

# Research in Brief



Issue No 2026-02  
Publication Date April 6 2026  
ISSN 2092-7117

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## Adapting Supported Housing-Based Out-of-Home Care: Issues and Strategies<sup>1)</sup>

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In this article, I present supported housing-based care as a new option for providing both protection and independent-living support in an integrated manner for children and adolescents requiring out-of-home care (OOHC), an alternative that remedies the limitations of facility-based care. Moving in this direction requires, first and foremost, establishing age criteria, which, together with the readiness for independence, should guide the design of a phase-specific entry scheme. As the intended beneficiaries are “children,” not adults, a clear legal basis should be established so that they are effectively protected and their rights are fully guaranteed under supported-housing OOHC (SH-OOHC). This includes provisions explicitly recognizing the child’s right to “reside” and designating national and local governments as the responsible bodies. Furthermore, relevant regulations should be amended to ensure a stable supply of housing. SH-OOHC should be delivered through integrated case management, enabling youth to continue living and developing within the community.

### Introduction: the need for SH-OOHC

Most children and adolescents who require OOHC are placed with residential childcare facilities, group homes, or foster families. Those in OOHC remain in placement for an average of 12 years. As

1) This article is an English translation of Issue and Focus No. 461, originally published in Korean in February 2026. The original article, based on *Policy Research on Supportive Housing-Based Protection and Self-Reliance Support for At-Risk Children and Youth in Service Blind Spots* (2025: KIHASA) by Sang Jung Lee et al, is available at [file:///C:/Users/KIHASA/Downloads/%EC%9D%B4%EC%8A%88%EC%95%A4%ED%8F%AC%EC%BB%A4%EC%8A%A4%20%EC%A0%9C461%ED%98%B8\(2026-02\)%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/KIHASA/Downloads/%EC%9D%B4%EC%8A%88%EC%95%A4%ED%8F%AC%EC%BB%A4%EC%8A%A4%20%EC%A0%9C461%ED%98%B8(2026-02)%20(1).pdf)

Article 52 of the Child Welfare Act stipulates, residential childcare facilities and group homes, while operating under different regulatory standards, are intended to accommodate children requiring OOHC and provide them with nurturing care, vocational training, and support for independent living. A foster placement, on the other hand, is a temporary arrangement where a child is placed in a home that meets the approval requirements as set out in Article 3 of the Child Welfare Act.

Whereas current global norms prioritize kinship or community-based care for children and adolescents in OOHC, in line with the “best interests of the child” principle and as reflected in a 2009 United Nations resolution calling for the development of deinstitutionalized alternatives to “large residential care facilities (institutions),” Korea’s OOHC remains heavily facility-based. Despite all the policy efforts put into rearranging the roles of residential care settings and advancing foster-family care, 48 percent of children newly identified as in need of OOHC are placed in facilities. As of December 2023, there were a total of 11,569 children or adolescents living on a long-term basis in residential childcare facilities or group homes.

Not only is facility-based OOHC associated with concerns about children’s human rights, but it also creates gaps in protection. Commonly cited disadvantages include restrictions on children’s rights to privacy and self-determination; limited opportunities for real-life experiences necessary for independent living; and institutional rules that separate children by age and sex and make it difficult for opposite-sex siblings to live together within the same facility. These conditions can lead to maladjustment and placement instability.

Moreover, children who are forcibly returned to their families may be excluded from further protection and support, and those transferred by court disposition to a different placement may be denied readmission to their original facility. Focused primarily on protection, OOHC services as they stand often fail to meet children’s broader needs. This is particularly true for those entering OOHC in their late teens, for whom, despite nearing the age of 18 and needing to prepare immediately for the transition to independent living, it is difficult to receive sufficient support tailored to their individual needs, as they must reside along with other children of a much wider age range.

Supported housing, in a broad sense, combines public rental housing with services such as healthcare, caregiving, and housing-stability assistance, with the aim of promoting independence and community integration among vulnerable groups. Operating in line with the principles of community- and family-based care, SH-OOHC can provide protection and support for children and adolescents, with fewer instances of exclusion. This approach may be particularly beneficial for late-teen adolescents, whose primary needs relate to protection and preparation for independent living.

The proposed model lies between transitional housing such as group homes, where privacy and self-determination are restricted to an extent, and which are characterized by short-term residence, small-group living, and tenancy held by a support agency—on the one hand, and on the other, assisted-housing arrangements, which—perhaps more closely aligned with the model—offer permanent residence, private occupancy, direct tenancy by occupants, and full privacy and self-determination (Seo, 2020).

**[Table 1] Protective facilities and supported housing for at-risk children and adolescents**

	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Transitional housing</b>	<b>Supported housing</b>
<b>Type</b>	Group-living facilities	Temporary housing	Permanent housing (with some units provided as transitional housing arrangements)
<b>Characteristics</b>	Large-scale communal living	Small-group communal living with services	Private occupancy with services
<b>Housing contract</b>	The program agency secures and manages the facility	Lease contract between the program agency and the housing provider	Direct lease contract between occupant and housing provider
<b>Level of privacy</b>	Private occupancy (X), Self-determined choice (X)	Private occupancy (X, △), Self-determined choice (△)	Private living (O), Self-determined choice (O)

Source: Sang Jung Lee et al. *Policy Research on Supportive Housing-Based Protection and Self-Reliance Support for At-Risk Children and Youth in Service Blind Spots* (2025). p. 66. KIHASA

Supported housing has increasingly been implemented in Korea as a policy measure targeting vulnerable adults aged 19 and older—such as homeless people, older adults, and disabled persons—thus far leaving children below 18 years of age out of consideration. Supported housing services target individuals who have difficulty performing daily life activities, with the aim of helping them achieve independence and integrate into the community. In Gyeonggi Province, supported housing has been introduced for people sleeping rough, whereas in Seoul it has been implemented for older adults and persons with disabilities.

Outside Korea, supported housing has been extended to include children and adolescents, providing support services for independent living to those requiring OOHC during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Examples include Semi-independent Living in the United Kingdom and Subsidized Independent Living in the United States.

There is a need to consider introducing SH-OOHC services in order to promote a shift from facility-centered protection and support systems for at-risk children and adolescents to community-based care, and to address gaps in OOHC services.

## Adapting SH-OOHC: issues and strategies

In this article, I propose introducing a supported-housing approach as an alternative to facility-based OOHC and discuss the steps required for its implementation. First and foremost, it is necessary to establish clear eligibility criteria and, based on these, design a phased entry scheme that reflects each child’s age and readiness for independence.

A clear threshold is needed to determine the age at which a child should be considered capable of making decisions as to whether to use supported-housing services and, if so, in what form. In light of the Child Welfare Act, which requires independent-living support plans to be established for children in OOHC aged 15 or older, as well as related subordinate regulations that provide separate support measures for care leavers in this age group, it may be appropriate to adopt 15 as the relevant age requirement.

In both the UK and the US, supported housing is defined not only as part of welfare services but also as a “transitional space”, with clearly specified age requirements for entry. In England, Supported Accommodation targets children aged 16 and 17, as stipulated in the Supported Accommodation Regulations 2023. This is because age 16 is regarded in law as the point at which a child in care is no longer “looked after” but instead “receives support.” In the US, supported-housing measures such as the Transitional Living Program and Chafee Foster Care Program serve youth aged 16 to 22. Adolescents aged 18 or younger may enter “protective occupancy” under the supervision of the responsible organization.

**[Table 2] Age and legal criteria for different types of OOHC in the UK**

Types	Key legal framework	Age range	Level of protection
<b>Children’s Home</b>	Children’s Homes Regulations 2015	Ages 0-15 (or 16-17 if care is needed)	Care-focused, 24-hour supervision
<b>Supported Accommodation (SILA)</b>	Supported Accommodation Regulations 2023	Ages 16-17	Support-focused, training in preparation for independent living
<b>Care Leavers’ Housing</b>	Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000	Ages 18-25	Aftercare-focused, partial support

Source: Sang Jung Lee et al. *Policy Research on Supportive Housing-Based Protection and Self-Reliance Support for At-Risk Children and Youth in Service Blind Spots* (2025). p. 84. KIHASA

Original source: “Children’s Homes (England) Regulations 2015 (United Kingdom), SI 2015/541”, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uk-si/2015/541/contents/> made: “Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 (United Kingdom), SI 2023/416”, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uk-si/2023/416/contents/made/>; “Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (United Kingdom), c. 35”, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35>

Conditioning eligibility solely on age risks excluding adolescents who, despite not meeting formal criteria, urgently need services. Care and support decisions should therefore be made more flexibly, based on individual circumstances and accounting for both age and readiness for self-reliance. Individuals’ needs should be assessed across multiple factors—including independent living skills, ability to manage financial affairs, social support networks, participation in education and training, and mental

health status—to determine the type of supported housing and the level of support services that best match them. In the UK, for example, children and adolescents requiring high-level support are placed in “core” or “clustered” housing with 24-hour on-site staff, whereas those with moderate needs are provided with shared housing, typically paired with one or two support visits per week. In addition, independent or host housing programs are available for adolescents who, in the period immediately before transitioning to independent living, require only low-level support.

**[Table 3] Levels of supported housing services for semi-independent living in the UK**

	Characteristics	Target group	Service details
<b>High Support Level 1</b>	High-intensity support for youth with adolescents and youth with complex needs or those at high risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High-risk individuals with experiences of running away from home, sleeping rough, and exposure to crime and violence</li> <li>Individuals with complex needs, such as those with mental health or substance use issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>24-hour on-site staff with immediate response capability</li> <li>Case-management services provided daily or at least 3 times per week</li> <li>Establishment of risk management plans and crisis intervention</li> <li>Intervention for mental health and addition issues</li> <li>Strengthened linkage to education and vocational training</li> </ul>
<b>Medium Support Level 2</b>	Adolescents and youth who are capable to an extent of independent living but who still require regular guidance and living skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capable of self-management but in need of ongoing support</li> <li>Able to maintain daily life with low-frequency interventions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular visits (once or twice a week) and case management services by a key worker</li> <li>Training in independent living skills such as budgeting and meal preparation</li> <li>Emergency contact in case of problems</li> <li>Support linked to education and work</li> </ul>
<b>Low Support Level 3</b>	Low-intensity support for relatively stable youth nearing full independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals with stable daily routines and self-management abilities</li> <li>Youth preparing to transition to independent living</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Off-site staff available for emergency contact</li> <li>Monthly visits or monitoring by phone calls</li> <li>Self-management based on floating support</li> <li>Final independence review before exit</li> </ul>

Source: Sang Jung Lee et al. *Policy Research on Supportive Housing-Based Protection and Self-Reliance Support for At-Risk Children and Youth in Service Blind Spots* (2025). p. 91. KIHASA

Original source: “Guide to the supported accommodation regulations including quality standards”, Department for Education, 2023a, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6514400088281e000db4e965/Guide\\_to\\_the\\_supported\\_accommodation\\_regulations\\_including\\_quality\\_standards.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6514400088281e000db4e965/Guide_to_the_supported_accommodation_regulations_including_quality_standards.pdf); “Providing supported accommodation for children and young people: Guidance”, Department for Education, 2023b, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/providing-supported-accommodation-for-children-and-young-people>; “Registration of supported accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds”, Ofsted, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/registration-of-supported-accommodation-for-16-and-17-year-olds>

Unlike adults, who have a legal right to enter into a housing contract, children require additional legal provisions to access protections and ensure their rights in SH-OOHC. While amending housing support laws can bring children into the scope of policy, this is insufficient on its own. To ensure that administrative measures—such as protective interventions, placement decisions, case management, and eviction protections—take full effect, it is necessary to explicitly codify “supported housing” within the Child Welfare Act, thereby establishing it as an official mechanism through which children in OOHC receive protection and care. Such amendments would lay a legal basis for local governments to intervene

to protect at-risk children and adolescents even without parental consent, allowing for protective actions in cases where a parent or guardian infringes on the child's welfare. Moreover, children or adolescents living as independent householders, separate from their parental homes, may have the burden of proof reduced for eligibility when applying for social allowances or housing support.

Legal foundations should further be established to ensure that those in OOHC have a continuum of living arrangements, and that protection measures are administered on a mandatory basis. Advancing this approach would require adding a provision to the Child Welfare Act that specifies the child's "right to reside" and obligates national and local governments to ensure such protection. The protective occupancy right in the UK and the US could serve as a reference or a model to emulate.

In the UK, minors may, pursuant to Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, claim a "right to be accommodated" by local authorities. England's Supported Accommodation Regulations 2023 also prohibit arbitrary eviction of children and require that, in instances of lawful eviction, prior notice is given and alternative accommodation provided.

In the US, under both the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and the Transitional Living Program guidelines, youth aged 16-22 "for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement" are entitled to housing services guaranteed by federal and state governments. In the US context, minors, in particular, as they are granted the right to "protective occupancy" under a tenancy agreement held in the name of the responsible organization, cannot be evicted arbitrarily unless they violate program rules or their placement term ends.

If supported-housing services are to function effectively as part of OOHC, local authorities should be able to secure, through a stable housing supply, sufficient resources to provide support as needs arise. This, in turn, would require amendments to housing supply regulations. First, "children" should be explicitly designated as a direct policy target group, in which case children in OOHC who are separated from their guardians would be recognized as housing-vulnerable.

Currently, while Article 3(2) of the Framework Act on Housing includes persons with disabilities, older persons, low-income households, newly married couples, young people, and "children requiring support" as groups eligible for housing assistance in such forms as priority allocation of rental housing and housing cost support, Article 3(7), in defining "housing-vulnerable groups," lists only persons with disabilities and older persons.

Consideration may be given to conducting a pilot program based on current administrative guidelines and regulations, with certain modifications. For example, a program would involve supplying OOHC housing by applying the special provisions for group homes (Section 4) and specialized purchase-rental housing (Article 38) under the Operational Guidelines for the Purchase and Lease of Existing Housing. Furthermore, since the Enforcement Rules of the Special Act on Public Housing permit the temporary use of public rental housing in cases of urgent need, additional legislation could be pursued under the Child Welfare Act to allow special use of public rental housing as a way to provide supported housing for OOHC. Another option is to make available *jeonse*-based rental housing or public rental housing, drawing on the Operational Guidelines for *Jeonse* Housing Support for Child-Headed Households, while waiving rent or interest on deposit loans.

The purpose of SH-OOHC is, in essence, to provide protection outside facility settings. It does not mean putting an end to existing modes of protection; rather it involves continuing support in community settings in ways that better promote independent living. Nor should this effort stop short at merely providing “space to reside in”; integrated, case management-based services must be delivered so that children and youth can maintain their lives and develop within the community.

Given that the Children Welfare Act grants mayors and heads of local governments the authority to decide on OOHC for at-risk children, these decisions, their implementation, and subsequent case management should be carried out in a sequence of consistent administrative actions to ensure that the supported housing approach is effective and that protection-related services and independent-living support are delivered as a continuous whole. If the public nature of the current OOHC system is any indication, an appropriate course of action would be for local governments’ child protection units to serve as the primary agents, taking direct responsibility for the entire process of supported housing-based care, including planning, case management, service coordination, monitoring, and support for the transition to independent living.

The proposed SH-OOHC system should adopt an integrated framework that focuses on “housing retention” and encompasses diverse dimensions, including daily living skills, education and employment, financial affairs, health, psychological and emotional support, community relationships, and rights advocacy. In detail, these components would include: on-the-ground assistance (such as housing search and move-in support, deposit and rent management, payment of utilities, facility maintenance and repairs, furnishing and household setup costs); life skills (cleaning, cooking, and time management); financial management skills and savings counseling; psychological stability support and health care; continuation of education and career exploration, and employment and job retention.

Because, as legal actors, minors by definition face constraints in making decisions in everyday contexts—housing, financial affairs, health care, education, etc.—it is important to listen to their views and provide them with information in a readily understandable way so that they can make their own choices. Such “decision support” does not mean that adults stand in for or replace minors, but rather should consist of a process through which children and adolescents become better informed and able to shape and express their own views. This course of action would require nurturing the capabilities of OOHC-dedicated officials and case managers to provide decision support and, if need be, making use of professional assistance.



## Concluding remarks

SH-OOHC should be considered not as an adjunct to compensate for limitations of the facility-based OOHC system, but as a policy alternative that ensures continuity of protection and independent-living support for children in their late adolescence. As this stage of life is characterized by a need as much for protection as for preparation for independent living, the supported-housing approach, which by design would provide residents, from the point of placement onward, with accommodation, independent-living support, and opportunities to make self-determined choices, could serve as a practical alternative that reduces structural protection gaps that occur with the existing facility-based system. This proposed shift should be pursued by institutionalizing supported housing for OOHC in the context of childcare policy rather than housing policy, adding a provision to the Child Welfare Act that specifies “supported housing,” thereby obligating public authorities to ensure stable occupancy, eviction control, and continued care and protection for those in OOHC.

SH-OOHC must uphold children’s right to self-determination as a core principle. While in facility-based care settings, self-determination and participation are both structurally constrained, the SH-OOHC model allows children and adolescents to make their own choices about spatial arrangements and service modes. For children aged 15 and older, in particular, who are considered capable of making their own decisions<sup>2)</sup>, it should be institutionally guaranteed that their views are heard regarding whether they wish to have a supported-housing arrangement, their preferred housing type, and the services they are to receive.

OOHC for children and adolescents in Korea is founded on not one but several different legal frameworks, with jurisdiction divided among the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, and the Ministry of Justice. Within this system, even children of similar ages and risk levels may, depending on the jurisdiction under which they fall, receive different levels of protection and experience varying continuity of support as they transition to independent living. Ensuring that all children and adolescents who require formal protection and assistance consistently receive adequate levels of supported-housing services would require the establishment of a unified legal framework, a cross-ministerial umbrella organization to oversee the whole process, and an integrated management system engaging local government child protection units.

2) Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has the same effect as domestic law, guarantees that a child capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express them freely in all matters affecting the child, and requires that due weight be given to those views in accordance with the child’s age and maturity. In addition, Article 4 of the Special Act on Domestic Adoption in Korea clearly stipulates that, when an adoption is carried out, the child’s opinion must be heard, taking into account the child’s age and level of maturity. Meanwhile, Article 62–3 of the Rules of Family Litigation (“Hearing the Opinions of Interested Parties”) explicitly provides that, if the person to become a full adoptee is 13 years of age or older, his or her opinion must be heard. This provision effectively recognizes age 13 as the point at which a child is considered capable of participating in decision-making. (Source: *Law Times*, retrieved February 10, 2026)

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