

A look behind the Scenes – Focused Perspectives on the Study

Background

»Care Leaver Statistics: Participation in the Life Course of Young Adults – A Long-Term Study« – **CLS** – is the largest nationwide panel study in Germany across all providers, focusing on young people who have spent (part of) their childhood and/or adolescence in foster families and residential child and youth care.

The **starting point** for the study was an **analysis of the current data** on the living situation of care leavers (Erzberger et al. 2019). Results:

- Care leavers remain underrepresented in general surveys
- In recent years, there have been more studies on »Leaving Care«, but most of them have involved only a small number of respondents
- To date, there has been no major study in Germany on the situation of care leavers, and there is relatively little international research on the subject
- The knowledge available so far points to structural disadvantages for care leavers



The Study

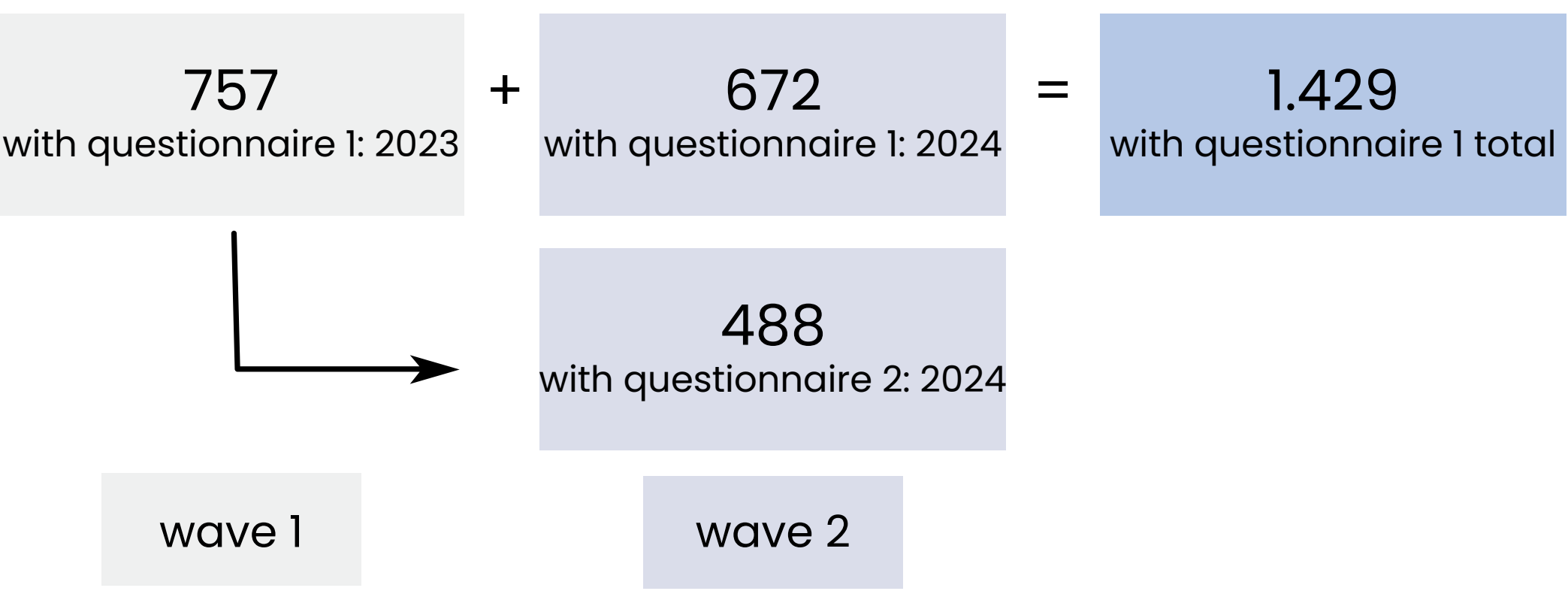
The study examines the **life courses** of care leavers in transition.

The **objectives** of the panel study are...

- ...to clarify what young people in transition need, to generate knowledge about the participation of care leavers and gain insights into support structures
- ...to collect data on »Leaving Care« and create a data basis for the further development of child and youth welfare services

At the start of the study, **the participants** were between 16 and 19 years old and lived in foster families or residential care. They are surveyed annually for up to seven years.

The **surveys** are conducted by the social research institute infas using quantitative questionnaires in face-to-face interviews, by telephone, or online. The third wave of surveys is currently taking place (status: fall 2025). The **number of surveys** conducted to date is as follows:



CLS examines how resources and limitations affect the **participation**, life courses, and prospects of young adults.

Dimensions of participation:

- Housing and independence
- School, vocational training, and studies
- Career and work
- Social relationships and networks
- Leisure and leisure activities
- Participation and rights
- Finances
- Health

The Project Group:

- University of Hildesheim – Institute of Social and Organizational Education
- German Youth Institute
- Society for Innovative Social Research and Social Planning
- FICE Germany

A look at the panel

Study participants share their experiences and time in the surveys. Their perspectives are the foundation of the study. This is recognized and valued through:

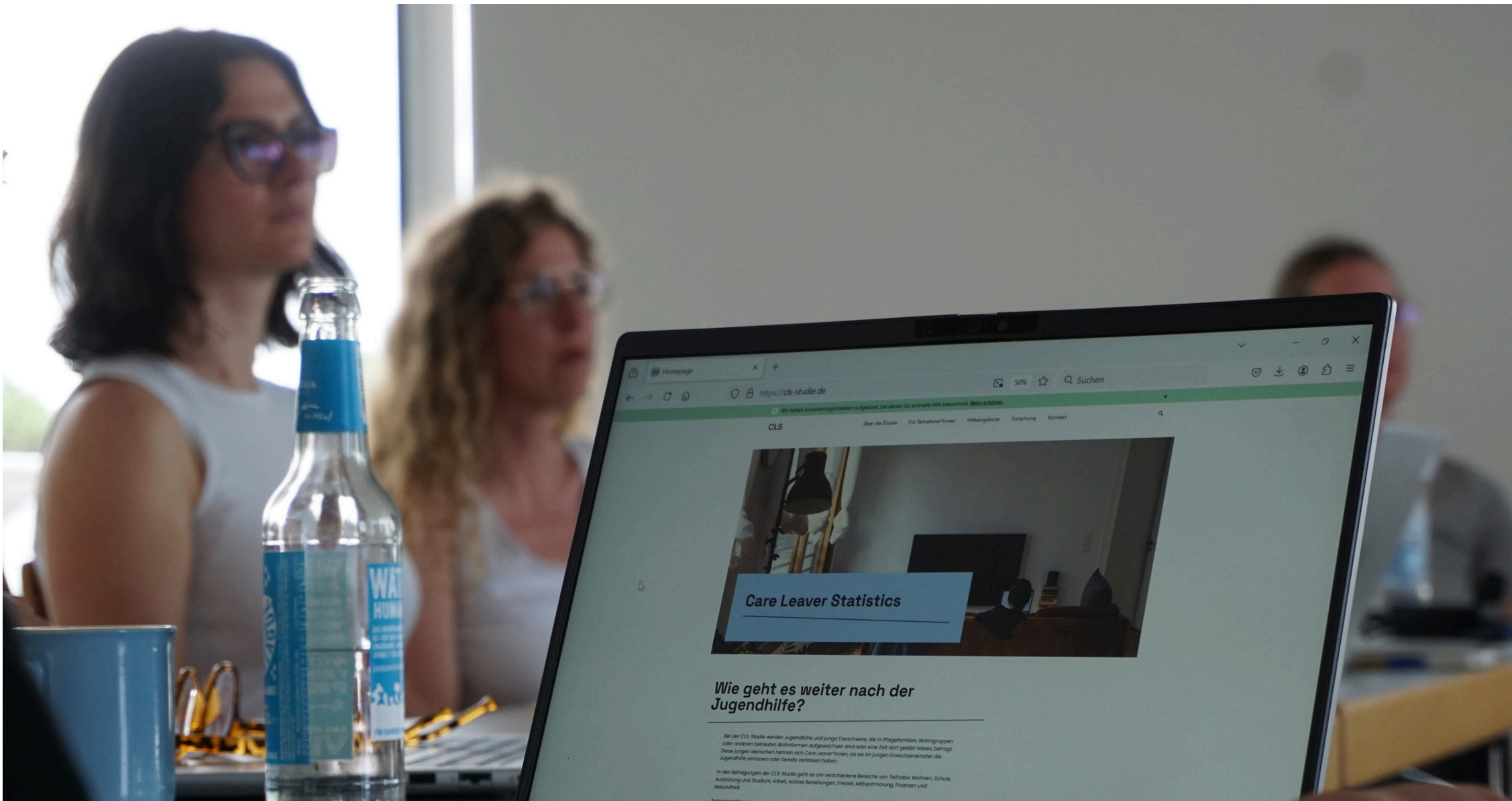
- Financial **incentives** for surveys and contact data updates
- **Information material** about the study, goodies, etc.
- **Additional panel maintenance offers**, e.g., digital game and movie nights, digital meeting »#CLS_Networkspace«, or joint weekend trips with CLS team members

By surveying many young people in the study, CLS has **a high level of responsibility** in the research process. Therefore, there are:

- Sensitivity trainings for interviewers
- A protection concept and a complaint management system
- A postcard with a QR code providing access to support resources for respondents

Responsibility also lies in **the handling of the data entrusted to us**, in data protection, and in the presentation and contextualization of the data. Stereotypical representation can lead to stigmatization.

- A **diversity concept** involves an ongoing process of reflection that supports researchers in engaging critically with the limitations and significance of their research
- The results of the study are discussed with (prospective) care leavers in **evaluation workshops**
- Their perspectives provide important insights for interpreting the **data** and continuously improving the **questionnaire**



The goals of open science

In addition to designing the survey instrument, evaluating data, maintaining the panel, etc., a central aspect of CLS is transparent science communication. The **objectives** are:

- Sharing **information** about the research process
- **Discussing** the results with different audiences
- Critical **reflection** in various formats

Target groups of science communication:

- **Science and research**, e.g., in the areas of leaving care, child and youth welfare, participation
- **Professional public, politics, and general public**, e.g., networks, self-organizations, projects, public and independent institutions
- **Young people**, e.g., study participants, (prospective) care leavers

Orientation toward **open science** concepts – e.g., integration of open science elements into communication:

- Provision of **freely accessible**, regularly published scientific **publications**; use of publicly accessible publication formats in journals and on platforms
- Provision of **Scientific Use Files (SUF)** (standardized, anonymous data sets suitable for other scientific research projects) on a **research database**
- Involvement of (prospective) care leavers in the research process, e.g., in **evaluation workshops**; **discussion of the study** with leaving care networks
- **Low-threshold publications** on the website and social media; provision of a support map, e.g., of the leaving care networks for participants



Quellen und Publikationen

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