /	Something else 1			Total number of answers collected	22	
21. What's one thing you wish someone had told you before you left care?	How to manage money and pay bills 10	Finding a job or housing takes time 2	That I should plan more before leaving 4	Something else 4							Total number of answers collected	22		
Section 6: Staying In Touch (Optional)														
22. Would you like to receive more information about our care leaver support project?	Yes 14	No 6										Total number of answers collected	20	
23. If yes, please leave your contact details:	WhatsApp - 06634292201 Email - canellaale@gmail.com Whatsapp - 06603147566.jasmin . G.											Total number of answers collected		

Please note that the question was somewhat unclear, as it was asked where there are from, so we have two answers that indicate BH & SE, because there are many residents originating from these countries in AT.

D1.1.4 – Assessment of the actual needs and challenges of the target

AUSTRIA Responses of the Trainers and Professionals Survey

Insert Google Form link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1FAIpQL5dQOuBwKzB0wJre69k_VI3U7OudB5SEGd77FdmDPL2SW2g/viewform?usp=s_boring&oud=116771449746283321251										INSERT Total number of respondents to the survey 47	
Section 1: About Your Company											
Survey questions		Answers to the survey									
1. What country are you from?	Austria	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bulgaria	Croatia	Czech Republic	Romania	Serbia	Slovenia	Ukraine		
	43	2	1	1							
2. What is your current role?	Social worker	Youth worker	Psychologist / counselor	Vocational trainer	Job coach / career advisor	Educator / teacher	Project manager / coordinator	Volunteer	Other	Total number of answers collected	
	8	3	2	18	2	3	5	/	6	47	
3. What type of organization do you work for?	Public social services	Non-profit / NGO	Residential care home	Vocational education and training center	Employment service	Mental health service	Other				Total number of answers collected
	2	6	4	30	2	/	3				47
4. How many years have you worked with care leavers or young people in	Less than 1 year	1-3 years	4-7 years	More than 7 years						Total number of answers collected	
	14	13	9	11						47	
5. How often do you currently work directly with care leavers?	Daily	Weekly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never						Total number of answers collected
	15	7	12	8	5						47
Section 2: Understanding the Needs of Care Leavers											
6. In your experience, what are the biggest challenges care leavers face?	Finding safe and affordable housing	Finding employment	Managing money and personal finances	Mental health and emotional well-being	Loneliness and lack of a support network	Lack of life skills (e.g. cooking, cleaning, self-care)	Navigating bureaucracy (e.g. benefits, healthcare)	Other			Total number of answers collected
	18	22	14	30	11	10	16	5			47
7. Which of the following support areas do you think are most urgent for	Mental health support	Mentoring / having a trusted adult	Job readiness training	Financial literacy	Legal and administrative help	Peer support / community building	Housing assistance	Digital skills	Other	Total number of answers collected	
	31	27	26	15	10	9	10	4	2	47	
8. From your perspective, what are the key strengths of care leavers?	Resilience and perseverance	Independence and self-reliance	Adaptability	Life experience / maturity	Motivation to improve their situation	Problem-solving skills	Creativity	Other			Total number of answers collected
	24	15	27	10	25	19	10	4			47
9. What skills or qualities are often missing in care-leavers when they	Self-confidence	Emotional regulation	Time management	Job-seeking skills	Communication and teamwork	Problem solving	Financial planning	Motivation and goal-setting	Other	Total number of answers collected	
	15	15	16	14	10	17	13	20	3	47	
10. What kind of support do you think care leavers respond to best?	One-on-one mentoring	Group training or workshops	Peer-led support	Digital/online support	Other						Total number of answers collected
	27	5	9	1	3						47
Section 3: Your Own Experience & Training Needs											
11. How confident do you feel when supporting care leavers with emotional or psychological needs?	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Not very confident	Not confident at all						Total number of answers collected	
	11	23	13	/						47	
12. Have you received specific training related to care leavers?	Yes, in the past year	Yes, but more than a year ago	No, but I would like to	No, and I don't feel I need it						Total number of answers collected	
	3	8	26	10						47	
13. What types of training or resources would help you work more effectively with care leavers?	Trauma-informed care	Mental health first aid	Conflict management	Career guidance / job coaching skills	Working with NEET youth (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training)	Intercultural or diversity training	Legal rights and administrative processes	Motivational techniques	Other	Total number of answers collected	
	22	27	25	14	8	12	12	29	2	47	
14. What are your biggest challenges in working with care leavers?	Building trust and long-term relationships	Addressing mental health issues	Lack of consistent support services	Time and resource limitations	Low motivation or engagement from participants	Bureaucratic hurdles / funding constraints	Insufficient training for specific needs	Other			Total number of answers collected
	17	21	19	23	16	11	10	3			47
Section 4: Reflections on Support Systems											
15. How would you rate the current support system for care leavers in your	Very good.	Good.	Adequate.	Poor.	I don't know.						Total number of answers collected
	3	7	12	20	5						47

Please note that the question was somewhat unclear, as it was asked **where they are from**, so we have 3 answers that indicate BIH, BG & HR, because there are many residents originating from these countries in AT.

[illegible]