

PRESS RELEASE

“Every child has the right to...” A reality check for young carers

Today the international community celebrates the **29th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**. States have committed to do everything in their power to protect and promote children’s rights to survive and thrive, to learn and grow, to make their voices heard and to reach their full potential. Yet, the vision of **the Convention is not a reality for all children**.

Young carers - people under the age of 18 who provide care to a family member or a friend, who has a chronic illness, disability, frailty or addiction - are still **too often unable to fully enjoy the rights they should be entitled to**.

What the Convention says:

Every child has the **right to rest and leisure**, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
(Article 31)

REALITY

The time constraints and duties that young carers carry can make play and recreation almost impossible for them. Unable to meet up with friends regularly, they can feel **isolated**. Young carers can also become victims of **social stigma and bullying**, with the result of a higher life course of **social exclusion**.

What young carers say:

*Do you feel like a child? “Not really.”
What do you feel like? “An adult”*

“They don’t know how to react, so they just act mean.”

“I get really tired and sometimes I feel really down. I do like being a carer, but I want to be able to do things for me too”.

What the Convention says:

Every child has the **right to education**. (Article 28)

The education of the child shall be directed to the **development of the child's** personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. (Article 29)

REALITY

Caring activities can prevent young carers from working productively at schools, maintaining a regular frequency of classes, reaching learning goals, finalising compulsory education or accessing and succeeding in higher education.

A report by the Audit Commission in the UK found that the likelihood of young adult carers being NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) for six months or more was twice that of their peers (Audit commission, 2010).

Source: Carers Trust.

What young carers say:

"I sometimes feel selfish for having aspirations but I know that in the end I'll be doing a good thing, it's just a battle to even be able to get to that point and know that while there (at college) my mother is safe."

"Many people are denied the future they could have and deserve because they need to provide and help their families now. Many have to look in the present tense only and what will help them get by, even though by going into higher education they will help themselves and their family in the long run."

"I am a carer with a degree. That means that I am seen as a success story. It shouldn't be that way. Firstly, because everyone has the right to the education they want. Secondly, because my time at school and university was a constant struggle –it is only looking back that I would describe it as successful."

"It is sometimes hard being a young carer especially when school is involved. I sometimes find it hard that teachers do not understand what I am going through. In fact one teacher said that "I was just another troubled child". I did not choose to be a young carer but I am proud of the difference I have made to my family and I am not a troubled child...But they just don't understand that, they don't understand. What young carers desperately need is peer support, not peer pressure"

"Although I was passionate about science, when I found out that these degrees required doing a lot of hours in classes, I decided to do English literature, because I could spend more time at home. I also chose to attend the university in my home town."

"School was a challenge; I'd often have done a shift before getting there, exhausted. Homework time was difficult, finding time for anything for me was impossible."

What the Convention says:

Every child has the **right to an adequate standard of living** for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. *(Article 27)*

REALITY

Young carers are often living in low-income households, many in lone parent families where sickness or disability reduces the family income, and therefore the standard of living for all family members.

What young carers say:

"I would like to know how to manage bills, how far to stretch money, how to make your money last, how to help family members with money."

"I have to help pay bills and I manage by not asking for money for anything for me."

"Finances and debt worries me because you can get thrown out of your house if you don't pay."

What the Convention says:

Every child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the **right to express those views** freely in all matters affecting the child. *(Article 12)*

REALITY

Young carers are rarely allowed to participate in decisions which affect their lives.

What young carers say:

"I hope that people do not only ask questions, but also take action based on the answers received from young carers."

What the Convention says:

Every child has the right to the enjoyment of the **highest attainable standard of health**. (Article 24)

REALITY

Young carers can suffer ill health as a result of their caring role. Coming to terms with caring responsibilities while navigating growing up and the challenges that life throws at them can be overwhelming. The pressure associated with caring can be considered as a risk factor for mental ill-health.

“Being an adolescent young carers is recognised as a risk factor for mental health and well-being, with around 50% experiencing care-related stress and 40% mental health problems.”

Source: *Carers Trust, 2016.*

What young carers say:

“Coping is difficult, but I feel proud”

“There needs to be more support so we can better ourselves and not be constantly worrying about the person we care for because it can take over and be detrimental to our health and wellbeing alongside our aspirations.”

“Often I am up the night because my mum is upset and screaming and shouting so I need to calm her down. The lack of sleep along with financial and schooling worries and the fact that teachers aren’t very understanding amounts to a lot of stress that has often made me quite ill and suffer from migraines, which a lot of people do not understand and think it’s just a headache. This has been incredibly difficult in my situation, as it has just meant things got even harder for me at home – because being ill has meant I have gotten further behind with the housework and schoolwork which just turned into a vicious cycle.”

It is evident that young carers are a particularly vulnerable group of children. For them to benefit from **equal opportunities to realise their full potential, extra, tailored support** has to be put in place. The lack of positive actions from States to support young carers can be considered as a failure to protect and promote their rights.

“We ignore young carers at our peril and at the peril of these children’s futures.”

Prof Saul Becker, University of Sussex

The need to take action is increasingly recognized at international and European level. The **European Network of Ombudspersons for Children** - in their recent [statement on child mental health](#) - has stressed the importance of support programmes to better

enhance and protect the mental health of young carers. The European Parliament, in the [Report on Care services in the EU for improved gender equality](#) – recently adopted by the FEMM Committee- calls on the Commission and the Member States to undertake research on the numbers of young carers, on the impact of this role on their well-being and livelihoods and, on the basis of this research, to provide support and address the specific needs of young carers.

Eurocarers believes that everybody should have the right to choose whether or not to be a carer. Young carers often have to resolve a particularly acute tension between their right to self-determination and their roles and responsibilities in their family. Hence, for those young carers who are involved in informal care, it is important to ensure that no inappropriate or excessive caring takes place and that their caring role does not prevent them from enjoying their rights as children. By advocating for policies and practices across Europe that recognise and support young carers, we want to ensure that young carers can move from a situation of vulnerability to one of growth, where they can flourish as human beings.

To this aim, we are involved in two research projects, [Edy-Care](#) and [Me-We](#), respectively aimed at creating supportive school environments and at increasing young carers' mental health. We have also established a Eurocarers Young Carers Working Group, a platform bringing together young carers from different European countries. This ensures that our advocacy messaging is in line with young carers' needs and expectations.

If you believe that all children should have equal opportunities to enjoy their rights, help us increase awareness about this invisible group. Whether you are a policymaker, a journalist, a professional from education, health, social field, your active involvement can make the difference! Share this news, [follow our activities](#), read [our recommendations](#), contact us.

The life chances of thousands of children across Europe are at stake. There is no time to lose.

Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. [...] To him we cannot say 'tomorrow', his name is 'today'.

Gabriela Mistral

END OF PRESS RELEASE

For more information, please contact

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More details on Eurocarers activities on young carers are available [here](#).

To access recommendations, broken down by category of stakeholders, read the [Eurocarers Policy Briefing on young carers](#).

More on the [Me-We Project](#).
More on the [Edy-Care project](#).

EUROCARERS is the European network representing informal carers and their organisations, irrespective of the particular age or health need of the person they are caring for.



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