

## BERGEN SUMMER RESEARCH SCHOOL

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# THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

By

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**Aims and Objective:** The aim of this policy brief is to provide recommendations with regard to the reunification of children in foster care with their biological parents in Norway.

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## Introduction

Reunification of children in foster care with their parents is a contentious issue in many countries. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) found that Norway has violated Article 8 of the Convention (Gerds-Anderson, 2021). This policy document presents the right of children and parents to reunification and contact under the investigation of SOS children's villages (henceforth SOSCVI). Measures pertaining to contact and reunification of parents and children in the national context of Norway have recently been stated by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) as violations of the rights of children and parents in two ways. First, the contact between parents and children is meant to be the prime focus toward their reunification. Second, whereas several care programs and orders are assessed based on general assumptions and are long-term, the duration of the order appears unspecified by the court and in practice is perceived as ambiguous for

parents and children. This ambiguity may include both the placement and the time of the child's placement (for example, how early and for how long), which may accordingly lead to the unpredictability of relations and expectations. A research shows that the majority of the moved children to foster families are teenagers (+60%) and for children at the ages of 16/17 (the majority were between 12 and 15 at the time of their first placement). This research also reports that the children placed in foster care might experience children with different behavioral needs and expressions, and therefore the researchers wished that locations would be followed with potential re-locations. Moreover, the research explores that child care protection can be optimized through better bonds of relations between the caregiver and the child as well as involving the child in participating in their own cases (Angel & Blekesaune 2014).

## Analysis and Results

While the Norwegian state has good intentions for the welfare of children in foster care, there are controversies that need to

be addressed with urgency. More than 8000 of Norway's children are in foster care. Over 60% of these are adolescents between 16

and 17 years of age. According to the report on the regulation of family reunification by Grønningsæter (2017), infants and adolescents are less likely to be reunified with their parents - this calls for an intentional move by the government of Norway to ensure that there is a wholesome approach to child care in Norway. The benefits of foster care are clear for both parents and children. For parents, they are able to get support towards recovery while their children are in safe custody, and for children, they are able to exercise their rights for a safe growth environment.

However, foster care can be damaging to the psychology of the children, their biological parents, and their foster parents. The foster parents in Norway are challenged with lack of enough resources to support both the nutritional and safety needs of children (Melinder et al, 2021). The children have undergone psychological turner and abuse, they cannot be in the right state of mind to decide where they would

rather state. It has also been argued that the rights of biological parents who have lost custody of their children have been neglected by the Norwegian child protection service (CPS) with regard for the children's right. In Favor of the biological parents, it's possible that a parent who has lost custody of their child will recover, intentionally faster, because of the hope to have their children again some day. In line with this, the child has a right to identity, and according to Angel & Blekesaune (2014) one of the factors to be considered is their biological family relations. Reunification provides a grounding in identity for this child and reduces anxiety for both parents and children. They are more established in culture and identity. We strongly advocate for the right of children to have an identity with their Biological parents depending on a phased welfare system for parents as well as children.

## Implications and Recommendations



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