

The Transition to Adulthood in France for vulnerable Children under Social Care

Legal Framework, Tools and Persistent Gaps

over 220,000 children in Custody : a system under pressure

- At end 2024, 405,500 minors and young adults under 21 benefit from ASE measures in France (+1.6% in one year).
- Of these, 224,700 (55%) are in residential care: foster families or children's homes.
- 40% are placed in approved institutions (the most common form since 2022); 35% with foster carers (down from 56% in 2006); 25% in other settings (autonomous housing, home placement, etc.).
- Around 67,000 young people aged 16-17 are approaching the age threshold each year, either in residential care or under educational support measures.
- In 2023, *départements* spent €11 billion on child protection, 80% on care measures. Total ASE expenditure has increased 2.6-fold in current euros since 1998.



a legal framework fundamentally reformed since 2022

- Before 2022: support for care leavers after 18 was largely discretionary, left to each local authority, or *département's* judgement. Up to 64% of eligible young people received no support at all (DGCS, 2020).
- **The landmark law of 7 February 2022: the rule is now that young adults aged 18 to 21 who were in ASE care before their majority continue, as of right, to be supported, provided they do not have sufficient resources or family support.**
- The stated ambition: to **put an end to 'dry exits'** (*sorties sèches*), abrupt departures with no follow-up plan, by strengthening pathways into mainstream services across health, training, employment and housing.
- The *Conseil d'État* (Supreme Administrative Court) has confirmed this obligation on several occasions (2022–2025): **the right to continued support constitutes a fundamental freedom** that *départements* cannot override.

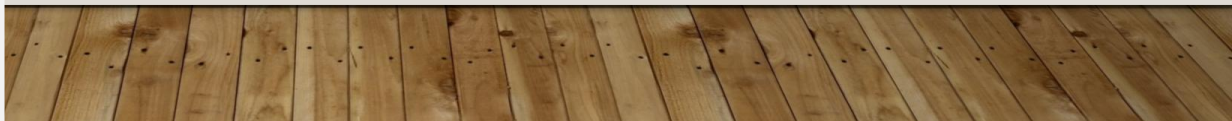
a cascade of tools, on paper...

- **Pre-majority interview (age 17)** : introduced by the 2016 law: a review of the young person's trajectory, information on their rights, and a formal **projet d'accès à l'autonomie (autonomy access plan)**.
- **The “Young Adult Contract”** (*contrat jeune majeur*): a bridge between child protection and socio-professional integration. It must cover financial resources, housing, training/employment, healthcare, administrative support and socio-educational accompaniment.
- **Post-exit interview and right of return**: a mandatory follow-up interview 6 months after exit from ASE; a 'right of return' guaranteed until age 21 for those who left voluntarily or no longer met the criteria.
- **Departmental Commission on Autonomy Access** (created by the decree of 5 August 2022): coordinates all local actors (child protection, employment, housing, health, education) for young people aged 16 to 21.
- **Contrat d'Engagement Jeune** (Youth Commitment Contract, March 2022): an intensive mainstream employment support scheme also open to care leavers.



ambitious law, uneven imple- mentation

- The 2022 law was assessed as "***insufficiently effective***" as soon as June 2023 by the National Youth Council (COJ), despite the goodwill of many actors.
- **The pre-majority interview at age 17 is not yet implemented** by all *départements*, nor for all eligible young people. The post-exit interview presents operational difficulties and was in practice not implemented in any of the four *départements* inspected by the State mission (IGAS, 2025).
- **Short, renewable contracts:** the typical contrat jeune majeur lasts only 3–6 months, with uncertain renewal, generating chronic instability for the most vulnerable young adults.
- **Severe territorial inequality:** access to support varies enormously from one *département* to another — a structural consequence of decentralisation without equalisation mechanisms.
- A quarter of **homeless people** under 25 have been in foster or residential care (CESE, 2018), the most dramatic indicator of what happens when transition fails.



specific vulnerabilities: MNA, disability and higher education

- **Unaccompanied minors (MNA):** between 27% and 38% of young people turning 18 in 2024 in the inspected départements were formerly MNA. Their transition is compounded by irregular residence status: a *contrat jeune majeur* has been used as a factor in assessing integration for residence permit renewal.
- **Young people with disabilities:** the *Défenseure des droits* specifically calls for better collaboration tools between child protection and the adult disability sector to ease transitions. Currently, young people can fall between two systems with no continuity.
- **Higher education:** the current cut-off at 21 is particularly penalising for care leavers in studies. In France, the average age of first stable employment is around 27. A parliamentary bill currently under discussion would extend support up to age 25.
- **Mentorship and parenting:** the law introduced mentoring and peer support (*parrainage*) for children entering secondary school. From 2024 decrees, these are formally included in the *projet pour l'enfant*, a building block of relational continuity beyond the institutional transition.

towards a more coherent transition: what needs to happen

- **Systematise the age-17 interview** in every département and for every eligible young person, currently a legal obligation, but far from universal practice.
- **Lengthen and stabilise contracts:** move away from successive 3-6 month contracts towards multi-year personalised plans, as the parliamentary bill currently proposes (support up to 25).
- **Build genuine interoperability** between ASE, local employment missions (*Missions locales*), France Travail, social housing and health services. The ECG–Youth Guarantee Linkage Toolkit proposed in COM(2026) 539 directly addresses this gap.
- **Create equalisation mechanisms:** the current system produces radically different outcomes depending on the département of placement. A national baseline standard backed by State funding is needed.

The European Child Guarantee Card pilot could play a structural role: a single access point to all entitlements would reduce non-take-up and administrative fragmentation at the very moment young people are most alone.

merci

for your attention!

Direction générale de la Cohésion sociale — National Coordinator, European Child Guarantee — 2026

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