The Social Exclusion of Vulnerable Youth

Country Report: Kenya

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The Social Exclusion of Vulnerable Youth
Country Report: Kenya

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List of Acronyms

AIDS  Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CCI  Charitable Children’s Institutions
FBC  Family Based Care
FGD  Focus Group Discussion
FSP  Family Strengthening Programme
HIV  Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HIV+  Human Immunodeficiency Virus positive status
ILO  International Labour Organisation
NCCS  National Council for Children’s Services
NGO  Non-Governmental Organisation
OVC  Orphans and Vulnerable Children
SOS CV  SOS Children’s Village
SRHR  Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TVET  Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNICEF  United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
YCI  Young Career Initiative
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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, employment, 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 290 youth participated; their voices, experiences and inter-relationships stand at the core of this research. In addition, their caregivers, 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 presents the country context and summarises the SOS Children’s Villages programme in Nairobi, Kenya. Research findings, following the conceptual scheme in Figure 1, are presented in detail in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 provides recommendations for uptake and use of the research findings by the SOS Children’s Villages organisation and a variety of stakeholders. The literature list is included at the back.
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 structures 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] (see conceptual scheme in Figure 1 below).

2.2 Vulnerable youth & their multiple transitions
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

![Conceptual Scheme Diagram]
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 affect 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, 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with caregivers and mentors, teachers, and employers of vulnerable youth, supplemented by insights from secondary literature. 70 young people were interviewed in Kenya using social relational mapping and vignettes as tools. With a sub-selection of 10 youth, life-histories were conducted to identify barriers, constraints and delays in their relational movements and social identity formation towards independence. 44 surveys were conducted and 5 focus groups were organised with young men and young women separately to explore gender specific drivers of social in- and exclusion.

3.4 Description of Study Populations
Next to data collection in collaboration with SOS Children’s Villages Nairobi, one other care organisation also participated in the study. This is a church-based project similar to the concept of family strengthening, that supports up to 345 children in vulnerable families in communities. In Kenya, 70 Young people (ages 16-31) and 24 stakeholders participated.
The gender of youth surveyed was split 21 male/23 female. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, young people were not directly asked about their ethnic background. From the references made to ethnicity, it can be seen that the ethnicity of young people varied. In terms of religion, 43 out of 44 surveyed young people were Christian, with only one young person not answering the question. The stakeholder participants consisted of 8 SOS mothers, 8 members of SOS staff, 1 teacher, 1 representative from the local government and judiciary, 1 employer and 3 health workers, and 2 experts on youth and youth unemployment.

4.1 Introduction
The research in Kenya took place in Nairobi. In this section the human development context of Kenya is described, with a focus on policies for vulnerable youth. Next the focus is turned to a description of the SOS programmes running in Nairobi and an overview of youth issues is presented.

4.2 Country context & youth policies
Kenya has a population estimated at 46.1 million [37], of which children under the age of 18 constitute about 50% [38]. The rapidly growing (young) population puts pressure on the labour market, shortage of land availability for agricultural production, and the provision of food, water, social services, infrastructure, and energy [37; 39; 40]. An estimated 45.9% of the population lived under the national poverty line in 2005 [37]. Youth unemployment is 24% and is among the policy priorities of the strategic plan of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security, and Services [41]. The Kenya Vision 2030 likewise states to increase the youth enterprise fund to encourage business opportunities for young people [42].

An estimated 3.6 million children (almost 8%) are orphans or vulnerable[43]. Kenya has over 700 Charitable Children’s Institutions (CCIs) housing approximately 40,000-42,000 children [38].

The majority of the population in Kenya identifies as Christian (80%), 10% is Muslim, and the rest practice traditional religions or other faiths. The country knows 42 ethnic groups, the largest of them Kikuyu (20%), followed by Luo, Luhya, Kamba and Kalenjin (these five account for 70% of all ethnic groups in Kenya). Next to English and Kiswahili, most ethnic groups have their own unique dialect or language. Kenya gained independence in 1964, led by Jomo Kenyatta and was succeeded in 1978 by Daniel arap Moi ruling until 2002, who was known for an authoritarian and repressive regime. Between 2002 and 2013, Kenya was ruled by Kibaki, which is when youth started to receive more political attention – positively in terms of creating jobs, but also negatively in terms of accusing youth movements for political and ethnic violence [39]. Since 2013, Uhuru Kenyatta has been president and was believed to have won the recent August 2017 elections, and is the declared winner of the subsequent October 2017 elections. The 2007 election resulted in a political crisis where ethnic tensions worsened; 180.000-600.000 people were displaced and young people lost their parents or relatives. Subsequent elections have witnessed a rise of ethnic tensions, though not as severe as in 2007. Nevertheless, politics and ethnic tensions remain closely interlinked, as revealed in this study as well.

Up until today, economic growth, education system, and arguably also care institutions, are affected by internally displaced people partly due to the 2007 election violence [44]. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has resulted into additional causes for youth being taken into care or under alternative family support systems, as well as poverty and parent’s inability to care for their children [45]. While academic literature on young peoples’ experiences in care are scarce, studies on family support systems have found that for young people in Kenya, factors related to poverty, wealth and access to

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1 OVC in these number includes children who have lost one or both parents and/or are living in a household where at least one parent, caregiver, or child has been chronically ill for the last three months or more and/or who are living in a child-headed household.
health/education services are more detrimental to their wellbeing than the experience of being an “orphan” [46; 47]. These experiences intersect with structural factors related to ethnicity and gender [48; 39].

At the policy level, Kenya’s governing bodies are operating under an overarching policy Kenya Vision 2030, made public in 2007, aiming for a globally competitive and prosperous country with high quality of life [42]. In 2010, the Kenyan constitution was promulgated, devolving government from national to county levels. Consequently, all government functions are decentralized, including provision of education and care. The Government of Kenya has several policies in place that address young and vulnerable people (also see Table 2 below). Kenya has a National Youth Policy (2006), which aims to form an integrated approach to encourage youth participation in society as to “ensure that the youth play their role, alongside adults, in the development of the country.” [49, p. iv]. However, no specific mention is made to youth in care apart from community-based welfare programmes to benefit youth living with HIV/AIDS, or post-care and social protection programmes. The Framework for the National Child Protection System more specifically outlines the responsibilities of various Ministries to children, including after-care and re-unification efforts [50]. The Guidelines for the Alternative Family Care of Children in Kenya (developed by the Government of Kenya and stakeholders, with technical and financial input of Swedish International Development Authority and UNICEF Kenya) provide further detailed directions on the provision of alternative care and transition to independence [51].

Table 2 - Youth policies and legislation in Kenya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy type</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Policy details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National development</td>
<td>Kenya Vision 2030</td>
<td>Section on gender, youth, and vulnerable groups states aim is “to increase opportunities all-round among women, youth, and all disadvantaged groups”. No mentioning of youth in care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting age</td>
<td>Inter-Parliamentary Union</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal responsibility</td>
<td>Penal Code of Kenya (2009)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority age</td>
<td>Age of Majority Act (1974)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Youth Policy</td>
<td>National Youth Policy (2006)</td>
<td>Visualizes a society where youth have an equal opportunity as other citizens to realize their fullest potential, productively participating in economic, social, political, cultural and religious life without fear or favour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Youth Representation</td>
<td>National Youth Council of Kenya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth in care</td>
<td>National Child Protection System Guidelines for the Alternative Family Care of Children in Kenya (2011)</td>
<td>Outlines the responsibilities of various Ministries to children, including after-care and re-unification efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum age for</td>
<td>Employment Act 2007</td>
<td>13. Allows light work from the ages of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Youth employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Youth Policy (2006)</th>
<th>Attention for youth unemployment, equity, and job creation. However, lack of coordination between government agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Youth health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRHR) Policy (2015)</th>
<th>Identifies “orphans” (a/o) as particularly vulnerable to SRHR problems as they tend to lack guidance and support which is associated with increased vulnerability to risky behaviours.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Education

|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Sources: [42; 49; 52; 53; 54].

4.3 SOS programme and education

SOS Children’s Villages (CV) Nairobi consists of 16 family houses (156 children) and two youth houses (one for young men opposite the CV sharing the compound with the SOS Health Centre, and one for young women within the SOS CV compound) (63 youth). The Family Strengthening Programme (FSP) has supported up to 1110 children in Nairobi since 2003 [55]. SOS Kenya has seven CVs in the country, of which Nairobi is the oldest. The CV also has a kindergarten, primary school, technical training school, health centre, and it operates a Family Strengthening Programme (FSP) serving youth in nearby informal settlement areas. In 2015, SOS CV organised Job Shadowing Programme, which allowed 5 young people being placed at DHL Express premises. This provided the participating youth with the opportunity to learn the basics of customer service and most importantly to identify the professional areas that they would be interested in pursuing in the future. Other programmes include the Young Career Initiative (YCI), an internship programme to enhance youth employability, community service, and also health programmes including sexual reproductive health camps and health awareness training [55].

4.4 Youth issues

Based on secondary literature review, issues affecting young people in Kenya are related to unemployment, crime, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, teenage motherhood, gender inequality, poverty, droughts, internal displacement and urban-rural divides, migration, being refugee, and lack of accessible social services including education (being school drop-out) and health care [38; 44; 49; 56; 57].
5. Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Before discussing the social, cultural, economic, and political drivers of exclusion, first we discuss how youth themselves conceptualise what it means to be socially excluded and socially included. Their views on in- and exclusion can broadly be categorised as in/exclusion due to young peoples’ own behaviour (individual factors), and in/exclusion by others in society (external factors). Young people attached particular importance to (the lack of) youth participation and “pity”.

Conceptualising social exclusion, some youth reflected on their own feelings and/or behaviour. They said that social exclusion means seeing yourself as different, not feeling like a “normal” child, and thus shying away from friends and community. Some youth also felt excluded when they did not identify with their community members or had to resist peer pressure. External factors that led to exclusion were amongst others, being looked down upon or being seen as a burden, being chased away from home, not feeling loved when caregivers or parents do not visit school, and having limited access to social services (e.g. applying for ID) and labour market (e.g. due to lack of connections). Some youth reflected on their difficulty of finding suitable accommodation due to their care background:

“The landlord thinks because they are coming from institution, that means that every time the rent will be delayed. At that particular instance, the ladies who stayed at that house, they felt excluded, because whatever supposed to be done correctly, it was not done correctly. And why- because they are from SOS. They would be treated differently if this landlord would not know that you are from SOS. And at the same time you would not like to be treated differently because you are part of community. Because of these gaps, we find ourselves treated differently. And at some point we tend to shy away.” [FGD1, young woman, care-leaver, FGD]

Youth also felt that being “institutionalised” contributed to their feelings of exclusion, as they are not used to their home communities and often have forgotten their mother tongue. Not having a job or not being able to be self-reliant made this sense of exclusion worse. Finally, in relation to participation, youth raised how the fact that their views or needs are not considered by politicians, caregivers, or community, and this lack of citizenship made them feel excluded. Also, not having enough information about politics increased their feelings of exclusion, as well as their opinions being rejected because of their economic background or poor performance in school. Some youth raise consequences of social exclusion: lack of concentration in school, lack of courage, crime, and drug abuse.

When defining social inclusion, youth’s own feelings and behaviour towards social inclusion related to for instance finding a reason to live, identifying with others in your area, being helped to reach your ambitions, being listened to, having an option, and being a good person. Importantly, several youth raised that caring for others and helping their own family and community was part of their definition of social inclusion, revealing the importance youth attach to a sense of belonging or connectedness. After being helped by their care organisation, many youth wanted to “give back” to society. External factors that led to exclusion referred to treating a person with love and care, being welcomed in peoples’ homes (e.g. for Christmas), being called regularly, receiving positive feedback
about achievements, helping people and being given access to quality education, job market and social services. In terms of participation, youth felt that social inclusion meant their views and opinions are asked and heard. They particularly raised that it means that policies are present for vulnerable youth, and that local leaders (e.g. chief) help with matters such as finding an ID and getting connected to employment and education opportunities.

Interestingly, many youth raised the issue of “pity” towards youth who are from care, particularly FBC youth. Many youth observe that people from the community pity youth from care institutions. Some youth associate this pity with efforts towards social inclusion: it works in your favour when applying for a job or searching for a house. Others in turn associate it with discrimination towards and social exclusion of youth in care: people think you may be playing a card which delegitimises their experiences. Youth can therefore feel discouraged and put down by “public pitying”, for instance teachers asking them what they need in front of the class; not getting paid because employers feel they are doing youth a favour/can use them for cheap labour. Furthermore, the pity affects young peoples’ sense of self-esteem and dignity, and as one young person describes, leads them to exclude themselves:

“I don’t like pity because it can kill you, the pity makes you to exclude yourself from other people and you withdraw from associating with other people. May be you think you are going be a burden to them and you just withdraw.” [FGD2, young women, SOS FBC, FGD]

Figure 2 below visualises the extent to which young people feel factors of being from care, religion, ethnicity, age and gender leads to social exclusion. Being from care, together with ethnicity and age, were considered to have the largest effects on social exclusion. These are discussed in more depth in the following sections on social, cultural, economic and political drivers of exclusion.

Figure 2 - Share of youth (in %) who think the following factors have a small or large effect on social exclusion (N=44)
5.2 Social drivers of exclusion

Social drivers of exclusion that were raised in this study relate in the main to gender, ethnicity, and being from care. Other drivers of exclusion that were mentioned were school performance, age and marital status, and health.

A division of gender roles in society affects the experiences of social in/exclusion differently for young women and young men. Young women faced stigma related to early pregnancy as a driver of exclusion. Other studies in Kenya have also highlighted how early pregnancies challenge traditional norms of womanhood in Kenya such as wifehood, homemaking and domesticity [48], and that young women from lower socio-economic status are more vulnerable to sexual violence and early pregnancy as a result [58]. Research based in the USA reveals that youth from care are more vulnerable to early pregnancies [59]. Young women in our sample also raised that because they are often expected to stay at home to do household chores, they are excluded from meaningful employment. Moreover, some employers prefer men for certain jobs over women. As a consequence of unemployment, young women may engage in transactional sex because they “fall prey to men to survive” [590, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC], whereas young men are often lured into drug abuse and criminal activity. To encourage gender equality and women to work, the Government of Kenya has developed several initiatives and funds supporting affirmative actions towards young women. Yet to young men, who also experience highly limited employment opportunities, this is often seen as a form discrimination: “The government is fan of the woman not of the man” [LH13, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC].

Kenya has experienced several periods of conflict that have been linked to ethnicity. Unsurprisingly, youth observed that ethnicity or “tribalism” is a major driver of exclusion. “Tribalism”, according to youth, limits fair opportunities in the labour market due to employers preferring candidates from their own ethnic backgrounds, causes favoritism in schools or (care) organisations, and has impact on the extent to which youth from a care background are able to relate to others in society (see also sections 5.8 and 5.9 on relational movement and identity formation). The issue of ethnicity are particularly important for youth from Somali-Kenyan background, who experience racism based on the association of Somali with Al-Shabaab. These youth have been called terrorist on the street, and have been stopped by the police to check their passport. Similarly, youth raise that issues arise with giving children a name that does not reflect their (ethnic) background, as it sometimes leads to confrontational questions and suspicion by officials.

As revealed above, social drivers of exclusion related to gender and ethnicity intersect with having a care background. Exclusion based on care background particularly applies to the daily interaction with peers and teachers (youth from care often fear or are being bullied or treated with prejudice and disrespect by teachers), but also affects chances in the labour market due to limited connections. It should be noted though, that this particularly applies to FBC youth. FSP youth often have some family or community connection that could link them to a possible employer. At the same time, some youth also feel being from SOS FBC is an advantage because it often comes with good education certificates and skills, and some feel more motivated to perform well in school and find a job due to the support and encouragement they have received.

Finally, other social drivers of exclusion that were mentioned by respondents were school performance, age and marital status, and health. In terms of school performance, one young person
summarizes that “bright people do not want to associate with the poor because they think it will affect their performance” [FGD2, young women, SOS FBC, FGD]. Discrimination based on age and marital status reflect Kenya’s hierarchical society which attaches importance to maturity. This particularly affects young people’s chances in the labour market. One young professional shared how being unmarried was increasingly becoming problematic in being taken seriously in employment, limiting their chances of promotion. Health was often mentioned as a driver of exclusion, particularly in relation to disability and HIV/AIDS. Many youth observed being neglected or excluded as a result of having HIV+ status, though youth in informal settlements who are supported through FSP at the same time observed that “in the ghetto, it would be advantage if you are [HIV] positive, then you may get somebody who pays your rent, somebody who gives you food, all of them have sponsors. But if you are negative, that is hard” [LH19, young woman, SOS FBC]. However, other FSP youth have felt excluded due to stigma and prejudices related to HIV/AIDS, when her neighbours and peers judged her as HIV+ when she started being supported by SOS.

The main social drivers of exclusion are gender, ethnicity, age, and being from care. 45.5% of youth say they feel treated differently as a result of being from care (compared to 2 out of 8 SOS FSP youth feeling treated differently based on care background). 34.8% of these youth reported this difference is negative.

5.3 Cultural drivers of exclusion

Cultural drivers of exclusion that youth raised are diversity in languages and religion. The linguistic diversity again intersects with young peoples’ care background and ethnic connections. Several youth raise that they cannot participate in discussions about ethnicity because they do not know their own mother tongue or the language their peers are discussing in. They also worry and fear how to reintegrate back into their home community if they do not know their mother tongue.

“I went to school with a lot of [name of ethnic group] guys. Also my name is [name of ethnic group] name. Even where I stay- it is [language of ethnic group] speaking place. Even if you are going to the market, they ask or respond in [language of ethnic group]. So for my friends in college, they ask me, how are you not speaking [language of ethnic group]? You don’t know to speak your language, where are you from? So it is kinda gets to you, you need to know your language.” [FGD1, young man, care-leaver, FGD]

At the same time, being in or supported by a care organisation such as SOS, may contribute to good education, leading to good language skills in Kiswahili and English. This in turn increases chances of employment, which makes young people feel there are better chances for them to participate in society.

Kenya is a highly Christian nation, with 80% Christian and 10% Muslim population daily life and community interaction is generally structured around church life – providing opportunities to integration, inclusion and development of a positive self-image, at the same time posing potential forms of exclusion for those who do not go to church on Sundays. For instance, one young woman currently in care does not share with her peers that she is a seventh day Adventist, because she has experiences of her peers being unwilling to help her with her homework due to her affiliation, and she could not attend tuition classes on Saturdays because that is Adventist church day. For Muslims,
who form a minority in society, prejudices and exclusion tends to be even stronger, reflected in young peoples’ statements who observe that “Muslims tend to be on their own”, “Muslims have banks where they discriminate Christians, when you want a loan you cannot get it from them, unless you transform to be a Muslim” and “If you are Somali you are branded Al-Shabaab”.

Having a good command of English and Kiswahili provides opportunities for inclusion. However, not speaking the language of your ethnic background leads to social exclusion, and difficulties reintegrating into home communities for young people from care.

5.4 Economic drivers of exclusion
Economic status and being unemployed is a driver of exclusion that many youth have directly experienced. From early ages onwards, children and young people recall that peer groups are formed based on “dress codes” and appearance, some teachers expect less of children from a poor household, and youth from poorer background cannot equally participate in school because of lack of equipment at home to do homework. One FSP youth for instance felt left out in school when they were being told that they have to bring pocket money for a morning snack while not being able to afford it: “everyone was supposed to buy a snack for themselves for breakfast. Other kids used to buy and most of the time I felt left out.” [LH11, young man, SOS FSP].

Unemployment status is likewise a factor that leads to social exclusion. Being unemployed leads to limited or negative relationships, as well as personal struggles with self-esteem and identity: “Ambitions die if you can’t find a job”. For some young people, their challenging socioeconomic status is a matter of mindset and they are determined to work harder than their peers need to in order to climb up the social ladder. For others, poverty and unemployment affects their self-esteem negatively and they frustrate over their unprivileged status in society. Nevertheless, for most of the youth and stakeholders, unemployment remains a political issue that requires substantial efforts from government as well as community, NGO and private actors to create jobs, restructure unfair social systems and redistribute social services to reach the most vulnerable.

Poverty and unemployment lead to social exclusion. The lack of employment opportunities for young people, combined with limited networks, force youth in a period of waithood where they cannot strive to reach their ambitions.

5.5 Political drivers of exclusion
Although many youth say to feel disengaged from politics, they are strikingly dissatisfied with and often cynical towards current national political efforts for young people. As one young person puts it:

“Where I live the biggest problem the youth have is unemployment. And people advantage especially politicians by bribing them to cause havoc. Where I stay I can say there is political interference. The money is used to mobilise youth, those who seem idle and are given like 200 shillings to go cause havoc for the leaders seeking popularity and support.” [FGD4, young man, SOS FSP]
The main drivers of this disengagement from politics is the bribery and “tribalism” of politicians, the lack of attention to unemployment, a dysfunctional education system, and the lack of adequate youth initiatives and policies. Youth state that politicians do not listen to youth, further increasing their feelings of exclusion. Likewise, where many FSP youth feel included by their local chief because their chief links them to employment opportunities and scholarships, FBC youth most of the time do not know their chief and have limited information on how to vote, register for voting/obtain the necessary ID card, and on politics in general, increasing their sense of disconnection from politics.

In terms of unemployment, youth observe there is high corruption leading to limited employment opportunities where only older, richer and better-connected people are able to enter the labour market. In the same vein, respondents raised that the education system further reinforces exclusion of the vulnerable by enforcing a hierarchical system that favours the upper class and well-performing students disproportionately. At the same time, some conclude that the only way to secure employment is by being involved in politics because it is the only sector that generates jobs. Young people and stakeholders raise the issue that the economy is not growing but the retirement age in Kenya has recently increased from 55 to 60 years. As a result, older people are not leaving their place of employment, which limits room for young people to enter the labour market who as a result feel that self-employment is the only way out. This notion of self-employment as the only option is reinforced by current policy focus on entrepreneurship (see below) framing youth as having the responsibility to contribute to national economic development.

At the policy level, respondents have raised that the core of the problem is that vulnerable youth are not being monitored. Many Charitable Children’s Institutions (CCIs) are not being monitored by the government, and if they are, only staff are spoken to and not the children whom may have important information and concerns about procedures and treatment in CCIs [60]. This limits opportunities for adequate policies and interventions for them. Indeed, as much as there are policies and laws in place for children and youth, issues raised are lack of enactment of for instance social protection policy, and lack of attention for youth in relation to employment. In fact according to a government representative “children are not a priority in Kenya’s new constitution”. Furthermore, apart from policy attention to entrepreneurship, there is limited attention for job creation for young people, particularly the vulnerable. One stakeholder summarizes: “Politics focuses on those who are doing well. The government is building roads for cars but not considering the ones who walk to work” [169, youth employment expert].

### Lack of political attention to vulnerable youth, limited opportunities for youth to be listened to and represented adequately, and high levels of corruption, are the main drivers of political exclusion and political alienation of youth.

#### 5.6 Multiple transitions
Turning to discussing young peoples’ experiences in and after care, we now discuss how their (sometimes multiple) transitions influence youth from care. Within our sample, youth from FBC have had several transitions from into care, to youth house, to independence, and some even with an interruption in the care given in between. Non-SOS and FSP youth in our sample however stay with their relatives and only know the transition from starting to be supported to not being supported any more. Findings highlight that young people are particularly affected by multiple transitions of
caregivers, experience the transition to the youth house as a moment of opportunity to form new connections though fear early disengagement in case of perceived misbehaviour, and attach great value to integrating with the community.

5.6.1 Transition into care

**Transition into care** is generally remembered as a positive feeling. For FSP youth, the support from SOS often comes as a great opportunity as it means having the chance to go to school while their family is financially supported. Youth in FBC move to the children’s village and for those who remember, most youth reflect back on this transition as a great opportunity, being excited about how great and child-friendly the children’s village looks, and the warm welcome of the SOS mother over a first cup of tea. Memories were often accompanied with statements such as: “I still remember those cups”, “I really love my [SOS] mother”, and “it doesn’t take long to feel at home here”, though the transition was sometimes coupled with having to get used to a new place, new people, and new language while missing biological relatives. Particularly the transition of new caregivers posed a challenge to children and young people (see Text Box 1 on multiple caregivers). SOS currently has the policy that biological siblings grow up in the same SOS family house. However, youth spoken to (and thus who entered care 6+ years back), report to have a biological sister who was taken into care in another children’s village elsewhere in the country, because of which they now do not have a strong bond.

5.6.2 Transition into the youth house

As much as the transition into care is often met with warm memories, the **transition into the youth house** is more ambivalent. For many youth the freedom in the youth house is attractive, but the independence and levels of responsibility also frightening. Positive memories in the youth house consisted of cooking together, sharing things, spending time on hobbies, freedom to stay out (in the city centre) longer, time of learning to be independent and responsible, making own decisions, and learning to budget. However, for many youth, financial issues, next to missing their mother, are also the biggest hurdle. They struggle to make ends meet with the pocket money they receive, and in their free time do other small jobs such as “sitting matatu”\(^2\) to generate income.

The transition to the youth house is different for young men and young women. Young men transition to the youth house at an earlier age, after circumcision (age 14), compared to young women who move to the youth house after graduating from secondary school (age 18). For many young men the transition to the youth house is a transition to becoming a man

\(^{2}\) *Matatus* (minibuses) often stand in a queue to depart and as soon as a *matatu* is full it will leave. *Matatu* drivers thus want their minibus to be full as soon as possible and people choose the fullest *matatu* to be on the road soon. *Matatu* conductors give some small coins to young people who are willing to ‘sit matatu’ to attract people to choose that *matatu*. 

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**Text Box 1 Multiple caregivers**

During their time in the Children’s Village, many youth experience several - up to three - changes of caregivers. Youth observe that new mothers often do not like the older children in the family house, and for children it is difficult to call the new mother ‘mum’. The transition affects their performance in school, as well as their general well-being in the home. For some youth, this was “the hardest part of our lives (...) we should have undergone counselling, or psychosocial support, so we could have prepared psychologically when another person comes into family. But we never got that, she just came and everything changed.” [LH22, young woman, SOS FBC].
and often met with excitement about increased freedoms, and a way of integrating into society as a young male adult:

“I am a man, and around [the age of] 14 or 15 I need girlfriends, so I cannot stay [in the family house]. It is good for guys to be trained out of the mother’s hand.” [LH13, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

At the same time however, the preparation and transition to manhood after circumcision was by some experienced as an uninformed transition. Not knowing what it means “to be a man” after circumcision (age 14) later complicates their integration into society and needs more guidance from a fatherly mentor. Furthermore, some young men struggle to handle peer pressure to drink and smoke during their time in the youth house and lose focus in their education, which comes with a downside of missing the closeness of a family. The later transition for young women coincides conveniently with the perceived necessity to protect them longer. Ironically though, it seems the actual time in the youth house is paired with increased levels of responsibility and accountability for young women, more than for their SOS brothers (see Text Box 2 on early disengagement).

Text box 2 Early disengagement
While young men in the youth house are free to come home late, drink, smoke, and party, young women are more controlled. Many young women have feared or witnessed early disengagement due to ‘deviant’ behaviour:

“I was in the youth hostel, we have gone out, we did not ask for permission, and we slept outside... and the rule in here is that you can't sleep outside. When we came back in the morning we found that we are in the trouble, we wrote apology letters and we said that we are sorry, but they did not want to understand that. So after 3 months of consultation, they decided to chase us out. (...)It was really difficult, and sometimes you find yourself even opt to do a prostitution, because you don't have any other way (...)just because of one mistake, it could cost everything.” [LH22, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

“All I can say, I am just a normal girl, grow up just like a normal kid...once in a while I just brush off with the youth leaders, but thank God I was not chased away” [LH 23, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

“Some [female youth] went outside and got pregnant and [SOS CV staff] will tell you 'you know this is a children's home and we take care of children so we cannot take care of a child who is taking care of another child'. Once you get pregnant, they can't allow you to stay, they will send you to go and stay with your relatives.” [LH6, young woman, SOS FBC]

Indeed, several of the youth and care-leavers spoken to, report that they have been or have seen youth being disengaged early due to misbehaviour or early pregnancy. Some young men were also disengaged early because of supposed involvement in criminal activity. Some of them were later taken back into the SOS Children’s Village. The youth spoken to who were disengaged early raised that they felt treated unfairly, were not given enough or adequate opportunities to explain their behaviour, or listen to their side of the story of wishes (see also [62]). This indicates there is a need for more care than control, that involves the voice and participation of youth in outlining strategies for their education, employment, and (planned)
The National Guidelines for Alternative Family Care (2011) [51] outline that each CCI should have an exit strategy, specifying a systematic and detailed plan describing how the child will leave the care of a CCI. As part of the exit strategy, the child should be supported with aftercare services provided by Department of Children’s Services in collaboration with partners. This also applies to children who are older than 18 years but already are in alternative care and need continuing support during the transitional period. However, no clear guidelines have been set on early disengagement procedures. The National Standards for Best Practices in CCI’s outline steps CCI’s should take in case of serious misbehaviour, where children should be referred to Sub-Country/Area Multi-Disciplinary Teams [61, p.60]. In case of early pregnancies, the CCI is responsible to ensure that the safety and rights of both mother and baby are guaranteed, and that the mother can continue with her education after giving birth [61, p.65]. However, this refers only to children in care (i.e. those under 18 years old), and leaves young people who are older than 18 but still need care during their transition to independence vulnerable to missing this protection.

5.6.3 Transition to and preparation for living independently

During their time in the youth house, FBC youth are prepared to live independently. The level to which they feel prepared to leave varies, with 3 out of 26 (11.5%) feeling very prepared, 9 out of 26 (34.6%) somewhat prepared, 2 out of 26 (7.7%) somewhat unprepared, and the majority, 12 out of 26 (46.2%) very unprepared to live independently. None of the FSP youth said to feel very prepared to live independently (the majority feeling somewhat unprepared, 5 out of 8 youth (62.5%), and from the non-SOS organisation that runs a similar programme to FSP only 1 out of the 10 young people said to feel very prepared, the rest feeling somewhat un/prepared. Youth in general thus do not feel prepared for living independently, with the SOS FBC youth seeming to be more extremely unprepared compared to the FSP and non-SOS youth. This is in line with other findings that youth in CCIs find the transition to independence a destabilising experience [60].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is being told shorter than 1 year (%)</th>
<th>Is being told longer than a year (%)</th>
<th>Think should being told shorter than a year (%)</th>
<th>Would like being told longer than a year (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average % of youth</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of youth (75%) think they should be told more than a year in advance when they will be leaving care. 5.6% does not know when they will leave care. From the below Table 3, it is evident that most young people in Malawi are being told shorter than a year in advance that they will leave care, which is when they think they should be told
When asked about the specifics of their preparation for independence (see Table 4 below), youth highlight that they are well-prepared for doing their daily chores and are aware of possible challenges related to water- and electricity shortages, drug- and alcohol abuse, and difficulties of finding a job, which they are warned about mostly by their SOS mothers. Finding employment and financial security are their main concerns and barrier to achieving their ambitions, though they do generally feel they have been prepared enough to manage their finances. Next to finding accommodation, a striking number of youth from FBC feel they have not been prepared enough to engage in politics (see also Table 4 below). SOS FSP youth stay with their relatives for longer and often do not move out until they are financially secure or preparing to get married. One FSP youth said she moved out earlier because she got pregnant and did not want to burden her single mother. Generally, FSP youth felt well-prepared to manage their finances and health, and felt most challenged in continuing education and finding employment. Non-SOS youth felt prepared to continue their education, find an apprenticeship, and take care of their health. They felt slightly less prepared in taking care of themselves and finding accommodation, though are ready to leave “to make space for other children to be helped like me” [S27, young woman, non-SOS]. For some youth, finding out about their background made them feel strong enough to start living independently, as it added to their awareness of having no fall-back mechanism and therefore making sure they can deal with independent life on their own:

“Finding out about my family background and the fact that I was abandoned made me stronger and realise that I am going to be on my own, so I worked harder and got better grades; I was well prepared because I saved and I was looking forward to making my own living” [LH14, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

Table 4 - Share of youth who feel prepared for the following aspects of independent living (N=44)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of independent living</th>
<th>SOS FBC (n=25) (%)</th>
<th>SOS FSP (n=8) (%)</th>
<th>Non-SOS (n=10) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding accommodation</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of yourself</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>7/8</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>8/8</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Education</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2/8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding employment-related training (apprenticeship)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3/8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding employment</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>8/8</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement in politics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5/8</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, some youth strongly felt SOS could have done more to prepare them better. Youth recommend:

- Youth should be included in decision making processes, and to have an individual and tailored approach to disengagement as some youth were told by text message or via a group dinner when they will be leaving, which they considered a very impersonal approach and some felt they had little to say about this decision;
• Youth should receive more guidance on saving, and receive their disengagement packages on time and fully (some youth had to go back to the SOS office and claim their package for up to two years) regardless of their perceived level of independence and financial self-reliance;
• SOS staff to check on care-leavers more regularly when they are living independently (see also [45]);
• To be linked to a mentor (care-leavers, church or community members) from a young age onwards to help them integrate into the community, guide them psychologically, and link them to potential friends and employers;
• SOS to develop a system where youth can drop their CVs and be linked to their former SOS siblings as to collaborate more as a SOS family.

50% of the youth reported their engagement with the local community changed for the better after they had left care. For 40% it stayed the same, and for 10% it changed for the worse.

Indeed, the actual transition to independence has proven to be challenging for most care-leavers. This was also concluded by Magoni, Bambini and Ucembe (2009) [45] who reveal that many care-leavers in Kenya do not receive support by their care organization or government, most live in poverty, and few find decent employment. For SOS care-leavers, most of the youth move to live alone, with their partner, or their SOS siblings. Very few youth move in with biological family members. In the surveys, most FBC care-leavers indicated that their living conditions and interaction with the community changed for the better (though the integration with the community was not always evaluated as positive, particularly for those living in informal settlements), their diet and time for leisure and with friends stayed the same, but 7 out of 10 youth said that their money available to spend on leisure changed for the worse. This is confirmed by the qualitative data, that highlight that next to difficulties integrating, lack of financial support was considered the most difficult part of starting to live independently, which was linked to being from care:

“The hardest was financial state. Because you don’t receive your allowances in time. So sometimes you become like a beggar to my family.” [LH26, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

“Being here is different from being in the community, (…) between 2013 and 2014 while I was outside there, I have lost about 6 phones. Because I did not know how they live and the walking styles are different, they will know you are new.” [FGD3, young man, SOS FBC, FGD]

“We have been brought up like bread and butter, and trying to adapt to that [outside] life is very difficult” [FGD1, male care-leaver, SOS FBC, FGD]
Contrasting these experiences with issues raised by a government representative, it seems that there is a gap in policy frameworks towards addressing employment, education, and financial issues for care-leavers. Limited data and research is available within the local government on how youth are integrating into the community after they have been through care, their general wellbeing and employment. This complicates efforts to follow up on these youth, or to monitor or develop programmes for supporting them. Furthermore, a recurring theme among government representative and some caregivers seems to be the view that children from care are privileged and lack the motivation to take their own responsibilities:

“Sometimes (...) I hear this nursery children singing: Haki yetu! Haki yetu! That is: Our rights! Our rights! But they are not singing our responsibilities. (...) UNICEF is always talking about rights, the AU has not been so vocal about the responsibilities that are in its African Charter which talks about responsibilities. So an African child has been knowing that there certain rights and they should be there, (...) I should have a b c d. So they come demand to the parents and communities such that when you try to tell a young person or a child that you also need to do a b c d, they feel it is not [important].” [174, Government representative]

In the same vein, a report on the wellbeing of care-leavers reflects care organisations may hold similar views to the responsibility of care organisations and care-dependency of care-leavers:

“Many of the institutions do not allow the care-leavers to go back to seek assistance. The institutions feel that the care-leavers are too dependent on them. Since the policy of charitable children’s institutions stipulates that they should exit care when they are 18, some institutions do not feel a responsibility towards the care-leavers” [45, p. 17]

5.7 Education
Access to education was often mentioned as the most important benefit of being in care or supported by a care organisation for FBC, FSP as well as non-SOS youth (in line with [45]). In fact, some believe it is a privilege even though not all children and youth manage to benefit from that advantage:

“If I would have had parents, I would not be here right now - I mean in university, I feel good about it.” [LH15, young man, care-leaver]

“Sometimes, even right now, I wish that my mum would be around. To see me right now. Then sometimes I think that maybe there is a reason why she had to die for me, so that I can be in the way I am. Because probably, if I would not be in care, I could not get the education what I have, I would not be the way as I am now, the brains I have how to deal with life.” [LH23, young woman, care-leaver]

“Society sees us as advantaged, but we don’t know how to take or use this advantage. We have an opportunity to study, no need to think about the school fees, but look at the performance, the community performs better than us.” [LH19, female care-leaver]

During care and towards the transition to independence, the opportunity to continue education and finalising education was considered key to successful preparation for independent living. Furthermore, having a good education was seen as an opportunity to give back to the community,
which was particularly mentioned among the non-SOS youth, who have a close interaction with their community.

As much as access to a good education was considered a “life changer”, some young peoples’ experiences in education caused negative effects on their self-esteem, identity, participation, and feelings of social exclusion more generally. Starting from primary school up to tertiary level, young people recall moments by which they were labelled “orphan”, dependent, or someone who “needs a sponsor and likes free things” by their teachers or peers. One young person who was supported through SOS FSP recalls that their teacher in baking class had once said that you cannot “touch the dough when your fees have not been paid” [LH10, young woman, SOS FSP], which led to this young person refraining from participation as she was unsure whether SOS had already paid the fees. (The same young person highlights that even though school fees are paid for, lack of money to buy equipment at home to do homework again limits her participation and performance in school). Such instances of labelling the “poor” or the “needy” create a sense of exclusion and lack of “fitting in” for in-care youth that affects their performance, concentration, and wellbeing in school.

The hierarchical nature of Kenyan society is reflected in the school system, and the experience of being a “reject”, “failure” or being labelled second class citizen from primary school onwards further entrenches social exclusion of the vulnerable. Furthermore, stakeholders raise that for instance being in TVET is viewed as “failure” and the focus is predominantly on academics, which creates a sense of exclusion or not being good enough for the majority of the youth:

“The education system in Kenya it is not being improved and in that sense it already demarcates who is who, you come from a poor community you end up in a community school (...) once you reach the primary transition to go to high school, you begin to feel there are differences, you came from a community school and you meet people who came from private high cost school. (...) At primary school we all sit the same examinations. But it becomes selective, if you don’t get this grades you don’t get to these good schools. They become rejects at a very early age because they realize I did not score 350 that is why am in a District school and that is why my friend is in a National school. (...) The people who are running the jobs are alumni’s; they recognize those from their schools.” [I73, care staff]

“The educational system is a total wrack. It is a disaster. The education system is not relevant to young people. It does not help them identify and help them to find their purpose, which is a disaster. In fact, I hypothesize that it was designed by rich people to create the employees for factories. (...) At the end of the day lots of people are not interested in what they do, they are like robots-produce, produce, get the money, go home, just survive. So that is not a good model for society, it is a problem, it is not sustainable. [I76, employer]

Furthermore what comes through from the data is that young people are very keen and determined to do a course they love and feel passionate about. Some youth have a clear idea of what they want to do and pursue, though were told to do a different course by SOS staff because of the limited job opportunities in that particular sector.

“I just finished my diploma and I passed well, I had a chance to be given to start my degree in university, but the another person came in the organisation, and said that one child should do only one course in the system. But before, as long as you are good with education, they
will support you. So you see, that policy affected me, and I stopped studying as long as I was able to do for myself.” [LH22, young woman, care-leaver]

Because of this, youth express a need for more and better career guidance, and participation in developing their career path and education options, as they feel their options and preferences are not adequately considered and evaluated.

5.8 Relational movement

5.8.1 Relational images

Young peoples’ experiences of being from care have had impacts on how they expect they will be treated (self-images) and on the images that others hold as to how the individual will act and who is to blame for their exclusion (images of others). Most youth feel that exclusion is mostly due to prejudice of the society towards poor and in-care youth (see also their reflection on “pity”, in section 5.1), others feel that it is their own mindset that matters most: “If you think poorly, you will be poor (...) How you carry yourself around matters a lot.” [LH14, young man, care-leaver].

Many youth raise that issues related to their own (negative) experiences and mindset influence how they expect they will be treated. For instance, they think others will not understand them in relationships, it takes longer to trust someone, and feel uncared for by being abandoned/not knowing family members. Negative self-images led to low self-esteem for many youth, and some call it the “gate mentality of SOS” that leads children to stick together in school and have limited interactions with “outside”. Interestingly, this self-image seems to change when youth start to live independently and are able to be self-reliant:

“I feel successful. I never thought I would feel this way. Because I told you I had a teacher who discriminated me like I [would] never make it in life. But now I understand that it is not a must to join the university to succeed in life, even college can make you go higher and higher.” [LH12, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

“I am different, I feel that I am confident now [that I am living independently], I am able to be strong, deal with the challenges. Back then in SOS I would cry a lot, now I am strong” [LH20, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

“Thanks to FSP, I was able to complete education and do job internship. I gained self-confidence and think positively about the future” [S68, young woman, SOS FSP]

However, for the youth who are continuing to be dependent on others after disengagement, their self-image as well as their images of others continue to be influenced by experiences and expectations of exclusion. They report to feel that those who take care of them see them as a burden, question whether they have integrated into the community “well enough”, and experience that employers pity them or consider them as privileged, both leading to forms of exclusion:

“(…) You want to blend in community but you find, or it may be just a mindset, that you haven’t blended easily in community.” [LH26, young woman, care-leaver].

 “[My employer] used to treat me like a daughter but I think it was out of pity and I was not enjoying it. (...) every day he would ask me in public to go and see him, and he asked me
what I did not have, yet I had everything, of which if at all I did not have I would not have told him, and my pride could not allow me. (...) Sometimes some people make fun out of it, knowing that you come from an SOS background. So people just look at you as a chokora [street child].” [FGD2, young woman, SOS FBC, FGD]

Youth also report that their employers suspect that they steal things from the work place due to their care background, or pay youth from care less because employers consider themselves doing a favour to these young people by employing them. In intimate relationships, young women are thought to be more dependent on their future romantic partners, and young men have experienced their girlfriends break up with them because they’re “orphan” thereby being considered to be “less of a man”. The fact that these young men are supported thus influences their self-esteem as a young man, because they are (or expect to be) viewed not to be capable of being self-reliant:

“The girls discriminate us so much, for example it is hard for us to convince a girl to be your girlfriend because they are looking at things like money, dressing and the like which we cannot afford by now.” [FGD4, young man, SOS FSP, FGD]

While young men who are not supported by care organisations may experience similar issues when they cannot provide for their girlfriends, young men from care consider their care background or “orphan” status as an additional disadvantage in maintaining romantic relationships.

5.8.2 Connectedness

Young people feel a strong sense of connectedness during their time in care while they are in the family house, but which becomes more complex after transitions of caregivers and/or to the youth house. Nevertheless, connectedness seems to be particularly strong within the SOS village, and very few youth mention close connectedness outside of the SOS village other than with their peers in primary or secondary school.

For SOS FBC youth, the connectedness amongst SOS siblings seems strongest and most positive, followed by connectedness to the SOS mothers (see also Table 5 below). The warmest memories that young people have are of celebrations in the family houses, doing daily activities in the house, and spending time on their hobbies and talents such as handicraft or sports. The strong emotional attachment youth feel to their SOS Mothers is a striking finding, as other studies have reported that what young people from care dislike most is their caregiver, and sense of affection is among the things they missed most [45].

While in the surveys no gender differences came forward, qualitative data suggest that the connectedness between young people and caregivers seem to differ slightly based on gender. While for almost all youth a transition to a new SOS mother causes a significant disturbance and they struggle to develop a good relationship with their new mother, for young women this seems to be more difficult than for young men. Mothers likewise report that the new generation of female youth are becoming more demanding and are speaking up against their SOS mother negatively – leading to power struggles during the teenage years of the girl, when young women want to “take over the household” [I72, SOS mothers]. In addition, one young woman for instance shares how the tense relationship with her new SOS mother caused her to hide sexual abuse from her:
“I should have reported that thing, but you do not know where to start and where to end it. So, I just felt that we are not open to our mothers (...) although we have mother physically, emotionally we don’t have mothers.” [LH20, young woman, care-leaver]

Alongside feelings of connectedness that differ along gender lines, youth also reported to feel disconnection based on ethnicity. This is partly due to not feeling connected to your ethnic “roots” due to the transition to care and not knowing the ethnic language, but within the village youth also experience preferential treatment by some caregivers based on ethnicity:

“… some workers within the village prefer some children, if you are a child from a different tribe from the SOS worker she/he discriminates you. So the interaction is not good.” [FGD2, young woman, SOS FBC, FGD].

The transition to youth house is a time when most youth start forming new connections and reshaping existing ones. Youth stay closer to their SOS sisters and brothers than SOS mothers, which applies especially to young women who “have been through” several mothers, but those who had a good relationship with their mother will continue to visit her in the family house. Due to the high turnover of youth leaders youth do not develop close relationships with them, and do not always respect youth leaders because they hang out with youth in pubs and are experienced as lazy for instance in not actively helping out youth in searching for a house when they are close to their disengagement, requesting youth to make lunch for them while they have to attend their studies, and not following up on how youth are doing as their mothers do.

Youth’s new connections outside of the village are generally made in boarding school (secondary school) or campus (college). School was generally seen as an opportunity to learn the behaviour of those “outside”, although this sometimes reaffirms their self-image of being different:

“When I was on campus, you struggle a lot, sometimes you don’t have that someone… On Fridays you see your peers going back home, and you are like: ‘They’re going, so where am I going to go?’ You see, our mindset is so institutionalised, we are not socialised at all. Even fitting in to the society becomes a big challenge.” [FGD1, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

Along similar lines, youth mentioned that they had always enjoyed sports and play activities organised by the village with youth from other children villages. This provided an opportunity to interact with children other than their own SOS siblings, practice their socialising skills, as well as developing their talents. They regretted that these activities are now not/less frequently organised. Church likewise offered opportunities to interact with others, and religious leaders and God are often referred to as a help and refuge that help young people finding their way in society:

“The pastor helped me to overcome that pain that used [to keep] coming back to me, that I am an orphan, I am useless… – I can say that God has helped me so much through her. I even serve in the church, on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. So that is where I spend my time. I have a lot of friends from church.” [LH20, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC]
Table 5 - Person youth go to for support (N=44)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOS FBC (n=26) (%)</th>
<th>SOS FSP (n=8) (%)</th>
<th>Non-SOS (n=10) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support worker/care staff</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>0/8</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological relatives</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>8/8</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0/8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>3/8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After care, many youth stay in touch with their SOS siblings and visit the village regularly on a comeback day and SOS mothers/family meet future spouses of SOS youth. When asked where young people would go to for support once they are independent, FBC youth overwhelmingly say they would go to their SOS mother or other care staff, as well as their siblings. FSP and non-SOS youth (FSP) almost all go to their biological relatives (see Table 5).

Most SOS FBC youth do not feel close to their biological relatives, with a few exemptions of youth who regularly talk to their biological father or siblings. However, biological relatives do have a strong impact on their feelings of in/exclusion (see also section 5.9 on identity formation). Connections or the lack thereof with “outside”, including biological family members, start playing a greater role once youth move to live independently. Reunification was challenging because young people only see their biological family members once a year, and gets further complicated by community’s expectations of young people in care:

“Some [biological relatives] expect so much from us because you know you go dressed up well and they feel like you are getting a lot from here and them they are in the village and they [do not have much] so maybe they expect so much from us. They don’t understand we are still in school we are not working” [LH6, young woman, SOS FBC]

“The community has that expectation, that she has been helped, so she will come back as doctor maybe (...) they expect that I will come back to contribute to community. You are coming to get them out from the ghetto, but not coming to join them in the ghetto.” [LH 19, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

Also the lack of affection and the feeling of abandonment by family members affects this reunification process, sometimes worsened by family members’ own actions and dysfunctional legislative system:

“Everything what our parents left for us to inherit, everything was sold by my [family], without me knowing. I cannot do [anything] to get the land back, the corruption is there and bribing is there.” [LH18, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

3 When answering “other”, 60% of the youth who specified whom they would go to indicated they would go to SOS siblings (for FBC youth), Other categories were the bank for financial advice, church, mentor or religious leaders for emotional support. Two young people said they had no-one to go to (one FBC, one non-SOS)
Furthermore, the high turnover of caregivers (see section 5.8) and the absence of a father figure leads to low self-esteem (see section 5.9). As a result, young women are thought to be more vulnerable to early pregnancies, abusive relationships and being abandoned by their boyfriends. Likewise, young men are considered to lack a sense of power due to the absence of a father figure:

“Let me just give an example...when you have a father, they sometimes guide you on some things that you plan to do... for example, for boys, for my brothers, it is very important, because now when they are growing up, they have to have role model. There was that village father, but he was that far away, and right now when you see most of my brothers, they don’t have, can I say, power or something.” [LH26, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

Health workers considered this lack of power as partly due to “care-dependency”: because youth have become used to depending on the system, they are not used to roles of providing and come back calling for their mother, or are still waiting for attention and love from a father figure in an abusive relationship (also raised by female youth in a FGD). One caregiver furthermore signals that the “terms of conditions” of a care organisation by which youth are taken care of up to a certain point and then lost out of sight, does not prepare youth to a “inclusive life in the future” (i.e. being connected to the community). Or, as one young person concludes:

“The difference is that, when you are out, your mama will never let you sleep hungry. And your mama will never let you go outside without having a job...not like here, there is no one I can run to, your blood understands you.” [LH20, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

5.9 Identity formation
Throughout the interviews, issues of self-esteem came up regularly to be affecting young people from care. Low self-esteem was seen to affect social exclusion and self-exclusion, which was further reinforced when youth were affected by feeling uncared for by or unaccepted due to their care status and/or the socio-economic status of their biological relatives. Issues with identity furthermore influenced future relationships of young people.

Most caregivers recognise that young people from care, particularly in SOS FBC, have a low self-esteem and need reminders that they are important, regardless of where they are from. Young people indeed mentioned that they do not believe in themselves, or do not believe that they can achieve their ambitions because they lacked love, support, and self-confidence. As a consequence, some youth end up in a vicious cycle of feeling angry inside due to which their school performance drops and isolate themselves, which lowers their self-esteem even further. At the same time however, health care workers were unsure whether:

“They are having a high or low self-esteem. (...) There is an imbalance somewhere (...), they want to act as if they are having a high self-esteem when in the real sense they are trying to cover up something.” [I70, SOS health workers]

Family background can influence youth’s self-esteem in various ways. Several youth mention how the fact that they do not know where they come from makes them feel they do not have an identity as they miss their biological “roots”, as was highlighted before. This is in line with other findings that reveal that young people who live with their biological family have a sense of belonging that residential care children miss [60]. Missing their “roots”, furthermore complicates integration and
sense of identity when issues related to language and ethnicity arise, and some youth raise that this has cross-generational effects, also limiting the connectedness of their future children to their ethnic background:

“People in the community [start asking] you whether you have parents, brothers and sisters and when you start sharing about yourself people start wondering about your mixed background. [They ask:] ‘You mean you are a [ethnic group A], your father is a [ethnic group B], your mother is a [ethnic group C], your brothers are [ethnic group D]?’ It makes people wonder how your father has a ‘mpango wa kando’ (meaning side dish or having many other relationships with women other than your mother) [FGD2, young woman, SOS FBC, FGD]

“Like at work, my surname is [name of ethnic group], so whenever I meet people at work from this tribe, they want to ask the questions like- you are from this tribe - from which part of Kenya? I tell them I am not a [name of ethnic group], I don’t have any links with [name of ethnic group]... so for them they don’t understand how I was brought up, the set-up of institution did not cater for my background or the tribe factor did not really matter. So I think that is another form of exclusion that is really there... like in the future, when you get kids, and I don’t have those roots, there will be some gaps, there will be something that they will be lacking.” [FGD1, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC, FGD]

Particularly their sense of being unloved by their biological family affects their self-esteem, and they hold the view that community kids can more easily concentrate because they are loved by their parents while “as much as SOS mother tries, she is just human” [LH23, young woman, care-leaver, SOS FBC]. Some mention they are determined to find their biological relatives regardless of how well they are doing – again illustrating how important it is to young people in Kenya that they have achieved something that pleases their family members. Knowing and accepting where you come from for some youth makes them feel more accepted in society and dedicated to work hard, whereas for others it leads to self-pity:

“[I felt uncared for by my family] but in the back of my mind I knew where I came from and that I was supported. I knew the most important thing I needed was school fees and that is all I needed” [LH11, young man, SOS FSP]

“Actually, when I finished my primary school, I demanded to go to find out my story, my background. So, that thing really changed me. We went back to [where I come from]... I think something clicked in me, so I thought, O.. you are on your own, so you need to push yourself, you need to work hard. It changed my perspective, my performance went up. In high school I performed well.” [LH14, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

“Accepting my social background made me feel accepted in the society” [S36, young man, non-SOS]

“Sometimes my background makes me pity myself because my family is unsuccessful” [S41, young woman, SOS FBC]

Nevertheless, care-background and particularly lack of self-esteem impacted on the future relationships of some youth. Both young women and young men (as well as the SOS mothers and health care workers) reported that youth do not know what you are supposed to do as a man or
woman because of lack of father figure who can act as example. Young people overwhelmingly felt that there is no close relationship to the village director due to the high turnover in village directors as well as the fact that the director is supposed to be a father to 160+ children, which they deemed impossible.

What should be noticed however, is that while issues of self-esteem affected youth across the different care backgrounds, it seemed to be most detrimental to youth from SOS FBC. In fact, youth from SOS FSP and non-SOS care programmes reported that being in the care programme increased their self-confidence, because they could now more confidently participate in education and are closer to reaching their future ambitions.

5.10 Social exclusion & self-exclusion
Social exclusion and self-exclusion are revealed to be highly interlinked. Youth immediately linked social exclusion to excluding themselves and their own mindset (see also section 5.1 introduction). Caregivers also observe that young people’s low self-esteem may lead young people to “discriminate themselves” and to prefer to be alone instead of with their friends from the community (SOS Mothers). Youth indeed report to isolate themselves, choose to be introvert to avoid negative interactions with others, and generally do not feel part of society or do not feel to fit in due to their low self-esteem, feeling a lack of love, or being pessimistic about future opportunities (e.g. in employment or relationships).

Young peoples’ views on social exclusion and self-exclusion are particularly shaped in school and upon entering the labour market. In school, several youth recall how they have been gossiped about by other youth, called “orphan” derogatively in school by teachers, or how teachers have a prejudice that “orphans” are not disciplined or made lazy by their care organisation. In addition, youth from FBC care often reported low self-esteem, reinforcing the exclusion in their friendships and school and some young people would hide their status as being from a children’s village. Youth also raised that the school classification based on students’ performance and the negative treatment of their caregivers based on under average performance further aggravates low self-esteem and feelings of exclusion.

The competitive environment in the labour market with high unemployment rates creates a further reason for social exclusion and self-exclusion. As was discussed in the drivers of exclusion, being unemployment or being from a poor background classifies people as a second class citizen who needs to defend him/herself towards family members for “failing” and is not considered in policy priorities. Opportunities to employment were furthermore complicated for youth in residential care because they have no fall-back networks or opportunities to work in family businesses, as their friends who live with their family would have. This leads to feelings of hopelessness and self-exclusion.

5.11 Outcomes:

5.11.1 Human wellbeing
Young people across the different types of care are generally positive about their wellbeing in terms of their access to education and health care. Despite the forms of social exclusion they experience based on their care-background, gender, ethnicity or lack of ability to “identify with their roots”, young people seem to be happy with the material support they receive, which leads them to form
future aspirations. Indeed, almost all young people reported to have high ambitions in their personal life and career. Most professional ambitions relate to being in well-paying jobs to have a stable life, though some consider to be involved in charity work or politics to “help and create jobs for street children” [S55, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC]. Lack of finances/jobs, health problems and psychological problems were considered the greatest barriers to achieving these ambitions.

Young people are looking forward to their independent life after care, though it is overshadowed with a lot of fears about joblessness, poverty and isolation. Some young people save up money to bridge the period between disengagement and finding a job – viewing this negative time period in between as “history”:

“I had to live for 6 months on my savings until I got my first job. So then I got the job, and the rest is history.” [LH16, young man, care-leaver, SOS FBC]

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was young people having to adapt to lower level life standards once they are disengaged from care. This affects their self-esteem and general wellbeing, though as the above quote illustrated, was soon forgotten when “real life” started again as soon as they had found employment. The phase between transition to independence and entering the labour market in formal employment is thus seen as an in between period, a form of waithood until they were able to take control over their life and future ambitions again. This sense of having a say in one’s future and education/disengagement trajectories was crucial to young people, and especially early disengagement had tremendous impact on the sense of ownership young people have over their lives and future wellbeing.

5.11.2 Employability

In a labour market where youth unemployment is 24% [41], and the gap between youth and adult employment rates reached 43 percentage points in 2012 favouring adults [53], young people from care seem even more disadvantaged to find decent employment. Their biggest limitation to finding employment is the lack of family networks and connections are often needed to start in the labour market. Particularly young women with a small network may be vulnerable to engaging in transactional sex:

“The jobs that are found are given to rich people’s children or those people who are well known. So those who are not well connected remain without an opportunity.” [LH9, young man, SOS FSP]

“In terms of employment as much as the opportunities are there, it doesn’t favour the youth. Because for the youth to get employment they have to give something in return. And you go out there looking for employment. If it is a grown up you find that he or she will be asked for a bribe but if you are a youth that person knows you cannot get that money so he may ask you for sex for him to give you employment.” [FGD5, young woman, FSP, FGD]

While from the data in this study it cannot be concluded if young women from care are at higher risk than non-care youth for transactional sex or early pregnancy, care-background amongst others thus seems a factor increasing vulnerabilities to unemployment, transactional sex and other inequalities.

Young women in general indeed have more difficulty finding jobs than young men; according to the ILO (2013) [53], 29.5% of young women are employed compared to 36% of young men. Gender
division in labour is also visible in the education sector, a government representative stated that “Girls they do the softer courses, dress making, tailoring, baking, but for the boys they seem to be strong enough to be mechanics and masons” [174, local government representative]. This notion that young men are “strong enough” and young women are more drawn to softer labour sectors, divides the workforce along gender lines, by which for many young women it is harder to feel equally part of society.

The high unemployment rates among young people lead to frustrations and disappointments. One young person for instance highlighted that older people generally do not retire while:

“They cannot even use a computer or laptop and are not digitized. Yet when a young person comes, he will be told that he is not experienced because of the age.” [FGD3, young man, SOS FBC, FGD]

The ILO (2013) confirms the finding that young people in general are dissatisfied, highlighting that next to the unavailability of jobs, young people are also dissatisfied with the lack of Government effort to increase the availability of quality jobs, more than youth in neighbouring African countries [53, p. 80]. One government representative suggests that young people should make use of the different funds the government is giving to young people to encourage entrepreneurship – the Government of Kenya has initiated several funds and increased accessibility to loans to facilitate start-ups by youth. However, as one stakeholder analyses:

“Entrepreneurship is that you are setting aside some resources and you are trying everything to make some profit. The fact is that the big companies are growing and they would like people to supply. So leaders push people into entrepreneurship because there is no alternative and there are no jobs. Most people in business are in the business of transport [such as] matatu(minibus) and bodaboda (motorcycle) (private forms of public transport by which people pay for transport in a matatu or on the back of a bodaboda), retail and they are not selling and repair of motorcycle and motor vehicle. In this business the profit margin is very thin and no one goes to school to come and ride these motorbikes.” [I69, youth employment expert]

29.5% of youth said they thought there are no adequate opportunities for young people to obtain decent/meaningful employment. All FSP and non-SOS youth felt being from care is an advantage in finding employment, and 42.3% of SOS FBC young people felt it is an advantage (11.5% thought they are disadvantaged, and 46.2% thought it makes no difference).

Furthermore, this stakeholder expresses concerns that loans often result into high debts. There is thus a need for refined policies to regulate this, as well as increase social protection efforts. The current lack of attention to job creation and inclusive labour markets for young people, lead to social exclusion and political dissatisfaction, disproportionately affecting vulnerable young people when they cannot benefit from family networks to link them to the labour market. At the same time however, youth from care felt their care background may serve as an advantage due to the better education qualifications and in some cases, strategically making use of “pity” of employers.
Caregivers observed that young people sometimes express feelings of entitlemets to care and that youth are being raised as a “policy child”; because of the several child protection policies and village policies in place, there remains little room for ‘real parenting’ and SOS children get used and feel entitled to luxurious life standards. Caregivers furthermore see the care they provide as a form of “upgrading” children but view these children as living an “artificial” form of life.

As much as this issue of entitlement perhaps reflects the mindset and experiences of some youth who have been brought up in SOS, it may as well reflect a perception of caregivers about the position of youth in the village. The fact that youth from care are labelled as “privileged” and their lives as “artificial” risks to delegitimise young peoples’ challenging experiences as a youth from care, and reinforces feelings of exclusion by de-normalising their upbringing and position in society.
teachers who perceive students from care as being made lazy by their care organisation, caregivers who repeatedly remind their youth of the privilege they receive in the care organisation and threaten to send them “outside” where they will learn hard life lessons, and sometimes even care-leavers themselves who are envious of the community children performing better in school than children from care, despite the fact that they do not have to worry about school fees. Issues related to identity formation, connectedness and belonging seem to be downplayed in such an understanding of privilege. However, the emotional turbulence and lack of after-care protection and possibilities experienced by young people reveal the importance of a more integrated approach to understanding and raising young people from care to be socially accepted citizens.
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 Kenya affected by social exclusion in terms of their human wellbeing, employability and social acceptance?

Generally, young people from care are highly aware of factors driving their vulnerability and feel “pitied” due to their care status – it was the most important factor leading to social exclusion, followed by gender, age, and ethnicity. Another striking finding is the extent to which young people feel excluded from participation and representation in politics, which they deem “tribal” and “corrupt”. The hierarchical nature of Kenyan society affects the ways in which young people can pursue their ambitions, particularly in the labour market, where the lack of a social and familial fall-back mechanisms severely limits young peoples’ chances to meaningful employment and social acceptance.

Transitions throughout the care system, particularly for SOS FBC youth, caused disconnections to their caregivers and siblings, and the risk of early disengagement was a severe stressor that affected the general wellbeing of youth. Young people who had experienced several caregivers (SOS mothers) were particularly affected by these changes and impacted negatively on their identity formation and connectedness. After leaving care, young people felt particularly pressured to be “successful” to receive appreciation from their former caregivers, as well as to meet their home community expectations to support them. For young men in particular, not being successful (i.e. self-reliant) once independent affected their sense of ability to provide and could lead to insecurities. Young women who did not yet achieve to be self-reliant on the other hand felt a burden to their families and raised to be vulnerable to teenage pregnancy or abusive relationships.

Because of their sense of vulnerability, young people feel a need of practical and socio-emotional support in their development to young independent adults. They see the care they are receiving as a stepping stone to a positive future, yet need tangible support for such a “breakthrough”, particularly by being linked to employment programmes and building up social networks. They furthermore feel their talents and ambitions need to be nurtured to develop a self-identity and face the transition to independent life more confidently. An important aspect of this is that youth want the opportunity to determine their own educational career choice, with sensitive and genuine support from care staff. Some young people experience a lack of space to express their wishes and concerns, which negatively affects the connectedness in care, self-confidence and their perceptions of their future. For FSP youth and youth from the other care organisation, their main concern was to be able to continue their education after the support to their family stops.

Education is seen by young people and stakeholders as an important opportunity to positively nurturing identity formation and professional skill sets. Young people from care view that their access to education as supported by their care organisations is a positive opportunity. However, issues such as early demarcation, discrimination, and irrelevance of the education system to young people, have a negative effect on vulnerable young peoples’ abilities to move upwards through the system and pursue their ambitions. This is further affected by high youth unemployment rates and a
competitive system where (family) networks are needed to move up the social ladder. Many young people feel their care organisations should play a role in connecting them to possible employers or important individuals in the community, since they often lack (family) networks.

Finally, discrepancies are revealed between views of stakeholders who see youth from care organisations as privileged and overprotected, whereas young people clearly articulate multiple vulnerabilities related to their care-background and other social categories. This disconnect and vulnerability is further aggravated when caregivers aim to prepare youth for the dangers of the “outside world” by emphasising their privilege and conditional protection in the care organisation.

6.2 Reflections & study limitations
There are a number of reflections and study limitations that should be considered in this research:

- Due to the sensitivity of the issue, the surveys in this research did not request young people to reveal their ethnic backgrounds. Throughout the research, it became apparent that ethnic backgrounds play large roles as drivers and experiences of exclusion. However, due to the absence of this background information, no quantitative conclusions can be drawn related to the ethnic backgrounds of young people.
- While researchers clearly stated that the research was independent from SOS, young people were to a large extent selected and approached by SOS staff. This may have led to a bias in information – some young people being more negative about their experience with their care organisation because they see an opportunity to change certain issues, some more positive because they did not want to disregard the care they have received.
- It was difficult to reach and plan appointments with youth of the other care organisation involved in this study, due to the traveling distance as well as the schedules and availability of the youth. This meant that in some cases, youth from this care organisation had to complete the surveys themselves whereas in other occasions the survey was completed in a one-on-one session with a researcher. Two researchers were present for questions and clarifications when a number of youth completed their surveys themselves, but nevertheless some bias or misunderstanding may have occurred.
- Because of the above challenge, combined with similar issues in reaching youth from SOS FSP, young people from SOS FBC are an overrepresented group in this study.
- This research has engaged with vulnerable young people who were sometimes under the age of 18. Because of this, great care and consideration was given to possible ethical issues arising. Young people were always made aware of their rights to stop or discontinue an activity or to refrain from answering certain questions if they felt uncomfortable. Their anonymity was guaranteed and the details of a trust person in case of concerns was communicated to the young people who participated in the research.
- Finally, the research was conducted in a specific part of Kenya, and thus the findings cannot be considered representative of the country as a whole.
6.3 Recommendations for care organisations programming and practice in Kenya

- Care organisations and staff should be aware of the multiple vulnerabilities that youth experience, and proactively cater for positive identify formation, nurturing of talent, ambitions and self-confidence. In part, this means facilitating connection to the “roots” of young people, in terms of their linguistic, ethnic and family background.
- There should be as much consistency in care as possible; children and young people should not have different caregivers as this causes disconnection.
- Young people should be more actively involved in decisions that affect their lives and futures, particularly on their educational career path and transitions. Staff who currently make such decisions need to have better communication with children and young people, where the views and ambitions of young people are nurtured.
- Young people feel unsafe and disconnected by threats of early disengagement. Care organisations should support young people in case of difficulties rather than expose them to increased vulnerabilities by early disengagement.
- Youth see life after care as life in the “outside” world. This shows that young people need better connection and integration with the community surrounding the care organisation during their time in care. This will ensure youth are less fearful of the transition to independence and will make integration into the community for care-leavers easier. It should also breakdown the preconceptions and relational images that society hold on young people from care, thus reducing the discrimination and exclusion of youth from care.
- Young people need to be better prepared emotionally and practically for life after care, as well as the point above this should include:
  - Practical advice on and help with issues such as finding accommodation, employment, and engaging in politics.
  - Familiarising youth with what life after care will entail, for example by involving care-leavers (“successful” and “struggling”) as mentors.
  - Care organisations communicating sensitively with young people to understand what practical and emotional preparations youth feel they need, and delivering on these in a youth-centred tailor-made way.
- Young people should be positively encouraged and assisted with regards to finding stable employment suitable to their interests and qualifications for instance through apprenticeships, with a focus on their future aspirations and ways to reach there.
- Young people need continuing support when they leave care, by proactive follow up from their SOS mother, caregiver, and local government, and need (to know there is) someone they can turn to during difficult periods.
6.4 National level policy and advocacy on vulnerable youth in and from care

- More data are needed about the wellbeing of children and youth in care and care-leavers.
- Government needs to recognise and prioritise strategies to include vulnerable youth, including youth from care, in policies addressing youth employment, education rights, and (political) participation initiatives.
- Local governments need to receive adequate funding to ensure they have the capacity to protect, monitor, and support vulnerable youth. Support mechanisms should be developed for young people transitioning to independence, particularly in accessing meaningful employment or follow-up support after disengagement when young people face challenges.
- Equal opportunities for (vulnerable) young people to stable and meaningful employment need to be created and protected. Current policy attention to encouraging entrepreneurship places the onus of responsibility to succeed at young people themselves, which disregards their rights to stable and meaningful employment. This furthermore excludes them from the labour market which leads to low self-esteem, self-exclusion, and risks youth being idle or engaging in crime.
- The education sector should develop a relevant curriculum that inspires young people to develop their talents and ambitions, adequately prepares them for the labour market, and avoids early demarcations that reinforce existing hierarchies in society and limits equal opportunities for vulnerable young people.
Literature list


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


