The Social Exclusion of Vulnerable Youth

Country Report: Côte d'Ivoire

van Dam, K.; Pouw, N.

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The Social Exclusion of Vulnerable Youth

Country Report: Côte d’Ivoire

Authors:

Karel van Dam MSc
Dr. Nicky Pouw

With: Christian Aboua and Cécile Koffi

November 2017
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The study has benefited from the input of all those mentioned above. Any errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors of the report.
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AISSR</td>
<td>Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEPC</td>
<td>Brevet d’Etude du Premier Cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC</td>
<td>Family Based Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSP</td>
<td>Family Strengthening Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOS CV</td>
<td>SOS Children’s Villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UvA</td>
<td>University of Amsterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>Life-history interview</td>
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<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus group discussion</td>
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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose & scope of the research
This report presents the results of a scientific research on the topic of Social Exclusion of Vulnerable Youth, commissioned by SOS Children’s Villages Netherlands and conducted by researchers of the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research (AISSR) at the University of Amsterdam, in collaboration with local counterparts within the study countries. The purpose of the research is to identify and understand the multi-dimensional drivers of social exclusion of vulnerable youth, which concerns youth who have lost, or are at risk of losing parental care.

Specifically, the objective of this research is to answer the main question:

How are vulnerable youth affected by social exclusion in terms of their human wellbeing, employability and social acceptance?

The research aligns with the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) objective to ‘leave no-one behind’ [1; 2] and responds to policymakers and practitioners’ interests, whom have recognized the importance of including youth in their social and economic policies and strategic actions on the ground. The research contributes to the global debate on social exclusion of vulnerable youth and provides concrete input to adjust SOS international’s existing programmes. The research was carried out in the period January 2016 until December 2017 in six countries: Côte d’Ivoire, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, and the Netherlands. The SOS National Offices have supported this research, but did not play a role in the research to warrant scientific independence.

1.2 Contribution to knowledge gaps
This research focuses on vulnerable youth, specifically on young people who have lost or are at risk of losing parental care. The social exclusion of vulnerable youth is a context specific problem, but its’ driving mechanisms show similarities across different societies. Social exclusion of vulnerable youth can thus be a problem in poor and affluent societies alike. If youth are not faring well, this poses challenges and risks to their own and family wellbeing, and undermines societal resilience and stability. Based on a literature review [3], the following knowledge gaps were identified:

(1) There is a general lack of empirical evidence on vulnerable youth (i) in and from an alternative/informal care settings and (ii) in vulnerable families at risk of losing parental care, being actually socially in-/excluded or marginalized
(2) Lack of in-depth understanding of how, why and by whom social in- and exclusion of vulnerable youth takes place, and to what extent
(3) Lack of knowledge on how vulnerable youth are faring later on in life after leaving care – in terms of their independence, human wellbeing, employability, family, and social acceptance.
(4). How do (2) and (3) differ across (1.i) and (1.ii) and according to gender, ethnicity and religion.

1.3 Approach & methodology
The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (2010) follow a Human Rights-based approach [4], which remains key to the mission goal of SOS Children’s Villages. At the same time, a
more comprehensive approach to human wellbeing, sustainability and voice and empowerment is currently advocated under Inclusive Development [5; 6]. This research integrates the two approaches by taking a relational approach [7; 9].

The six country case studies have taken a bottom-up and participatory approach and used mixed methods for quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The prime units of analysis were vulnerable youth themselves. In total, more than 280 youth participated; their voices, experiences and inter-relationships stand at the core of this research. In addition, their caretakers, teachers, health workers, employers and other social peers were also part of the research. Country specific secondary sources, including scientific literature and policy reports also formed part of the contextual analysis.

1.4 Report outline
The remainder of the report is organized as follows. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework and conceptual model guiding this research. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology in detail and lists the respondents’ key characteristics. Chapter 4 describes the country context, and elaborates in greater detail on the context of the study area. Chapter 5 presents the research findings, following the conceptual scheme in Figure 1. Recommendations for uptake and use of the research findings by the SOS organization and a variety of stakeholders are provided in Chapter 6. The literature list is included at the back, before the Annexes.
2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Taking a relational approach

This research is framed within human rights [4] and inclusive development theory [5; 6] and takes a relational approach [9]. The research takes youth in interaction with their personal and structural environment as a key entry point [17; 24; 25; 28; 29; 36]. Although, this is a social economic research, it is partly inspired by psychological studies on youth [e.g. 9; 27; 30], which have emphasized how inter-personal relations can either foster or impede relational connectedness. We consider vulnerable youth in dynamic inter-connection to their care environment (people and structures); the nature of these interactions changes over time [9; 17]. To feel relationally connected to people and a structure around oneself is an important determinant of human wellbeing [9; 11]. However, vulnerable youth transit in and out of care relationships multiple times: upon entering care, moving through care, and leaving care [31; 32; 33].

2.2 Vulnerable youth & their multiple transitions

In this research, ‘youth’ is defined as a transition phase between childhood and adulthood [13; 14; 15; 34], also described as waithood [12]. “Waithood represents a period of suspension between childhood and adulthood, in which young people’s access to adulthood is delayed or denied” [12, p. 1]. While their chronological age may define them as adults, they have not been able to attain the social markers of adulthood: earning a living in a training or job, independence, establishing a family, providing for offspring and other relatives, and becoming taxpayers [10; 12].

In this research, ‘vulnerable youth’ are defined as youth who have lost or are at risk of losing parental care. Vulnerable youth encounter barriers, disturbances and delays in forming their social identity, whilst making multiple transitions through care. When transiting out of care, they often lack financial, social and emotional guidance and fallback mechanisms [13; 14, p. 4; 15, p. 3]. As a result, care leavers run more risk than their peers to not achieve in education and employment, and more quickly resort to street life, alcohol and drug abuse, crime, or being exploited [14, p. 16; 16].

2.3 Social exclusion & self-exclusion

Social exclusion is both a process and outcome leading to disempowerment. Beall and Piron (2005) define social exclusion as “... a process and a state that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic and political life and from asserting their rights. It derives from exclusionary relationships based on power.” [17, p. 9].

Social exclusion creates social inequalities that are inter-generational and embedded in societal structures, institutions and policies [19]. Cultural oppression and marginalisation lead to further isolation, shame and humiliation – and, in turn, to self-exclusion [23; 35]. Those who are socially excluded share similar social, economic and political barriers and constraints, and lack security, justice and economic opportunities in life in general [16; 27]. This means that there are two sides to the same story; social exclusion may lead to self-exclusion and vice versa [9; 20]. Where social exclusion affects individuals in their daily life and behaviours, studies prefer to speak of discrimination [e.g. 21, p.3]. There is a growing awareness that social exclusion of vulnerable youth is an emergent problem arising out of problematic relationship between broad-based societal change, social inequality [22, p.21; 23, p. 7] and ideology [24]. The myth of meritocracy leads to self-blame and self-exclusion [9; 25, p.93; 26] of young people who are in an important identity building
phase of their life and on their way to independence. Early experiences in life of social exclusion affect later ones, making social acceptance more and more difficult [27].

2.4 Other key concepts & conceptual scheme

**Drivers of Social Exclusion** - Social, cultural, political and economic factors that cause and sustain the process of social exclusion and self-exclusion.

**Connectedness** - Being and feeling connected to others in a social-relational environment. [9]

**Relational images** - Individual expectations of how one will be treated (self-images), based on previous treatment, and images of others as to how they will act and who is to blame for one’s exclusion [9].

**Relational movement** - Relational movement is the process of moving through connections, disconnections and back into new connections; these can be positive or negative [9].

**Employability** - A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, community and economy [15, p. 3; 18].

**Social Acceptance** - The acceptance of a person (or group) into a group or society as a whole.

**Human Wellbeing** - Feeling satisfied with what one can have, be and achieve in life.

Figure 1 - Conceptual Scheme
3. Research Methodology & Study Populations

3.1 Introduction
This research uses a mixed methods approach to explore the social exclusion of vulnerable youth. This section will outline the research questions, the methodologies used and describe the study populations.

3.2 Research Questions
To guide the research, the following research question and sub-questions were used:

| SQ1 | In what ways are vulnerable youth socially excluded, by whom and to what extent? |
| SQ2 | What are the drivers of social exclusion of vulnerable youth? |
| SQ3 | How does social exclusion lead to self-exclusion and vice-versa? |
| SQ4 | How do childhood experiences of exclusion effect relational movements and connectedness after care? |
| SQ5 | How are vulnerable youth prepared for living independently? |
| SQ6 | How do the above answers differ between different subgroups of youth? |

3.3 Research Methodology
In order to develop an understanding of the social, cultural, political and economic drivers of social exclusion, in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 13 stakeholders, including caretakers, teachers, employers, government workers and health workers, supplemented by insights from secondary literature. 62 youth in total participated in Côte d’Ivoire; a structured survey was conducted with 48 youth; with a sub-selection of 19 youth, life-histories and social-relational mapping exercises were conducted to identify barriers, constraints and delays in their relational movements and social identity formation towards independence. 5 focus group discussions were organized with young men and women separately to explore gender specific drivers of social in- and exclusion.

3.4 Description of Study Populations
The primary group of respondents in this study were vulnerable youth. These young people came from the SOS Family Based Care (FBC) and Family Strengthening Programmes (FSP) and from one other non-SOS care organisation.
Table 1 - Number of youth survey respondents (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOS FBC</th>
<th>SOS FSP</th>
<th>Non-SOS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of young people</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOS youth that are in the FBC programme, are separated in the data analysis according to the care stage in which they are in, as depicted in Table 2 below

Table 2 - Number of survey respondents in the FBC programme per care stage (N=32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care stage</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth house</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitat encadré (semi-independent housing)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth who left care</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the survey respondents, 70.8% were male and 29.2% is female. This disproportion in the demographics of our respondents was not intended, and was mainly due to time constraints and availability of respondents at the time. To mitigate this bias, additional life-history interviews were conducted with 9 female SOS care-leavers in the period of September 2017. The stakeholder participants consisted of 2 SOS mothers, 6 members of SOS staff, 1 staff member of a non-SOS care organisation, 1 teacher, 1 employer, 1 local government worker and 1 health worker.
4. Country Context & SOS Programme

4.1 Introduction
In Côte d’Ivoire the research focuses on youth that are part of the youth programmes from SOS Children’s Villages Aboisso. Consequently, most research was conducted in Aboisso. Research was also conducted in Abidjan, where most youth who left the SOSCV Aboisso programmes are now living. SOSCV Aboisso was selected as a research site by the SOS Children’s Villages Côte d’Ivoire team because they run several youth programmes there and recognise the many challenges youth leaving care encounter. The SOS village and youth house is located in Aboisso. The post-care placements for the FBC youth are located in Abidjan. The non-SOS care organization is located near Aboisso. This section of the report will briefly outline the country and local context of the research. More detailed information can be found in the Fieldwork Guide for Côte d’Ivoire [37].

4.2 Country context & youth policies
Côte d’Ivoire is a lower middle-income country, and has a population of about 22.7 million people [38]. Youth are demographically dominant in Côte d’Ivoire with approximately 42% of the population being below the age of 14 years [38]. Youth unemployment is a prevalent issue in Côte d’Ivoire, and estimated at 13.9% [38; 39], but the large informal economy and lack of reliable data sources make it difficult to assess this percentage exactly.

The political violence occurring in Côte d’Ivoire between 2002 and 2011 has caused tremendous hardship for Ivorian orphans, creating a high rise for the need of children to be taken in care. As of 2013 there were approximately 1,300,000 orphans in Côte d’Ivoire [40]. From these children, 380,000 were orphans as a result of the HIV/AIDS disease [40]. As of 2015 there are approximately 10,090 orphans in the region of Aboisso [41]. The vast majority of the 1.3 million orphans grow up without any support struggling to survive as street children [42]. These children are very vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation, child labour and recruitment by armed gangs [42]. When the post-electoral violence reached its peak, hundreds of thousands of children could not attend school, as these were often used by armed forces, and remained closed [42]. As of May 2011, approximately 85% of children in the country’s North and West have returned to school [42]. Orphan youth are more likely to be excluded from education, with the orphan school attendance ratio in the period 2008-2012 at 66% [40]. There is a lack of data on how many vulnerable orphans in Côte d’Ivoire have been taken into care.

The government of Côte d’Ivoire has long lacked an overall youth strategy, and failed to address youth issues over the past decades [43]. Nonetheless, after the 2011 politico-military crisis, the government has made significant efforts to recognise the challenges youth have with health, education and employment in its political agenda, by for example enacting the National Employment Policy (2012-2015) and the National Health Development Plan (2012-2015) [43]. In 2016, the government created the Ministry for Youth Promotion, Employment and Civic Services (MPJEJSC) to address the gaps previous governments missed, and to better coordinate and monitor youth policies. In addition to the creation of this ministry, a Youth National Policy (2016-2020) was adopted in 2016 [43]. This policy also provides for the creation of a Youth Committee composed of government, private sector and youth representatives in charge of monitoring the policy’s implementation [43]. The enactment of this national youth policy is seen by many as a step forward to emancipating young Ivorian people [43]. However, challenges still remain in implementation,
especially considering the many problems the nation has such as: a lack of financial and human resources, complex administrative procedures, leadership conflicts, lack of coordination, absence of adhesion from political actors and poor monitoring and evaluation tools [43].

Table 3 - Youth policies and legislation in Côte d’Ivoire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy type</th>
<th>Policy/legislation (details)</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition of youth</td>
<td>While the government of Côte d’Ivoire does not provide a definition of youth, the Youth Card is available to all citizens ages 16-35.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting age</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Inter-Parliamentary Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority age</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Civil Code (n.d.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Youth Policy</td>
<td>Youth National Policy (2016-2020)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Youth Representation</td>
<td>The National Youth Council (CNJCI) includes education-based youth associations, different youth federations and NGO’s represented by elected delegates. The CNJI “aims to encourage youth civic participation, to represent the country’s culturally, politically and social diverse youth and share opinions and advice on matters regarding young people”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth employment</td>
<td></td>
<td>National Employment Policy (2012-2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth health</td>
<td>National Health Development Plan (2012-2015)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Compulsory education in Côte d’Ivoire lasts from age 6 to age 15.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: [43; 44]
4.3 SOS programme and education

In Côte d’Ivoire, SOS Children’s Villages runs programmes in three locations: Abobo (since 1971), Aboisso (since 1983) and in Yamoussoukro (since 2014). There are two SOS programmes: (1) the Family Based Care (FBC) programme; (2) the Family Strengthening Programme (FSP). FBC focuses on taking care of children in SOS Families and in transit homes. FSP supports families at risk of breaking down, providing, for example, financial support, engagement in livelihood activities, and training. Other activities include health and education (schools and vocational training). Youth specific activities in the programmes include reintegration into biological families, socio-professional training, income-generating activities and support in job search by youth. According to the 2015 SOS annual report on Côte d’Ivoire, the programme in Aboisso has a staff of 47 people working in the areas of administration, social and pedagogical services, SOS mothers and aunts and general services [45]. The SOS Children's Villages offers several services, activities and interventions within the FBC programme. The SOS facilities also offer educational services. Children in SOS facilities are required to attend the SOS primary schools, which are also open to other children in the Aboisso community. Afterwards they attend the secondary schools of the municipality of Aboisso, allowing them to build on their social network for the future. In the year 2015 the FBC programme in Aboisso reached 97 children as well as 35 youth (of which 14 are female and 21 are male) in three internal youth facilities [45]. Most of the children and youth in the FBC facilities have lost parental care. They either have been abandoned or are orphans following the death of one or both of their parents. Moreover, some children have been abandoned for cultural reasons, because they are the tenth born in the family. Most of the youth and children are very vulnerable as they have been exposed to malnutrition, trauma, maltreatment, poor health care and lack of education.

The FBC programme has a number of stages; children first live in family-type set ups, with an “SOS mother” and “SOS siblings”. There are up to 10 children and young people living in these family homes. When there are biological siblings entering care, they are kept together as much as possible. The next phase is the SOS youth house, where young people move from the family houses to communal living, monitored by a designated member of staff, with a youth house for young men and a youth house for young women. The male youth house is located outside of the SOSCV complex, but still within Aboisso. The young women’s youth house is still within the SOSCV complex. According to an interview with the youth house coordinator in SOSCV there are three criteria for youth to be able to enter the youth house in Aboisso. The first criterion is that young people must be mature, in the sense that they can take care of themselves by for example doing their own shopping and cooking. The second criterion is that at the school level the young person must have at least the BEPC qualification. The third criterion is age. Young men have to be between 15 and 16 years old to enter the youth house. Young women have to be between 16 and 17 years old [I13 with SOS staff]. After young people leave the youth house, they usually move to a semi-independent accommodation in Abidjan which SOSCV helps them to attain, referred to as habitat encadré [I11 with Female Director of the Habitat Encadré Programme]. In habitat encadré youth have more independence compared to the youth house, however, they are still being supervised in one way or

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1 BEPC is an abbreviation for Brevet d’Etude du Premier Cycle. The BEPC is a diploma awarded to students in Côte d’Ivoire who complete the lower cycle of secondary school. After the first cycle or four years of secondary school, students take an exam, and if they pass, they are awarded a diploma called the BEPC.
another, by living with a guardian or a family member. Given that there are no universities in
Aboisso, youth usually move to SOSCV accommodation located in Abidjan where they can continue
their education at a higher educational institute, and where they are more likely to find employment
after leaving care. Youth who still have connections with their biological family are usually able to
find accommodation with their family. While youth are in habitat encadré, SOSCV continues to
financially support them with food, transport and education. After passing through the habitat
encadré, youth make their transition to complete independence, where they are no longer
supervised. In many cases, youth receive financial support by SOS in helping them finance their
employment projects after leaving care.

4.4 Non-SOS care organisation
The non-SOS care organisation is an institution that offers a two year training programme to youth
to prepare them for employment in carpentry, agriculture or breeding. This programme is available
to) youth who have been in conflict with the law or youth who are from the community close to
where the care organisation is. The youth who have been in conflict with the law join the
programme with the help of the judge of a youth tribunal. The youth from the community join by
formally applying to the care organisation. Due to time constraints, a lack of willingness of youth to
participate, and the difficulty of finding other non-SOS care organisations in Côte d’Ivoire that were
willing to participate and provide access to their youth, the sample of non-SOS youth respondents is
small. Hence the findings culminating out of this report mainly refer to the youth in/from the SOS
FBC programme.

4.5 Youth issues
Youth in Côte d’Ivoire experience many challenges with regards to their health, education and
employment [43]. While Côte d’Ivoire has made progress in increasing access to education, many
youth do not complete secondary education, and illiteracy rates are very high; more than half of
young people did not know how to read and write in 2015, with a higher proportion of young
women (59.3%) [43]. Young people face precarious conditions in the labour market and have
difficulties accessing paid labour [43].
5. Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction
Before delving into an analysis of the in- and exclusion of youth it is important to first gain a deeper understanding of how the youth themselves conceptualise inclusion and exclusion. Youth conceptualise social exclusion and inclusion in two general ways. Some claim that inclusion and exclusion from society relates to the individual; how the individual behaves, and whether he or she respects the rules or norms in society. For example non-SOS youth in particular claim that social exclusion is mainly a result of bad behaviour adopted through bad friendships, and not respecting the norms and rules in society. The view that people who experience exclusion do so as a result of their own negative behaviour puts the onus of responsibility of exclusion onto the individual, rather than attributing exclusion to wider societal factors. Others claim that social exclusion is more related to external societal factors such as one’s social status, and the financial means one has. On the one hand, FBC youth attribute exclusion to wider societal factors, such as one’s social status, and whether one has certain social connections or not to help finding a job. On the other hand, FBC youth attribute social inclusion to how one behaves with respect to others. FBC youth attribute social inclusion to youth who respect the rules and norms of society, and behave well in relation to others. FSP youth relate social inclusion more to being able to find decent employment, and being financially self-sufficient. Lastly, there are several factors which youth relate to being socially included, such as having a good education, having a well-paid job, having a family and social connections to help oneself. Youth relate being an orphan, being disabled or having a contagious disease with social exclusion.

5.2 Social drivers of exclusion
On a general level, youth do not feel that their gender, age, ethnicity, religion or care-background leads to their social exclusion. Only 3 out of the 32 youth (9.4%) in/from the FBC programme claim that they feel treated differently by society due to their care background. No FSP youth felt this way and only one non-SOS youth claimed that being from a care background had some effect on their feeling of social exclusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling socially excluded because of care (%)</th>
<th>FSP (n=11)</th>
<th>FBC (youth house) (n=8)</th>
<th>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24)</th>
<th>Non-SOS (n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling socially excluded because of care (%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, according to stakeholder interviews there have been several incidents among FBC youth from SOS Aboisso in the past, in which they have experienced discrimination because of their SOS care background:

“Some years ago, some children felt not accepted by the other young in the community. The children felt frustrated because when their friends saw their buses they called them orphaned children and that affected them.” [I3 with caregiver SOS]
“Actually in the past there have been incidents. There were several cases of fighting and violence for which we were summoned.” [I13 with an educator of the SOS youth house]

### Table 5 – Factors resulting in youth feeling socially excluded N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FSP (n=11)</th>
<th>FBC (youth house) (n=8)</th>
<th>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24)</th>
<th>Non-SOS (n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (%)</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion (%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These topics appeared very sensitive, resulting in many non-responses. The topics were therefore explored in more depth in FGDs and one-on-one interviews when youth felt more comfortable.

Youth generally do not feel excluded on the basis of their gender, age, ethnicity, religion or cultural background. Nonetheless incidents of discrimination based on care background have occurred in the past.

### 5.3 Economic drivers of exclusion

Data from surveys, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and life-history interviews indicated that there is a lack of decent economic opportunities in Côte d’Ivoire and that this is a major driver of exclusion for youth in finding employment. As depicted in Table 6, when being asked the question “Do you think there are adequate opportunities for young people in this area to obtain decent/meaningful employment?” there is a clear distinction in the answers given by FSP and FBC youth. For the FSP respondents, 25% reported there are adequate economic opportunities in region, whereas for the FBC youth who were in a post-care placement, this was 69.6%. This difference is likely attributable to the fact that FBC youth have greater access to education than FSP youth, and therefore have more opportunities in finding stable employment after leaving care (see section 5.7).

### Table 6 – Youth perceptions of adequacy of economic opportunities for youth in the region (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adequate (%)</th>
<th>Not adequate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSP (n=11)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (youth house)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (post-care</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>placement) (n=24)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SOS (n=5)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An interview with a government official of Aboisso stated that most employment in Aboisso is in the agricultural sector. Furthermore, he claimed that most employment is situated in the informal economy and low-skill jobs. In addition, SOS staff claimed that there is a lack of appropriate professional training centre structures in Aboisso and in Côte d’Ivoire in general that can adequately prepare youth for employment. Moreover, youth often lack the financial support that is needed to finance their training. As a result, many youth leaving care, even those that are highly educated, are forced to turn to self-employment and live on an unstable income (see section 5.11.2).

The lack of meaningful employment opportunities in the region constitutes the principal economic driver of exclusion for vulnerable youth from care. Youth leaving care are forced to turn to self-employment and live on an unstable income.

5.4 Political drivers of exclusion
Social exclusion of youth by the government is common in many societies and communities in West Africa, as government policies are often not youth-centred [46]. As has already been mentioned in section 4.2, the government of Côte d’Ivoire have long lacked an overall youth strategy that is needed to properly address many of the youth issues in the country. An interview with a government official from Aboisso highlighted how there is a lack of knowledge on what happens to vulnerable youth, more specifically young people leaving care. This lack of knowledge has been attributed to the fact that there are no monitoring mechanisms in place to properly follow-up on what happens to youth after they leave care. Most youth feel that politics has no impact on their lives (Table 7). In the focus group discussions with the FBC young men from the youth house, some youth report that local government authorities do give funds to provide employment for youth, but that youth do not make efficient use of these funds:

“For me, local authorities often want to fund the youths to create their projects, but young people do not develop good projects.” [FGD 1, SOS FBC young men]

“For me, the young people of Aboisso are very lazy. There are jobs in the agricultural sector, but youth do not develop good projects.” [FGD 1, SOS FBC young men]

Therefore for some youth the exclusion of youth from employment is mainly blamed on the youth themselves, and not as a result of governmental policies. However, other youth believe that poverty and lack of financial means is a cause for the high level of youth unemployment in Aboisso, and that the government can do more to provide employment for youth:

“For me I believe it is poverty, and the lack of financial means for young to fund their project.” [FGD 1, SOS FBC young men]

“The state must also create businesses so that there are more jobs for young people.” [FGD 1, SOS FBC young men]
Political drivers of exclusion were also highlighted very directly in the focus group with the FBC young men, who stated that people may be excluded from employment if they are not from the same political party as their managers or do not have necessary acquaintances in public administration. Moreover, it was also mentioned that the government is more inclined to invest in youth employment projects during election times, and not afterwards. This demonstrates that youth are not included in politics due to the inherent value of their inclusion and their rights as citizens, but are only included in political agendas when politicians have something to gain from this. It therefore begs the question as to how much of a voice, and how much citizenship, youth have. It is not possible to envision the empowerment of youth if they lack the political spaces to make their voices heard and express their opinions and concerns.

Focus groups with the SOS FSP young men and FBC young women highlighted that corruption and not having the right social relations is a major barrier for many in finding stable employment in Côte d’Ivoire. On the other hand, the SOS FBC young women’s focus groups noted that women were advantaged over men in attaining other jobs, provided they would offer sexual services:

“There is corruption everywhere. In many cases, it is easier for girls to have jobs compared to boys, in exchange for offering sexual services. If you do not know anyone, it’s not even worth going to the competition, you’re going to fail.” [FGD 2, SOS FBC young women]

In particular, in the SOS FSP young men’s focus group it has been discussed that the inability of youth to find employment due to lacking the right social relations has discouraged them, and reduced their motivation to actively search for employment:

“It’s true, we can have a good CV, but if you do not have a social relationship, you will not have a job. Many young people have been discouraged.” [FGD 3, SOS FSP young men]

For the FSP youth, the survey data highlighted how some youth perceive the local authorities as useful, in terms of the financial aid being given to support them in employment. Moreover, some youth also mention that they are politically engaged with activities in the community:

“I am part of an association that is recognised by the local authorities that finance their small business.” [S10023 with male SOS FSP youth]

“My friends give me a lot of help, they are nice to me. The mayor provides funding for youth to finance their projects.” [S10029 with male SOS FSP youth]

“My father entrusts me with responsibilities. I am the first of my class and my friends ask me to school for help. I participate in political activities in my community.” [S10033 with male SOS FSP youth]

On the other hand, the survey data highlighted that some FSP youth perceive that local authorities do nothing in their favour, causing them to feel that politics either excludes them or has no impact on their life. For these youth, the data indicated that youth rely more on their friends and family to receive support rather than politics:
“With friends, we share ideas, but I do not have a link with the local administrations in Aboisso.” [S10032 with female SOS FSP youth]

“I share my daily life with my best friends. My boss appreciates my work. Local leaders make promises they do not respect.” [S10030 with male SOS FSP youth]

“I have good relationship with my family and friends of my community. But for me the local authorities do nothing in my favour” [S10031 with female SOS FSP youth]

Table 7 – Do you feel accepted or not by national politics (N=43)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care type</th>
<th>Made me feel accepted (%)</th>
<th>No impact (%)</th>
<th>Made me feel excluded (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSP (n=11)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (in youth house) (n=8)</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24)</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SOS (n=5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main political driver behind the exclusion of vulnerable youth is that practices of corruption, exploitation and ethnic discrimination deny youth the opportunity to attain stable employment.

5.5 Cultural drivers of exclusion
Cultural drivers of exclusion that youth raised are diversity in languages and religion. The survey data indicates that on a general level young people do not feel discriminated against due to their ethnicity or religion. Nonetheless, FBC youth, who come from a region where the customs are different from those at SOS, struggle in adapting to their new environment when entering care. For example, the following life-history quote highlights the struggles some youth have in adapting to new customs, including learning a new language:

“When I arrived at SOS, it was a bit difficult because I found new people and I was not used to these people and besides I could not speak the French. Several times I tried to escape … But I have adapted over time.” [LH10013 with male SOS care leaver]

Another life-history interview mentions that in moving to SOS and having to adapt to the French language, made her forget in how to speak her native language, which made her feel as if she had lost her cultural roots. This suggests a loss in the markers of identity for youth who come from rural areas:

“At the beginning I spoke my maternal tongue. Today I can no longer speak my mother tongue and it is like I lost my roots.” [LH10051 with female SOS care leaver]
Furthermore, one life-history interview with a female SOS care leaver indicates that youth with a minority background struggle in participating successfully in the classroom at school, as they experience difficulties in adapting to the French language (see section 5.7).

Additionally, many FBC youth also find it difficult to adapt when returning to their biological families after leaving care. The SOS FBC young women focus group highlighted how in particular Muslim youth that leave care, struggle in reintegrating back into their biological family, because they have to adapt to new customs and practices that are different from the Christian values they learnt in SOS care.

According to the focus group discussions conducted with FBC young men and women, FSP young men, and an interview with SOS staff, women are more likely to be marginalised due to the traditional values on gender roles that are held in certain communities. These views are particularly held in some of the neighbourhoods where the FSP programmes take place in Aboisso, as parents tend to prioritise the education of boys over that of girls. It was also believed that these values are more common among Muslim households in the area, which limit women in terms of accessing education and decent employment.

Cultural drivers of exclusion: Youth who come from a religious or ethnic minority group take time in adapting to the language and the local customs of the care organisation and when reintegrating into their home communities.

5.6 Multiple transitions

5.6.1 Transition into care

As youth enter into care, many feel a first disconnection with their biological family, which can be described as a challenging experience, as it takes time for youth to adapt to the new environment of the care institution. This point is demonstrated in the life-history interview extract below:

“I was disoriented. I saw that I had just joined a new family, people I have never known. It must be said that in the first days it was not easy. I have adapted as I go along.” [LH10051 with male care leaver]

One SOS mother claimed that children who enter care, especially those between the ages of 6-7 years old, tend to feel tense, and that it takes more time and effort to make them feel at ease in the care institution. Other youth who come from families with difficult circumstances; even though they take time to adapt to the care institution, feel privileged after a while, as they get access to education, shelter, food, and a “family environment” which was not something they had access to before entering care. Being provided with these privileges helps them cope with these transitions on an emotional level:

“I felt better at SOS because they took good care of me ... I had a room and a bed for myself, they fed me well. I did not have all these privileges when I was in a family ... I was going to school well.” [LH10051 with male care leaver]
5.6.2 Transition within care

As part of the SOS FBC programme, young people transition from the family house to the youth house. When in the youth house, the schedules of youth change and they take on increasing responsibility for themselves, including shopping, cooking and cleaning as preparations for living independently. While some youth are informed a year in advance on when they will go to the youth house, two life-history interviews have indicated that some youth have been informed on the day itself that they will go to the youth house. This swift transition denies youth the ability to psychologically and emotionally cope with their change in environment:

“One day, the village manager called us and informed us that we will go to youth house soon ... Immediately, I was not happy, but afterwards, I thought it was necessary to leave room for the others.” [LH10011 with male SOS care leaver]

The transition to the youth house is seen as a challenging period by youth where many, especially male youth, encounter several difficulties. SOSCV conducted an analysis between 2010-2016 on the progress of youth who have been in the youth house in SOSCV Aboisso and SOSCV Abobo [47]. This analysis highlights that youth from SOSCV Aboisso experience greater difficulties in terms of their progress within care; with 52% of youth (N=50) from SOSCV Aboisso having a “difficult progress” in care, compared to 30% (N=63) from Abobo [47]. The report on Aboisso highlighted that of the 52% of youth that have had a “difficult progress”, there have been 6 youth who have encountered school problems, 11 youth who have encountered behavioural issues, 7 youth who encountered drug and alcohol addiction issues and 2 youth who encountered early pregnancies. In the 2010-2016 SOSCV report, several explanations were given as to why youth from SOSCV Aboisso struggle more in their progress in care than youth from SOSCV Abobo such as: (1) the environment of Aboisso, which is different to the rest of Côte d’Ivoire, (2) the lack of preparation of young people from leaving care for independence; (3) the geographical position of Aboisso close to the border of Ghana, where drugs and narcotics are transferred more easily through numerous pathways; (4) the youth house for the young men is not within the SOSCV Aboisso facility; (6) the educator is at a distance from the male youth house, and as a result there is a lack of supervision; (7) the young women in the female youth house may be overprotected, considering that their youth house is within SOSCV Aboisso facility, unlike the male youth house.

The data collected in this research project indicates similar findings to that of the 2010-2016 SOSCV report. While some interviews have indicated that the youth house is a place where youth learn to be more independent, it also has some negative implications for the progress of youth in care. Several life-history interviews and stakeholder interviews indicate that some youth progress very well in the family house, but that as they make the transition to the youth house, they are more likely to get into contact with negative friendship groups who take drugs and engage in crime. This results in SOS youth skipping school, declining academic performance and an increase in substance abuse. These findings occur mainly among FBC young men who move to the youth house. As the young women’s youth house is within the SOS compound in Aboisso, and their mobility is more restricted compared to the young men, they are less exposed to these problems. However, among FBC young women there is the issue of being overprotected, and having a very small social circle, which does not extend beyond SOS (see section 5.8 and 5.10). A member of SOS staff shared the following:
“In principle, the youth house is a good thing. Some people live it well. There have been cases of children who were brilliant at family house, but once in the youth house their school performance decreases.” [I6 with the educator of the FBC programme]

One life-history interview with a youth indicated the following about his transition to the youth house:

“This transition changed my life negatively. I was brilliant at school, but when I got to the youth house, my academic performance declined. I started drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes.” [LH10004 with male SOS care leaver]

Stakeholder interviews and life-history interviews indicate that it is the lack of supervision which youth receive in their transition to the youth house, which poses significant problems. According to one SOS mother, youth should be supervised more effectively in the youth house if they are to have better progress in care. One life-history interview with a young person indicated that more effective supervision of youth in the youth house could prevent youth from engaging in substance abuse and declining in their academic performance:

“Some of our brothers began to take drugs and educators could not supervise that effectively.” [LH10013 with male SOS care leaver]

“For me, the educator must live with them.” [I4 with SOS staff]

In response to these problems, SOSCV Aboisso ensures that if youth are not seen as ready to enter the youth house, the care organisation will keep them in the family house until they are seen as mentally prepared enough. Furthermore, the supervisors have moved closer to the youth house to more effectively supervise youth with the problems they have.

5.6.3 Transition to independence

One life-history interview and a focus group with young men in habitat encadré indicated that male SOS care leavers move to bad neighbourhoods where they are more likely to get into contact with “bad” friendship groups, and become exposed to substance abuse, violence and crime. It was noted that, similar to the youth house, these friendship groups can have a negative effect on youth with regards to their education and their progress in their transition to independent living.

“I leave for [neighbourhood] and there again there was a new life that opened for me. That’s where I met many friends who smoked drugs. [It] was not a good neighbourhood ... When I got there, I did not go to school anymore. SOS was paying for my schooling, but I did not go to school anymore.” [LH10051 with male SOS care leaver]

It was also noted that youth in habitat encadré are in need of more supervision if their transition to independent living is to be smoother. Several SOS male care leavers claimed that to prevent them from being exposed to these negative social environments, and to ensure that they continue to participate well in education; they need to have a friend or guardian that can supervise them more effectively, while they are at habitat encadré. This can be demonstrated by the following vignette responses to the question of what advice is recommended for youth who move to Abidjan:

“The young person who comes from the SOS house would find it difficult to integrate
because if he opens early to a group of friends without knowing the environment, he can easily be exposed to alcohol, cigarettes and drugs.” [FGD3, SOS FBC young men]

“It would be good for Theo to ask a member of his family about how the young people behave in the neighbourhood and to recommend him the friends with whom he can keep company.” [FGD3, SOS FBC young men]

FBC young women have the opposite experience in their transition to independent living. Unlike FBC young men, FBC young women appear to be ‘overprotected’ as their youth house is located within the SOS compound. Therefore they have limited contact with life outside of SOS, and they receive stricter guidance by SOS staff. Several life-history interviews with female SOS care leavers highlighted that the transition from being in care to independent living is very challenging, as they have to adapt to a new reality outside of SOS which they are not used to:

“When you are at SOS, your world is in four walls. There is the reality of life that you do not know. For example, prostitution, fight against hunger, fight to take the bus.” [LH10052 with female SOS care leaver]

FBC, non-SOS and FSP youth struggle financially after leaving care as they have difficulties managing their personal finances to meet the additional transportation and food costs:

“When I arrived in Abidjan, transportation was very difficult for me to cope with, and made me feel exhausted. I did not manage to adapt quickly.” [LH10013 with male SOS care leaver]

Furthermore, FBC youth struggle in attaining funds for their desired employment projects after leaving care. Most youth end up self-employed and lack stable wages (see section 5.11.2).

5.6.4 Preparation for transition to independence
Table 9 below indicates that most youth feel somewhat satisfied with their preparations for independent living. Table 10 illustrates that 73.9% of respondents claim that the preparations they receive are sufficient, whereas 26.1% claim that the preparations they receive are not sufficient for independent living. However, this becomes more nuanced when questions were broken down to explore the specific elements of preparations for leaving care.
Table 9 - How satisfied are youth in post-care placement satisfied with their preparations for living independently (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very satisfied (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied (%)</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied (%)</th>
<th>Not answered (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FSP (n=11)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FBC (in youth house) (n=8)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24)</strong></td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-SOS (n=5)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 - Were the preparations for living independently you received sufficient (N=40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Not answered (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FSP (n=11)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24)</strong></td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: this question was not answered by non-SOS youth.

The survey data in Tables 9, 10 and 11 indicate that most youth receive sufficient information with regards to taking care of themselves, personal finances, and personal health. Nonetheless, several SOS care leavers claim that they could have been prepared better in terms of managing their own personal budget:

“Finances are a bit difficult because I’m coming out of the program” [LH10059 with female SOS care leaver]

“At the youth house we had pocket money, but in habitat encadré, we had a scholarship ranged ... We were not taught how to manage such an amount so it was a bit difficult.” [LH10052 with female SOS care leaver]

Furthermore, Table 11 indicates that a lot of youth do not receive sufficient information with regards to continuing their education, obtaining employment-related training, and obtaining employment. Moreover, in all sub-groups except for FBC in the youth house, the survey data indicates that almost no youth receive any information on how to engage in politics.
Table 11 - Young people who have received sufficient information on different aspects (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FSP (n=11) %</th>
<th>FBC (in youth house) (n=8) %</th>
<th>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24) %</th>
<th>Non-SOS (n=5) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding accommodation</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after yourself</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal finances</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing education</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining employment-related training</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining employment</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal health</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in politics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 – Young people who found the following people helpful in their preparations for independent living (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FSP (n=11) %</th>
<th>FBC (in youth house) (n=8) %</th>
<th>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24) %</th>
<th>Non-SOS (n=5) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caregivers</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological family</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-based organizations</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other NGO’s</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey data together with life-history interviews indicate that for many youth social connections are essential in their preparation to independent living, as it is through social connections through which youth tend to find employment. The survey data in Table 12 indicates that, on a general level, youth view their caregivers, biological family, teachers, friends, and faith-based organisations as helpful in their preparations for independent living. Employers, NGO’s and local government bodies were seen as less helpful for preparing youth to live independently. In particular youth who lack connections with their biological are particularly vulnerable after leaving care, as these youth miss the social connections which are essential for finding employment in the informal economy after leaving care:
“If you are an orphan, you will be discriminated because you have no social relations that can help you.” [FGD 4, SOS FBC Young women]

“For us who have no parents it is difficult. We asked ourselves who would help me to take care of me.” [LHI10007 with male SOS care leaver]

Nonetheless, the social circle of particular SOS FBC youth is very small, and does not extend beyond their care institution, limiting their ability to prepare for independence successfully. More will be elaborated on this issue in section 5.10 of the report.

Several youth, in particular the FSP youth and the FBC youth in the youth house, indicated that they are not looking forward to living independently, as illustrated in Table 13. Among these youth, many indicated that the desire to continue their education, and having a lack of professional work experience, are among the main reasons attributed as to why they are not looking forward to leaving care.

Table 13 - Are you looking forward to living independently (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Not answered (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSP (n=11)</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (in youth house) (n=8)</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24)</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SOS (n=5)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For FBC youth in a post-care placement, most youth (65.2%) indicated that they were looking forward to living independently. Many youth felt this way because they wanted more independence. Two respondents claimed that they wanted to leave care because they thought that SOSCV did not respect their choices and aspirations, with regards to their preparations for leaving care. This finding corroborates with one life-history interviews where it was indicated that SOSCV staff does not always agree with the study choices of the youth, and therefore do not support youth in certain training or study programmes:

“I wanted to do [course]. They refused. It discouraged me and I decided not to go to school anymore ... I was happy to leave Aboisso because I no longer felt at ease in Aboisso....SOS Aboisso was imposing things on us.” [LH10003 with female SOS care leaver]

From the 34.8% (n=24) of respondents who were not looking forward to living independently, five respondents claimed that they were still in need of financial support from SOSCV to complete their education and find a stable job. Three respondents claimed that they would still like to have had the opportunity to finish an internship or complete their studies. One respondent claimed that she preferred to stay in the family environment she had at SOS.
The relative unpreparedness some youth participants in Côte d’Ivoire feel for living independently, is further emphasized in the tables below, and in particular Table 16, which stress that 83.8% of youth (N=48) think that they should be informed more than a year in advance on when they will leave care.

### Table 14 - How prepared do youth feel for living independently (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very prepared (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat prepared (%)</th>
<th>Somewhat unprepared (%)</th>
<th>Very unprepared (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSP (n=11)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (in youth house) (n=8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24)</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SOS (n=5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 15 – How far in advance will you be told that you are leaving care? (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How far in advance will you be told that you are leaving care? (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between 3 to 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 months to one year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than a year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 16 – How far in advance do you think young people should be told that they are leaving care? (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How far in advance do you think young people should be told that they are leaving care? (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between 3 to 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6 months to one year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than a year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.7 Education

The rise in educational inequalities in Côte d’Ivoire, which is as a result of a decrease in scholarships available, and rising tuition fees, is a major source of exclusion for many youth [48]. Furthermore, it has been noted that education-based inequalities across regions, the highly politicised nature of education in some schools, and the mismatch between education and employment, have all played a role in igniting conflict at the beginning of the civil war in Côte d’Ivoire in 2002 [46; 49]. For youth in the FSP programmes in Aboisso, financial difficulties create barriers in completing their higher education, as many youth do not complete secondary school. According to the SOSCV Côte d’Ivoire Annual Report 2015 the success rate of youth in primary school was 78% and the success rate in secondary school was 67% for the school year 2014-2015 [50]. Reasons for these low success rates include the lack of financial means for parents to finance and support their child’s education. Youth in the FBC programme are more privileged in terms of the financial support they receive for completing their higher education. Many FBC youth indicate that the fact that they have access to
education makes them feel very privileged to be in SOS care, as this was something they would not have access to in their biological family. For FBC youth the success rate of children in primary school was 98%, and the general success rate for youth in secondary school was 88.4% in the school year 2014-2015 [50, p. 54].

The life-history interviews and stakeholder interviews with SOS FBC youth highlight how in general young men have a lower educational attainment and less smooth educational trajectories than young women. This difference in educational attainment is partly attributable to the relational movements (see section 5.8) and transitions within care that SOS FBC young men experience (see section 5.6.2). This research finds that for many FBC young men, the educational attainment starts to decrease as they move to the youth house and habitat encadré where they become exposed to “bad” social environments, and where they are more likely to become engaged in school absenteeism, substance abuse and crime. FBC young women are more protected from these social environments, as their youth house is located within the SOS compound in Aboisso. Furthermore, negative relational movements, such as feeling disconnected from one’s biological family also negatively influence the educational attainment of FBC youth (see section 5.8).

The educational attainment of young people from care is often affected by negative relational movements and “bad” friendships of youth during their time in care.

One female SOS care leaver emphasises that youth from a different cultural or other minority background may struggle more in learning at school, as it takes time for them to adapt to the French language and customs they are exposed to in the schools in Aboisso. This can be demonstrated by the following life-history interview extract below, which highlights that she was ashamed to let others know that she did not understand something in the classroom. This may indicate that coming from a different cultural backgrounds and not receiving adequate help to adapt and assimilate to a new social context, tends to lead to self-exclusion for this youth group. This highlights that youth from minority groups may need more assistance and guidance with regards to their assimilation and participation in school.

“At the primary level, it was a bit difficult … I did not quickly assimilate quickly to the lessons, so often I was ashamed to ask the teacher that if I had not understood something I was ashamed to raise my hand” [LH10051 with female SOS care leaver]

SOS FBC youth do not always appear to be supported with regards to their desired educational trajectory, which leads to frustrations for many youth, as they are not able to pursue their higher aspirations (see section 5.6.4). The survey data also highlights than many youth are concerned for leaving care because they have the fear of not being able to continue their higher education (see section 5.6.4). The life-history interview extract from a male SOS care leaver below illustrates that the unpredictability of financial support after leaving care caused him to quit his study, even though he had higher aspirations to complete a doctorate degree:
“SOS policy to support the youth who left care was not predictable. I wanted to go to the doctorate, but it was difficult for me. SOS had financed my master 1 and computer graphics training, but I stopped because I did not want to face the uncertainty of not having the means to finance my studies later.” [LH10012 with male SOS care leaver]
“It’s been ... years before she (biological mother) came to see us again. It affected us a bit because we saw the parents of the other children coming to look for them.”
[LH10013 with male SOS care leaver]

“It was true it was sometimes frustrating to see some parents who came to see their children and we did not. It was frustrating, but it’s something I’ve gotten used to.”
[LH10052 with female SOS care leaver]

According to several stakeholder interviews, the disconnectedness youth feel from their biological family has a negative effect on their feeling of social acceptance, which in turn influences their participation in education and their interaction with others. In terms of education, the academic performance of youth who feel a lack of social acceptance from their biological family tends to decrease, and absenteeism from school is more common:

“Some Children are excellent, they have good academic results but after losing contact with their parents, they refuse to continue going to school. They are no longer motivated. In a psychological way, all we try to do is to have the appreciation of the parents.” [I12 with social worker SOS]

Moreover, youth who do not feel socially accepted for this reason tend to want to “assert themselves” and “become violent with others”:

“The children who do not have families do not go for holidays and when they grow up they became sad. Some of their brothers laugh at them because they do not have holidays and they spend all the time at the SOS village. When it is like that, they become frustrated, violent and they want to go out and assert themselves.” [I4 with caregiver SOS]

According to one SOS social worker, SOS FBC young men in Aboisso in particular are more likely to become involved in gang activity, and engage in substance abuse if they feel a lack of social acceptance from their biological family:

“Often parents are associated but they do not respond as they should. When the parents react appropriately, the child returns to the right path. But when this is not the case, he falls into some behavioural flaws. He becomes violent with others. He can fall into a bad group and engage in drugs.” [I12 with social worker SOS]

To combat the consequences of negative relational movements young people from care experience with their biological family, SOSCV communicates with them by means of using SOS social workers. Also according to one SOS mother social-cultural events sporting events are organised for these youth to help them cope with such emotional difficulties.

Some youth mention how the family-oriented life in the family house in SOSCV has positive effects on their feelings of social acceptance. One life-history interview indicates that the family life in the SOSCV family house helps youth rebuild on a psychological level, from the past traumas they may have experienced, as well as the traumatic disconnection they may have experienced from their biological family:
“What I liked about SOS is this concern for family reconstruction. Really it’s effective. It helps to rebuild on a psychological level” [LH10012 with male SOS care leaver]

Moreover, several youth claim to regard their SOS mother, as well as their peers within the SOS compound more as their “real” family, with whom they feel more closely attached to on a personal level, than their biological family:

“For some young people, our SOS mothers are more valued than our biological mothers. We grew up with them.” [LH10009 with male SOS care leaver]

“I do not consider them (members of biological family) too much like people of my family, I consider more those with whom I grew up in the village like people of my family.” [LH10053 with female SOS care leaver]

However, two life-history interviews indicate that some FBC youth do not feel this “family environment” with their caregivers, and report there to be misunderstandings. Moreover, one female care leaver mentions that she perceived that SOS mothers favoured some youth over others making her feel a lack of social acceptance:

“What I did not like at SOS was that there was sometimes discrimination. Some were more loved than others.” [LH10003 with female SOS care leaver]

“Sometimes with the educators there were disputes, we were sometimes misunderstood.” [LH10011 with male SOS care leaver]

Some FBC youth mention that these misunderstandings did not bother them, and regarded it as “part of life”. However, for some youth these misunderstandings led them to become more withdrawn, introverted, and actively excluding themselves from social relations (see section 5.10).

As the FBC young men move to the youth house and *habitat encadré* they are more exposed to a wider social group outside of the SOS compound. As has been mentioned in section 5.6.3, many young men come into contact with friends who are engaged in substance abuse and crime, which in turn influences their participation in education and interaction with others negatively. In terms of education, their academic performance is more likely to decrease when they move to the youth house, and they are more likely to become absent from school. Moreover, many FBC young men are more likely to engage in crime and substance abuse themselves when in contact with “bad” groups outside of SOS. FBC young women have a very different experience than young women as they move to the youth house. As the youth house of the young women is within the SOS compound in Aboisso, they have limited contact with youth outside of SOS. The consequence of this arrangement is that FBC young women have a very small social circle which does not extend beyond SOS, and that they actively withdraw themselves from relations with other non-SOS youth at school or when they leave care (see section 5.10).

5.8.2 Connectedness after care
The young male and female focus group discussions and vignettes with SOS youth highlight how it is emotionally difficult for youth to leave care and move out of the care organisation, as youth feel a strong familial attachment to their SOS mother, caregivers and their peers within the institution. This emotional attachment is particularly strong for the FBC young women who, unlike the young men,
spend most of their time up until habitat encadré living within the SOS compound, and therefore feel that they “leave a big family behind”. When being asked the question on how they would feel if they would have to leave care, the following responses were given:

“I’m going to feel sad; it’s going to hurt me because I’m leaving my family.” [FGD2, SOS FBC young women]

“That day I cried a lot because I had to leave everything, a big family behind me to come here to my real mum, I cried for 2 days it was not easy” [LH10055 with female SOS care leaver]

The focus groups and vignettes highlighted that FBC youth from SOS Aboisso are more accustomed to socially interacting with their peers within the care institution. Consequently, youth from SOS find it more challenging to interact and socially engage with youth outside of their care institution when they move to the habitat encadré in Abidjan, as is highlighted by the vignette responses below:

“For Theo, it is difficult to make new friends because he has not the habit of approaching others. He is more accustomed to his SOS brother’s.” [FGD3, SOS FBC young men]

“The young person who comes to Abidjan is disoriented because he was not in constant contact with other people when he was in Aboisso. Young people at SOS Aboisso spend their daily lives with SOS brothers and sisters and SOS mothers.” [FGD3, SOS FBC young men]

Both focus groups with FBC young men and women mention that when leaving care, youth feel that they need to be very cautious with whom they interact with to prevent themselves from engaging with a bad social environment. Among FBC young men a concern is coming into contact with friends who engage in substance abuse and crime, whereas for young women falling vulnerable to prostitution is a concern. Several youth claim that to prevent young people from being exposed to these negative social environments, and to ensure that youth continue to participate well in education they need to have a friend or guardian that can supervise them effectively.

Many youth continue to stay in touch with their SOS mother and friends from the family house, after leaving care. Moreover, many also claim that when they seek advice, they turn to their SOS mother. As indicated in Table 17, for FBC youth in a post-care placement, 52.2% of the respondents claim that they turn to their caregivers like their SOS mother when they need advice, and 65.2% turn to their biological family. For the FSP and non-SOS youth, Table 17 highlights that most youth turn to their biological family when they are in need of advice in times of difficulties. However, some SOS youth actively choose not to stay in contact with SOS staff after leaving care, often due to misunderstandings or quarrels experienced with staff during their time in care:

“We have 13 young people who left care in the normal way ... Among them, there are 2 who are in break with SOS; they do not want to have any relationship with SOS. They no longer want to follow SOS guidelines.” [I11, Female Director of the Habitat Encadré Programme].
Table 17 - Who will/ do youth turn to in need of help transitioning to independence (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Caregivers (%)</th>
<th>Family (%)</th>
<th>Teachers (%)</th>
<th>Friends (%)</th>
<th>Employers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSP (n=11)</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (in youth house) (n=8)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24)</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SOS (n=5)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One SOS mother also mentions that when certain youth fail in their education, and do not progress well in their transition to independent living, they feel a sense of self-shame, and therefore actively choose not to stay in contact with their caregivers.

Some SOS FBC youth encounter difficulties when they reintegrate back into their biological family. Youth note that misunderstandings and quarrels occur often due to the fact that the cultural or religious values and the education they received while growing up at SOS differs from that of their biological family:

“Today I live with her (biological mother), but I am not comfortable with her. For me I consider more my SOS mum who educated me.” [LH10055 with female SOS care leaver]

“With my real mum it was a bit difficult. The education she gives me was different from what I received at SOS village.” [LH10055 with female SOS care leaver]

“With my biological family it is not easy, because the lack of communication makes that there are many discords.” [LH10059 with female SOS care leaver]

Furthermore, due to the higher education youth receive at SOS, when they return to their biological family, youth are often seen as the financial providers or the “hope of the family” that are able to attain highly-paid jobs. Moreover, youth often return to families that have many financial difficulties. Therefore, once youth leave care and reintegrate back into their biological family, a massive burden falls on them, as their biological family comes to rely on them financially:

“I have the feeling of not being loved because they (biological family) are only concerned about the money I receive at the end of the month, they do not care about my daily life.” [LH10054 with female SOS care leaver]

“When you came from SOS, you become the hope of the family, so the problem is at our exit.” [LH10058 with female SOS care leaver]

“I returned to live with my biological family. Well, I am confronted to family quarrels, lack of finance, lack of communication.” [LH10059 with female SOS care leaver]
5.8.3 Relational images

Relational images are a key part of the relational approach. Relational images can be images in the form of expectations about how you will be treated, based on past experiences (for example a person who was abandoned by their parents believing they could never be loved), or images others hold of you. In Côte d’Ivoire, even though a few youth claim to have experienced discrimination and stigmatisation based on their care background, no youth or stakeholder interviews elaborated in greater detail of there being any relational images.

5.9 Identity formation

Stakeholder interviews with caregivers have indicated that youth from SOS become aware of their identity as “youth from care” as they get older, and start to raise questions such as where they come from, and what their background is. As indicated in section 5.8.1, when youth feel a lack of social acceptance by their biological family and peers, youth associate negative feelings with the term “youth from care”, and consequently become refractory in their behaviour, and feel the need to assert themselves. When youth feel that their biological family and peers socially accept them, they are able to cope with the identity of being “youth from care” youth in a more positive manner. Only one life-history interview elaborated in greater detail on how being in care affected his identity formation, and how he coped with identifying himself as a “youth from care”. He mentioned that while it took time to accept himself as a “youth from care”, he was able to cope with it in a positive manner due to the affection given to him by his caregivers:

“Internally I was thinking, I did not know my parents, and how things would be if I had known them. I thought about that every time. It was at secondary school when I made the decision to stop thinking a lot and live with it. At that time, I forged a strong morale to bear this situation. And above all we were taken care of; there was no reason to be sad.” [LH10012 with male SOS care leaver]

5.10 Social exclusion & self-exclusion

The relationship between social exclusion and self-exclusion is apparent in this research, and occurs mainly by means of the relational movements young people from care experience during and after their time in care (see section 5.8). The disconnectedness youth experience from their biological family, as well as misunderstandings encountered with caregivers and peers, all have an influence when it comes to young people from care becoming more withdrawn and excluding themselves from relationships. According to several stakeholder interviews many youth develop a lack of self-esteem while they are still in care, and as a result become more withdrawn. One female care leaver mentions how due to her shyness and being introvert, she encountered misunderstandings between herself, SOS staff and her SOS mother:

“I can say that it was not easy with my SOS mums, not that she was abusing me, but, well ... I’m an introverted kind of person, so it was very difficult for her to understand me. So it was like that. That’s how I grew up at the family house. It was a bit difficult with them. I was not open.” [LH10052 with female SOS care leaver]

Another female care leaver reports how misunderstandings between herself and her SOS mother led her to become more withdrawn, especially as she did not feel her issues were dealt with confidentially and experienced prejudice from staff. In response she claims that she felt the need to withdraw herself:
“..., they will expose and index you with this problem there. And at one point, we shut up. Personally, it was my case, at one moment I shut myself up.” [LH10058 with female SOS care leaver]

The above quotes highlight that young people from care are in need of someone to be able to confide in or disclose confidential information to, in order for them to become more open in their interaction with other youth or staff within and beyond their care institution.

Several life-history interviews and social-relational mapping exercises also indicate that youth have a small social circle and lack friends outside of their care institution. This small social circle is particularly the case among the SOS FBC young women, who unlike the FBC young men have their youth house located within the SOS compound in Aboisso. Several interviews with female care leavers highlight how because they have such limited contact with youth outside of SOS, they actively avoid these youth at school or university out of shyness. One life-history interview with a female care leaver even mentions that youth outside of SOS are referred to as the “people outside”, emphasising how limited their social network is:

“I was very withdrawn, I avoided people as much as possible and even when I was in high schools it was the same, I avoided talking with people because I said to myself as they were called when we were in the SOS village “the people outside” that’s how they were called I avoided a lot of talking with them. My daily life was home and university.” [LH10053 with female SOS care leaver]

“I was quiet and withdrawn. I can go back to school and not talk until I get out of class.” [LH10058 with female SOS care leaver]

One female care leaver mentions that her social network only started to expand as she attended university and participated in many volunteering activities:

“It is by participating in the activities that I made a lot of friends at the university, I kept good relations with these friends”. [LH10053 with female SOS care leaver]

This quote suggests that there is the need, in particular for SOS female youth, to more actively engage with youth beyond their care institution, for example by means of organising communal activities. In this way, young people from care are more likely to feel comfortable in interacting with youth beyond their care institution.

5.11 Outcomes:

5.11.1 Wellbeing

**Material wellbeing**

Youth, especially those who have left care, do not feel they are earning enough to sustain themselves and thus can be seen as being in a position of waithood. The survey data, as illustrated in the Table 18, indicates that all youth perceive the ‘lack of financial means’ as the greatest obstacle in achieving their objectives in life. Less youth claim that their own abilities or mind-set is an obstacle, demonstrating that youth perceive exclusion from employment to be a result of external factors.
Table 18 - Greatest barriers for youth in achieving their goals in life after care (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care type</th>
<th>FSP (n=12) (%)</th>
<th>FBC (youth house) (n=8) (%)</th>
<th>FBC (post-care placement) (n=24) (%)</th>
<th>Non-SOS (n=5) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of financial means</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious discrimination</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced marriage</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal abilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of family support</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal psychological barrier</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing support for care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad influence from friends</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social-relational wellbeing**

Young people from care experience multiple transitions throughout their lives. This leads to young people experiencing several intense relational movements. When these relational movements are negative, such as losing family connections, or coming into contact with a “bad” social environment, young people begin to question their identity, and their educational attainment tends to decrease, leading to limited prospects for the future (see section 5.8). This can result in young people becoming angry about their identity, or excluding themselves from caregivers, peers and society.

Young people who leave care, especially FBC youth, claim to feel sad as many have a strong social and emotional attachment to their SOS caregivers and peers (see section 5.8.2). Consequently, many FBC youth feel as if they “leave a whole family behind” when leaving care, which is psychologically and emotionally difficult to cope with.

Young people who leave care and reintegrate back into their biological family are often confronted with multiple problems including quarrels, lack of finances, and misunderstandings (see section 5.8.2). As many young people leaving care, especially FBC youth are advantaged in receiving a higher level of education, they are seen as the “hope of the family”. Consequently, a great social and emotional burden falls on these youth as their family relies on them extensively to bring money back to the household.

Transitions out of care can also result in disconnection, where young people can struggle to balance working hours and leisure activities (including seeing caregivers and friends) and waithood. Social-relational mapping exercises also show that young people have a very small number of connections, which are mainly centred around their care organisations, and engage very little with their community or young people their age.

**Subjective wellbeing**

With a few exceptions, young people did not feel that being in/from care led to their exclusion. To the contrary, most youth claim feeling privileged of being in care as it allows them to grow up in a
nurturing environment, and receive good education, something which they would not otherwise have access to.

However, as highlighted in section 5.6.4 and 5.7 many youth are not always supported to pursue certain higher educational/training trajectories even though these lie within their higher aspirations. Furthermore, several FBC youth feel that they are not always consulted or involved with regards to decisions affecting their future. The survey data is illustrated in table 19 indicates that most youth are not doing an education programme or are in an employment that meets their aspirations. For FSP youth, only 41.7% were doing an education programme or were in an employment that met their aspirations. For FBC youth in a post-care placement this was only 26.1%. Several youth stated that they would rather be doing another type of educational programme or profession, but that lack of choice, financial means and the need for money to take care of oneself forced them into a different type of training trajectory or employment. These results highlight that not all youth in care are able to pursue their dreams and aspirations.

Table 19 - Is this the type of training/work you want to be doing? (N=40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
<th>Not answered (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSP (n=11)</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC youth (post-care placement) (n=24)</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SOS (n=5)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.11.2 Employability

The survey data in Table 20 indicates that a majority of youth struggle in successfully integrating into the labour market. Most youth, especially FBC youth who left care end up being self-employed (50%), and only a few find salary-earning employment (33.3%).

Between 2014 and 2016 SOSCV Côte d’Ivoire launched a youth employment project, which aimed to professionally integrate 120 youth from both the FBC and FSP programmes into the labour market [51]. After the cessation of the project, 75 were still in their employment activities which the project financed (34 in self-employment, and 41 having salary-earning employment) [51]. The rest of the youth either were working in the informal economy or were unemployed. In total, the project managed to integrate 62.5% of the youth professionally into the labour market [51]. A member of SOS staff, who was actively involved in this youth employment project, claimed that the project failed to reach its objectives due to many difficulties, especially due to the fact that young people were trained in entrepreneurship and leadership too late:

“The project as you see, we did not achieve our objectives because we had a lot of difficulty. The focus of the project was on self-employment, but we realised that our young people were not well prepared. We had trained them in entrepreneurship and leadership, but it was late. If we had started earlier it would be beneficial.” [11 with member of SOS staff]
Table 20 - What type of employment do youth have after leaving care (N=28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-employment (%)</th>
<th>Family work (%)</th>
<th>Salary-earning employment (%)</th>
<th>Internship (%)</th>
<th>Apprenticeship (%)</th>
<th>Not answered (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSP (n=11)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC who left care</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SOS (n=5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The life-history interviews with FBC youth also suggested that youth who started with entrepreneurial activities within early stages in care were more likely to have financial and employment security after leaving care. The reason attributed for these claims, is that if youth fail to attain employment after leaving care, they always would be able to earn money by doing the craft they learnt. Moreover, some caregivers also claimed that in order to improve the integration of young people leaving care into the labour market, it would be useful to teach them entrepreneurship and leadership skills in early stages in care. One SOS mother claimed that:

“The young person must be trained to undertake a business. It is good to make more investment in the youth education, but it is so important to prepare him for entrepreneurship. While they go to school, they can learn a craft. Like that if he does not find work, at least they have a craft.” [I4 with SOS caregiver]

Higher education plays as an important role in professionally integrating youth into the labour market. One member of staff claimed that it was more difficult to professionally integrate SOSCV youth from Aboisso into the labour market, compared to SOSCV youth from Abidjan, due to their lower academic performance. Nonetheless, even with higher education, young people leaving care struggle in professionally integrating into the labour market. Due to the lack of economic opportunities in Côte d’Ivoire, many are forced to turn to self-employment.

“I have a diploma, but it was difficult for me to get a job. It was last year that SOS funded a hardware store for me ... it was because I could not find a job that I turned to self-employment”. [LH10013 with male SOS care leaver]

Table 21 - Do you feel that being from care gives you an advantage in attaining employment (N=48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advantaged (%)</th>
<th>No difference (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSP (n=11)</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (in youth house) (n=8)</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBC (in post-care placement) (n=24)</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-SOS (n=5)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, young people from care do not consider that their care background affects their chances of them gaining employment. Several SOS and non-SOS youth claim that they feel advantaged, due to the fact that their care institution funds the businesses of some youth, and due to the social capital they are provided with through their care institution. Moreover, several youth highlighted that because their care institution supports them in pursuing certain education/training programmes they were more likely to be able to attain higher skilled jobs.

### 5.11.3 Social acceptance

As Table 21 demonstrates, young people surveyed generally feel accepted in most areas of their life, apart from local and national politics.

**Table 22 - Young people from care feeling socially accepted (N=48)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FSP (n=11) (%)</th>
<th>FBC (in youth house) (n=8) (%)</th>
<th>FBC (in post-care placement (n=24) (%)</th>
<th>Non-SOS (n=5) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In education</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In social activities with age mates</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By their biological family</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In employment</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local politics</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National politics</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When this was examined more qualitatively, a minority of young people discussed experiencing discrimination/exclusion based on being from care, however most highlight that their friends and society are accepting of their background. In particular the relational movements youth experience during and after their time in care have a strong influence on their feeling of social acceptance (see section 5.8).

Young people from care, in particular FBC youth, appear to have a very small social network which does not extend much beyond their care organisation. This small social network is not so much a problem for FSP youth who unlike FBC youth, live outside of the SOS compound in Aboisso. As is highlighted in section 5.8 and 5.10, the limited interaction young people from care, in particular FBC young women have, young women, has negative implications for their integration into broader society after leaving care. These youth feel less comfortable in interacting with youth who are not part of their care institution, and as a result, after leaving care, choose to actively avoid them (see section 5.10).
6. Main Findings & Recommendations

6.1 Answering the main research question

This section will provide a brief summary in answer to the main research question: how are vulnerable youth (youth in and from alternative care and families at risk of losing care) in Côte d’Ivoire affected by social exclusion in terms of their social acceptance, employment and human wellbeing? Findings suggest that young people leaving care from SOS Aboisso face problems including progressing through higher education and difficulty in finding financially stable and meaningful employment. These findings are attributable to the multiple processes youth experience during and after their time in care, as has been outlined in the conceptual scheme in section 2.4, including negative relational movements which have negative implications for youth’s identity formation; the interaction between social exclusion and self-exclusion; the drivers of exclusion; and lastly the multiple transitions youth experience throughout their time in care.

Young people from care in Côte d’Ivoire generally do not feel that their care background automatically results in them experiencing exclusion, even though interviews with stakeholders mention that discriminatory incidents have occurred in the past. On the contrary, many youth claim to feel privileged for being in care due to their access to higher education, and the chance to grow up in a nurturing environment.

Young people in general claim to feel socially accepted in all areas of their life apart from local and national politics, as most youth feel either negatively affected by politics, or claim that it has no impact on their lives. However, this research finds that youth interact very little with the society beyond their care organisations, even after they have left care. This finding can be attributed to the transitions and the negative relational movements youth experience during their time in care, which can lead young people to question their identity and to exclude themselves from those around them. This small social network becomes especially problematic when young people transition into independence as it limits their prospects for finding employment.

Youth leaving care encounter difficulties in successfully integrating into the labour market. Young people often lack the knowledge on how to access employment and employment related training. Even though young people generally feel prepared for leaving care in terms of the basics (personal finances, health, etc.), substantially less youth feel prepared to find employment and continue their education. Furthermore, according to stakeholder interviews and youth themselves, the employability of youth can be improved by training in entrepreneurship and leadership skills, which is currently lacking. While higher education plays a significant role in the employability of youth, training in entrepreneurship and leadership skills is also vital, especially considering that a majority of young people leaving care turn to self-employment, where these skills are essential. The report also finds that many SOS FBC youth are not pursuing an employment or educational/training trajectory that fulfils their desires and aspirations. This finding is partly attributable to the evidence that some youth feel that they are not always consulted and given a voice with regards to decisions affecting their future. Furthermore, there is evidence that not all youth are supported sufficiently to go on to higher education, and that there appears to be preferential treatment for youth with a good behaviour and high academic performance.
6.2 Reflections & study limitations

There are a number of reflections and limitations that should be considered regarding this research:

- Côte d’Ivoire is a culturally and ethnically diverse country, and as such the research cannot be considered representative of the country as a whole. Some SOS staff highlighted that Aboisso in itself differs from the rest of Côte d’Ivoire being a cross border area to Ghana. Furthermore, most of the life-history interviews and surveys were conducted with youth who are in the SOS FBC programme. As a result, most of the findings in this report are based on the experiences of SOS FBC youth in Aboisso, and cannot be generalised beyond this context.

- From the survey sample there was a substantially greater proportion of interviews conducted with males rather than females. Consequently, the experiences of females leaving care may not always have been fully captured. This disproportion in the demographics of our respondents was not intended, and was mainly due to time constraints, and availability of respondents at the time.

- It was difficult to contact a non-SOS care organisation in Côte d’Ivoire, as many were unwilling to participate in the research. Efforts were made to contact one non-SOS care organisation, which differed vastly in comparison to SOS, because it was more of a training programme preparing youth for employment for two years, rather than a care institution. In total a sample of 5 youth were interviewed from the non-SOS care organisation which is too small a size to base generalisable conclusions on.

- There was a reluctance to discuss more negative issues among youth. Caregivers repeatedly claimed that youth probably did not want to discuss the negative issues some faced with regards to the disconnection they feel from their biological family. As a result, in the surveys and life-history interviews youth may not always have been completely open as to their experiences of being in care.
6.3 Recommendations for SOS and care organisations in Côte d’Ivoire

- Young people should be better guided, especially in their transitions within care and in their transition to independent living. Young people should be assisted more effectively to ensure that their participation in education remains positive, and to discourage them from absenteeism from school and engaging in substance abuse. This could be done by providing more workshops for youth, informing them about the dangers of substance abuse.

- Young people should be prepared more actively for (seeking) stable employment in early stages of care. While higher education plays an important role for youth in being able to find meaningful employment, in the Ivorian context, business and entrepreneurial skills are also vital in the labour market, and these skills should be encouraged in early stages in care if possible. Business and entrepreneurial skills are vital for many youth in the Ivorian context, especially considering that most youth in this study end up being self-employed. Youth should be positively encouraged with regards to finding employment, and also be made aware of the realities of the job market.

- Young people should be more actively engaged in decisions over their lives and their futures. Caregivers need to take more into account the aspirations and choices of youth, with regards to their desired educational trajectories and preparations for living independently.

- Youth need more predictable and stable financial support to be able to continue their higher education and pursue meaningful employment after leaving care.

- Better provisions should be in place for supporting and preparing youth in their transition to independence; particularly in providing emotional support and practical support in advising youth on how to best be prepared for when they move on their own to their allocated semi-independent or fully independent accommodation.

- Youth should be assisted where possible, and at least be encouraged to maintain their social ties to ensure they have positive connections when they leave care. Especially in the context of Côte d’Ivoire, social connections are important for seeking employment.

- Youth should be encouraged to engage and interact with youth beyond their care organization, by means of organizing more communal activities. In this way, the social network of young people from care will be larger, and extend further than only youth within their care organization. The expansion of the social network of young people from care is essential for their social-relational wellbeing, social acceptance, and employability.
6.4 Recommendations for more inclusive youth policies in Côte d’Ivoire

- Government should recognize young people’s citizenship – irrespective of their social-economic backgrounds, and actively seek their consent to legitimize youth policies and interventions.

- Governments should take more responsibility for youth (un)employment, in particular by improving the education and training system of the country to facilitate smoother school-to-work transitions.

- Governments must improve the accessibility of quality education, so that all children and young people have access to education and families do not feel obliged to leave their children in care.

- Governments should improve the accessibility of higher education by making it more affordable to all youth, including those in/from care institutions.

- Governments must take responsibility for vulnerable children and young people from care, by more closely monitoring what their experiences are. In order to do this, all care organisations in Côte d’Ivoire must be registered and monitored. Moreover, records should be kept locally and shared nationally on children and youth entering and leaving care.
7. Reference list


[34] Hook, J. (2010). Employment of Former Foster Youth as Young Adults: Evidence from the Midwest Study. Chapin Hall, University of Chicago.


