

Hintalovon

Child Rights Foundation

**CHILDREN'S
RIGHTS REPORT**

2023

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Foreword

„Every child is born with a score. There are many conditions for a score to become music. With our current knowledge, we don't even know the score. We can only change the conditions if we want children's music to sound better. This is the metaphor used by Albert Jacquard, one of the greatest geneticists of our time, to explain the interaction between environmental conditions and genetics, the inherited genes. The more unequal a society is, the greater the environmental differences that affect a child's development, “the sound of their music”. The childhood and adulthood of a newborn baby is largely determined by where they are born. Under what conditions, and with how much joy or anxiety the birth was expected, did the mother have the opportunity to eat well, live a healthy life without anxiety, and be calm and healthy during her pregnancy? How is the family in which the child is being raised and how is the municipality where the home is located? Does the baby, and later the toddler, have everything they need - love, security, food, warmth, toys, vaccinations, treatment for illness? How attentive are the pre-school and school teachers, and how much do they help the child's abilities and talents to emerge and develop freely? What kind of experiences and attachments does he or she develop among friends and in different peer communities? A child's well-being depends on a combination of these and similar conditions. And in all these conditions, there are huge differences between families and between large social groups that affect the sound of the score.”¹

Zsuzsa Ferge (1931-2024)²

¹ Ágnes Darvas – Zsuzsa Ferge (2011): The Poverty of Children. In: István Takács – Ferenc Csillag – László Trencsényi (eds.): How to love a child? The writings of Korczak and Hungarian thinkers. Hungarian Committee for UNICEF - Eötvös Kiadó, Budapest, pp. 349-350.

² The news of the death of Zsuzsa Ferge, Sociologist and Professor Emerita, came before the manuscript was finished. The above quote is in memory of her and her work and thoughts on children's rights.

What was it like to be a child in 2023? What sheet music was used to play children's music? These are incredibly important questions, which we hope this Children's Rights Report will help to answer. We have gathered all the data, information, research and publications available to us, highlighting both the bigger trends and the smaller situations specific to a group of children.

We write about the challenges facing the education system, child protection and child health, and analyse data on children's well-being (from physical and mental health to abuse and other risky behaviours).

We discuss the most important changes in legislation and institutional operations. We describe trends and challenges related to the placement and responsible care of children growing up outside their families.

Anyone expecting the next 70 pages to be a happy read will be disappointed. But if you start reading to get a more accurate picture of the reality surrounding children, you will find important and thought-provoking data and trends.

Methodology

The report summarises the most important events in 2023 from a children’s rights perspective, using a similar methodology as in previous years. In its preparation, data and information were collected in three main areas:

- **Legislation and amendments adopted or entering into force in 2023;**
- **Professional materials, statistical and information sources published in 2023;**
- **Reports, news, media reports published in 2023.**

Every year, we carry out a lot of research before compiling the report. In fact, this year, we continuously collected information, data, research findings and based the report and decisions on what we saw as the most important events, changes and challenges in each area of children’s rights.

This is the eighth year of the Children’s Rights Report, which allows us to continuously monitor the collection of child protection statistics, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of operation. Among other things, the fact that in April-May, when we finished the manuscript, often only data from a year earlier are available. Difficulties around data requests and problems in accessing certain information have been addressed in a separate chapter in the 2023 report.³

The Children’s Rights Report 2023 was compiled by the professional team of the Hintalovon Children’s Rights Foundation, but we also

directly involved experts from other organisations in writing some of the sections. The first draft of the report was reviewed by proofreaders with extensive professional experience and knowledge of the individual articles.

The Hintalovon Foundation’s Kid Colleagues were also involved in the preparation of the report in 2024. Eight children aged 14-17 were interviewed during two meetings to discuss the previous year. We looked at the previous report, in which their ideas were already directly included, and then discussed their role and the purpose of their involvement. Through collective, playful discussions, the children identified the themes and events from 2023 that they considered significant for their age group. **Children’s views are an important part of the Children’s Rights Report.**⁵

As in previous years, the report follows the structure of reporting of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the clusters of children’s rights, but this year (in light of the European Climate Convention) we have added a new topic, **sustainability**.

The reports, published annually since 2016, are available at www.hintalovon.hu.

Comments on the 2023 material are welcome at the following e-mail address: info@hintalovon.hu. Thank you!

³ See chapter on Disclosure and access to data of public interest.

⁴ Date of completion of the manuscript: 18 April 2024.

⁵ Their thoughts are included as quotes, labelled „Insights from a Kid Colleague”.

Disclosure and access to data of public interest

Collecting data is a major task every year, as data on children are not held in one place, but are available at several institutions, so-called data hosts (e.g. ministries, authorities, agencies). **The system of data hosts often lacks transparency.** In recent years, there have been several cases where the organisation that provided data in the previous year claims that it was no longer responsible for data collection in the following year.

Although the National Statistical Data Collection Programme (OSAP), governed by the Official Statistics Act⁶, helps to provide information, there are several important registers that are independent of OSAP, i.e. they are not part of OSAP.

To prepare the 2023 report, **we sent out more requests than ever before (thirty)** to public, church and civil society organisations. In most cases, the requests were for statistical data, but in several cases we also asked for other types of information (e.g. on institutional practices).

Most of the data comes from the Central Statistical Office (KSH), which collects extensive data on child protection. Howev-

er, for most of the data from KSH, it is true that **data for the year covered by the report (in this case 2023) only become available months after the manuscript is completed**, so we can usually only report data from a year earlier, for example on health or child poverty.

The data retrieved from the registers of the various ministries and agencies, although available for the relevant reference year, raise a number of quality problems. In many cases, **the requested data are not available in the requested form and/or breakdown**, and the data holders **refuse** to provide the data, citing Article 30 of the Info Act.⁷ It is up **to the individual attitude** of the data providers (one could say the individual decision of the manager or administrator) whether they send what is available to them in relation to the data requested by the public interest data request. There are also examples where we receive data that is different from what we have requested but close in content. This practice helps professional work, provides an opportunity for evaluative analysis and makes the operation of the organisation more transparent.⁸

⁶ Act CLV of 2016 on Official Statistics.

⁷ Act CXII of 2011 on the Right to Informational Self-Determination and Freedom of Information.

⁸ We do not give examples of these institutional practices because we want to draw attention to general phenomena.

There are also many cases where the different organisations **do not have the information requested**, e.g. there is no information available on the hearing of children's views either from public authorities (e.g. guardianship authorities) or from the courts, but there is also no information available on the level and extent of involvement of children in specialised care in issues affecting them. In our view, and in line with Paragraph 53 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's (UNCRC) Comprehensive Commentary No. 16 (2003), these **data collection gaps** should be **filled**, because without them, an evaluation of the child-centred functioning of institutions cannot be fully informed (and the need for improvement is more difficult to establish).

Finally, there are cases where **our data request remains completely unanswered**.⁹ For years, we have not received a reply on Hungary's ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communication procedure supplementary to the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁰, which in 2019, during a hearing before the Committee on the Rights of the Child, was said to be „in the process of adoption” and the Committee also **called upon** Hungary to ratify it. Over the years, this issue has been the responsibility of different ministries. This year, we requested information from the Ministry of the Interior, from where our request was transferred to the Ministry of Culture and Innovation

by a letter dated 2 February 2024 – referring to the fact that the tasks related to the Convention on the Rights of the Child were transferred to the Ministry. As in previous years, there was no reply to our letter following subsequent enquiries.

Systematic and professional data collection is needed on all aspects of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is also to ensure that children in vulnerable and fragile situations can be identified and appropriate assistance and support programmes can be properly implemented. This implies **a broadening of the scope** of child protection **statistics** and a **child-centred approach**. It is also necessary to ensure that the data and statistical indicators are shared between the sectors and areas concerned and used in the development, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects to implement the Convention. This is a particularly important task in Hungary, where the system of sectoral governance is particularly fragmented, as illustrated in the **Children's Rights Report** 2022 with graphs and tables.

⁹ This year, three data requests sent to public organisations went unanswered.

¹⁰ Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure.

A. General implementing measures

In order to achieve the objectives of the Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 on the establishment of a European Children's Guarantee, the Government adopted the „**National Action Plan 2030 on Guaranteeing Children's Rights**” **document**¹¹ in 2023.. The content and style of the document can primarily be **considered** a report. The text gives more emphasis to the presentation of past achievements than to the strategic presentation of future objectives and the means and actions needed to achieve them. As stated in the National Action Plan, **it is sufficient to continue with the programmes of the past:** „...as a result of the Government's efforts, Hungary is already largely complying with the Council Recommendation; the following is a detailed presentation of the programmes and measures already adopted by the Government, the implementation of which also serves the implementation of the National Action Plan to ensure guarantees of chil-

dren's rights”.¹² However, on the basis of professional opinions¹³ - and the phenomena presented in this Children's Rights Report - it seems that improvements related to the Children's Guarantee Programme would be needed in several areas.

In 2023, the politicisation of children's interests and child protection and its use as a political tool continued. One example of this is the **national consultation** on the **Protection of our Sovereignty**, launched at the initiative of the government in November 2023, the 10th question of which was on child protection.

The question has been criticised by several **media** and **organisations**. The ZRI Závecz Research Institute for Market and Social Research conducted a poll¹⁴ on what Hungarian citizens consider to be the most important tasks of child protection. **The**

¹¹ Government Decision 1202/2023 (V.22) on the adoption of the National Action Plan 2030 on Guarantees of Children's Rights.

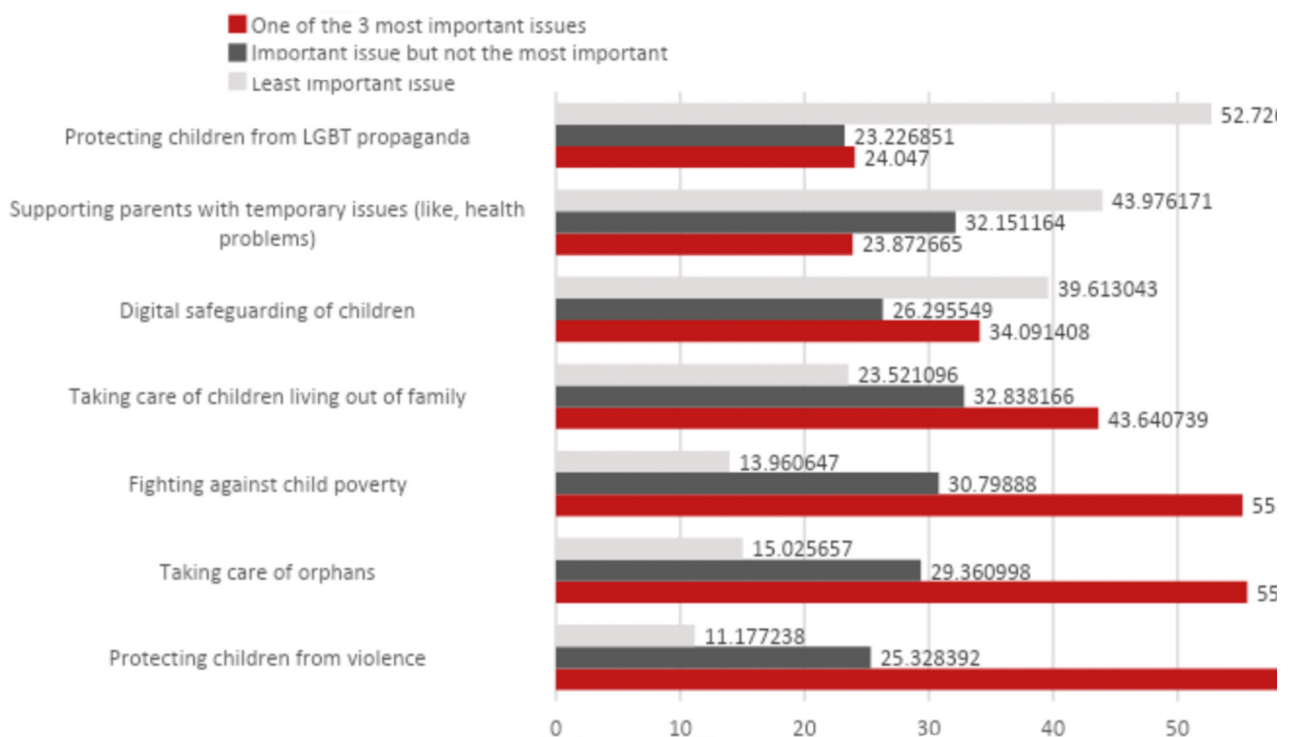
¹² National Action Plan 2030 on Guarantees of children's rights, page 50.

¹³ Gábos-Tomka: Access of children in need to services covered by the European Children's Guarantee in Hungary, **presented** at the Let's make things better for children! National Strategy Evaluation Committee, 15.11.2023.

three most important issues identified by respondents were tackling child abuse, caring for children without parents and combating child poverty. Of respondents, 43.6% also mentioned caring for children deprived of their family as one of the most important tasks. Keeping children safe on-line and on the internet was a divisive issue,

with around a third (34.1%) of respondents citing it as one of their top priorities, while just over a third (39.6) said it was one of their least important tasks. **Respondents ranked supporting parents with temporary problems and protecting children from LGBT propaganda as the least important tasks of child protection** (see Figure 1).¹⁵

Figure 1. The most important tasks of child protection according to respondents¹⁵



Source of data: ZRI

¹⁴ The question was included in the ZRI omnibus survey from 28 April to 5 May 2023. The data was collected through a face-to-face survey on a sample of 1,000 respondents, representative of the total population of Hungarian citizens aged 18 and over permanently residing in Hungary, by gender, age, education and type of settlement. The sample was selected using two-stage stratified random sampling.

¹⁵ The exact question was: „Child protection can include several tasks. Here are seven such tasks. Please put them in order. First, which do you think is the most important task of child protection in Hungary today? Continue with the second most important and so on.”

Legislation and measures

In 2023, there were **43 pieces of new legislation relevant to children's rights** – if the adoption of the 2024 budget is included – **of which eight** were **statutory norms** and the rest were lower-level legislation at the level of government regulation.¹⁶ In 2023, the practice of previous years has not changed and issues related to the rights and entitlements of children and families with children are regularly adopted by Parliament **in laws containing amendments on different subjects at the same time** (so-called salad laws). This legislative practice raises serious concerns about the quality of the texts, the coherence and structure of the legislation, and the lack of proper preparation (debate) and support for implementation of amendments adopted in salad laws.

In 2023, social debates on the education system were decisive, so the **Government Decree**¹⁷ that entered into force at the beginning of the year and changed **the rules on the extraordinary dismissal and immediate termination of public servants and employees in public education institutions** attracted particular legislative

attention. Teachers received the information on the change in their status by 15 September of the start of the school year, after which they had two weeks to decide whether to accept it, and the Government Decree on salaries from 2024 was only **published** in December.¹⁸ The measure has been heavily **criticised** for, among other things, restricting teachers' right to strike.¹⁹

Despite the protests, on 4 July 2023, Parliament **adopted** the so-called Status Law on the new career of teachers. The draft law was already **protested** against **by** several teachers' organisations, NGOs and students. The Tanítanék Movement, the Teachers' Trade Union, the Democratic Trade Union of Teachers and the noÁr Movement jointly launched a petition against the introduction of the Status Law, which was signed by more than **80,000 people**. Teachers had until the end of September to decide whether to accept their status under the new law. More than 4,000 teachers decided not to continue working under the new law, according to data from **a public interest inquiry**.

¹⁶ Under the 2022 amendment to the Constitution, the Government may declare a state of emergency in the event of armed conflict, war or humanitarian disaster in a neighbouring country, and this state of emergency was extended twice in 2023, so many important issues are still being discussed in Parliament without public consultation, or by means of ordinance legislation.

¹⁷ Government Decree No. 4/2023 (I.12.) on Certain Emergency Rules Affecting the Operation of Public Education Institutions.

¹⁸ According to the explanatory memorandum of the regulation, „the amendment gives the employer more time and discretion to give notice of termination or to refrain from doing so. This means that the employer may decide not to immediately resort to extraordinary dismissal, or even not to do so at all, in the interests of the continuity of education”.

¹⁹ For more on the implications of the Status Law, see also the chapter entitled Education, leisure, culture.

„In 2023, and even before that, I felt that I didn't know which of my teachers would announce at random that they were no longer teaching, and I simply couldn't foresee what decisions the government would make that would affect me very much. I'm thinking here of the Status Law, or the fact that the baccalaureate has been completely changed. It bothers me so much, because what I really need to know is exactly what is going to happen to me, and that is what I did not see, or still do not see, and how much it bothers me and how much it stresses me out. It's because I don't know whether maybe tomorrow something will be announced. I just don't know what's going to happen to me and around me.”

(Insight from a Kid Colleague)

The Act, also referred to as the Status Law, authorises the Minister of the Interior, responsible for public education, to lay down in a decree the detailed rules of the competence and **performance-based evaluation system** for the quality of a teacher's work and the **performance** of the teacher. Also in 2023, a legislative event, related to the education system and teachers, was the adoption of the law **on the new career of teachers**,²⁰ which set new levels for the combined amount of the guaranteed salary and the sectoral professional allowance.²¹ The status law also amended the law on natio-

nal public education²² in a number of areas, which also affected children's rights.²³

A law²⁴ that came into force in January 2023 changed the **requirements for becoming a foster parent**. Under the legislation, it is now sufficient to complete a sixty-hour foster parenting course to become a foster parent, and the additional 240 hours of KOP training within two years of a child's placement has been delayed again by another two years.²⁵ This technique (the two-year deadline amendment included in various laws) means that since 2016 it has been pending

²⁰ Act LII of 2023.

²¹ Accordingly, the combined amount of the guaranteed salary and the sectoral allowance may not be less than HUF 400 000 for a trainee; b) HUF 410 000 for a teacher I; HUF 430 000 for a teacher II; HUF 520 000 for a master teacher; HUF 640 000 for a research teacher.

²² Act CXC of 2011.

²³ For more information on the amendment and the student aspects of the protests, see the sections on „Education, leisure, culture” and „Respecting the views of the child”.

²⁴ Section 64.33 of Act L of 2022 Amending Certain Acts Serving the Security of Hungary, under which „Section 165 (1) of Act XXXI of 1997 on the Protection of Children and Guardianship Administration, the words „2022.” shall be replaced by „2024.”.

²⁵ Beyond the requirements referred to in **the relevant law** and Government Decree.

whether the previously defined foster parent qualification requirements²⁶ **will actually become mandatory.**

In the spring of 2023, the Ministry responsible for sectoral management published two methodological guidelines, the application of which are mandatory. The document entitled „Guardianship for child protection. Methodological Guidelines” acts as a unified professional regulator for the provision of **child protection guardianship services.**²⁷

In the regulation on care homes, it is stated with effect from 1 January 2023 that „the care provider shall ensure that the child in care has access to **education** and vocational training appropriate to his or her age and abilities, to the assistance necessary to remedy his or her educational disadvantage, and to the conditions necessary to ensure the proper development of his or her talents and abilities”. To this end, the **methodology** „Ability and talent management in child protection” must be applied.²⁸ **2023 a methodological guide** has been produced to support child protection professionals **in the development of children’s abilities and talents.**

Among methodological and professional guidelines, it is also worth highlighting the **supplementary guide** for those working directly with children with special educational needs (Pedagogue II), published in 2023. This guide focuses on the monitoring of the health of children/young people and the acquisition of appropriate methodology for the successful education of children/young people with special educational needs, disadvantaged children or children with special educational needs or children with difficulties in integration, learning and behaviour, together with other children/students.

According to an amendment **to the law**²⁹ which entered into force on 1 July 2023, **children with special educational needs or children with early development and care needs can be placed in a crèche with other children or in a special crèche.** The amendment and the need to clarify it were also addressed by the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in a **report.**³⁰ and the need to clarify it were also addressed by the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in

²⁶ This includes attending a course for foster parents and then the obligation to complete a centralised education programme within two years of the first child or young adult being placed.

²⁷ Section 85/A of the Child Protection Act provides that „the child protection guardian shall act in the best interests of the child and in the performance of his/her duties as guardian by applying the uniform principles and methodology approved by the Minister and published on the Ministry’s website.”

²⁸ In accordance with Section 84 (4) a ad) and (5) of Decree No. 15/1998 (IV. 30.) of the Minister of Welfare under the heading „Care and Education”, .

²⁹ Act XXVIII of 2023 amending certain Acts related to the simplification of family administration.

³⁰ Section 2 (1) of Act XXVIII of 2023 amending certain Acts related to the simplification of family administration , Section 42 of Act XXXI of 1997 on the Protection of Children and Guardianship Administration is supplemented with subsection (3a): „(3a) Children with special educational needs or children entitled to early development and care may be provided with day-care in a group of day-care centres or in a special group of day-care centres shared with other children.”

a report.³¹ The same law³² amended the law on family support³³ to **simplify the 50-50% family allowance for parents with children in care**. The same amending law also provided for the amendment of the Act on Assistance to Victims of Crime and State Compensation³⁴ to the effect that **a victim is considered to be a child if his or her age cannot be established and there are reasons to believe that he or she has not yet reached the age of eighteen**.³⁵

In 2023, the Government, **in a decision**³⁶, called on the Minister for Culture and Innovation, in cooperation with other ministers, to draft legislation to create the **possibility of anonymous birth**. The need for a legal settlement was triggered by the phenomenon (strongly **criticised by** professional organisations) of around **50-100 babies „waiting”** in hospital for placement.³⁷ Under the government's decision, the mother could ask the hospital's maternity ward to keep her data confidential, so that the child would be considered to be from unknown parents. If the mother does not withdraw

her application or the father does not come forward by the time the child is six weeks old, the child would become adoptable. The involvement of a number of disciplines (child protection, health, guardianship, civil registry) in the tasks and detailed rules set out in the government decision is justified and it is crucial to develop professional rules to support mothers who choose to give birth anonymously (identifying their crisis situation, providing them with crisis counselling, helping them to make an informed decision), as well as guarantees of the child's right to know their origin. The government decision stresses that **the child's right to know his or her family background may be restricted only to the extent strictly necessary and proportionate to the aim pursued**.

³¹ Report No A/B-51/2023.

³² Section 5 (1) of Act XXVIII of 2023 Amending Certain Acts Related to the Simplification of Family Administration, on the basis of which Section 9 (4) of Act LXXXIV of 1998 on Family Support shall be replaced by the following provision: '(4) If the child is raised and cared for by the parents living separately - exercising joint parental authority - alternately and for the same period of time, both parents shall be entitled to the family allowance in the proportion of 50-50%.'

³³ **Act** LXXXIV of 1998.

³⁴ **Act** CXXXV of 2005.

³⁵ This amendment is to comply with Article 18(3) of Directive 2011/93/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on combating the sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, in force in Hungary since 2011.

³⁶ Government Decision 1570/2023 (XII. 18.) on the directions for the settlement of the situation of newborn children left in hospital.

³⁷ Rapid report on the influx of children under 3 into the child protection specialist care system. OGYSZ. 2022.

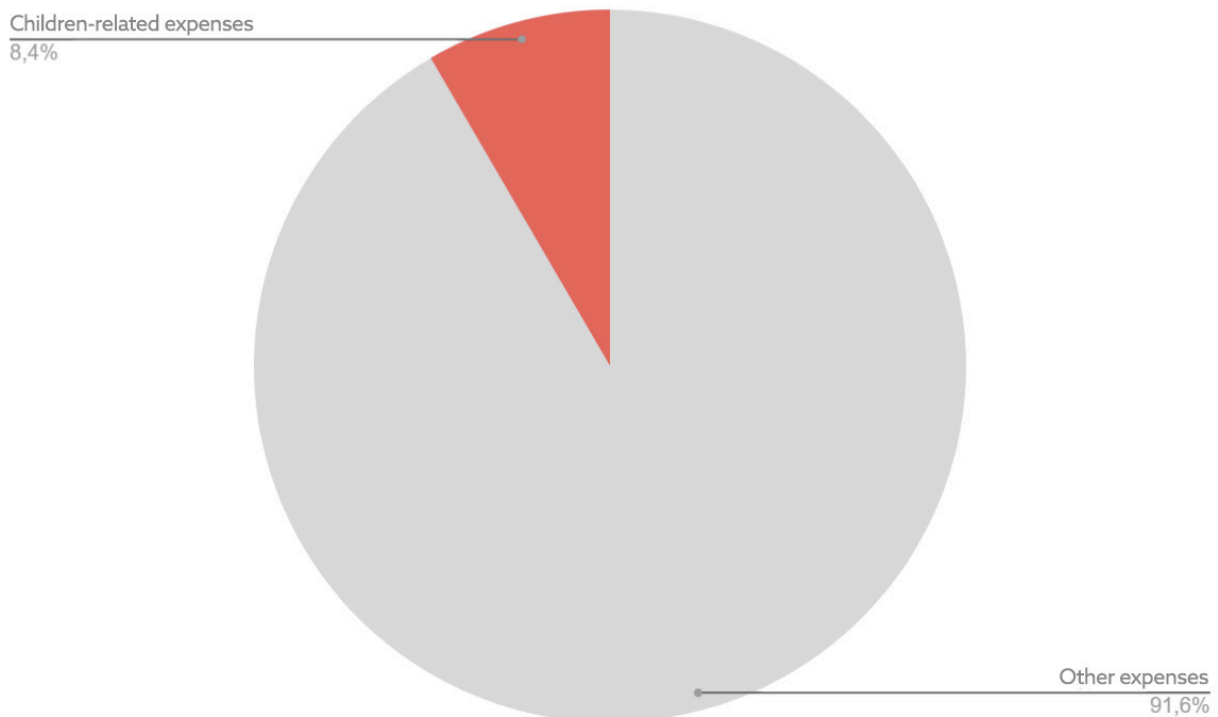
Source distribution

In its Concluding Observations on the recent sixth periodic report of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on Hungary 2020,³⁸ the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Hungary „allocate adequate human, professional and financial resources at all levels of public administration to implement policies, plans, programmes and legislative measures for children, in particular in education and health, and establish a system to monitor and ensure the effective use of resources”. In contrast, in Hungary, there is no centrally produced report detailing expenditure on children in 2023. Therefore, every year,

the experts preparing the report attempt to prepare a so-called „child budgeting”, which summarises all items related to child raising, and the enforcement and implementation of children’s rights. According to our calculations based on the **Budget Act**,³⁹ **8.4 percent of Hungary’s planned expenditure for 2023, totalling HUF 3,335.95 billion, will be spent on children** (see Figure 2).

³⁸ Concluding observations on Hungary’s sixth periodic report, 2020, point 10(a). Other relevant recommendations: (b) Regularly assess the distributional impact of government investments in areas supporting the realisation of children’s rights in order to eliminate disparities in indicators related to children’s rights; (c) Put in place appropriate mechanisms and participatory processes to involve civil society, the wider public and in particular children in all stages of the budget process, including design, implementation and assessment.

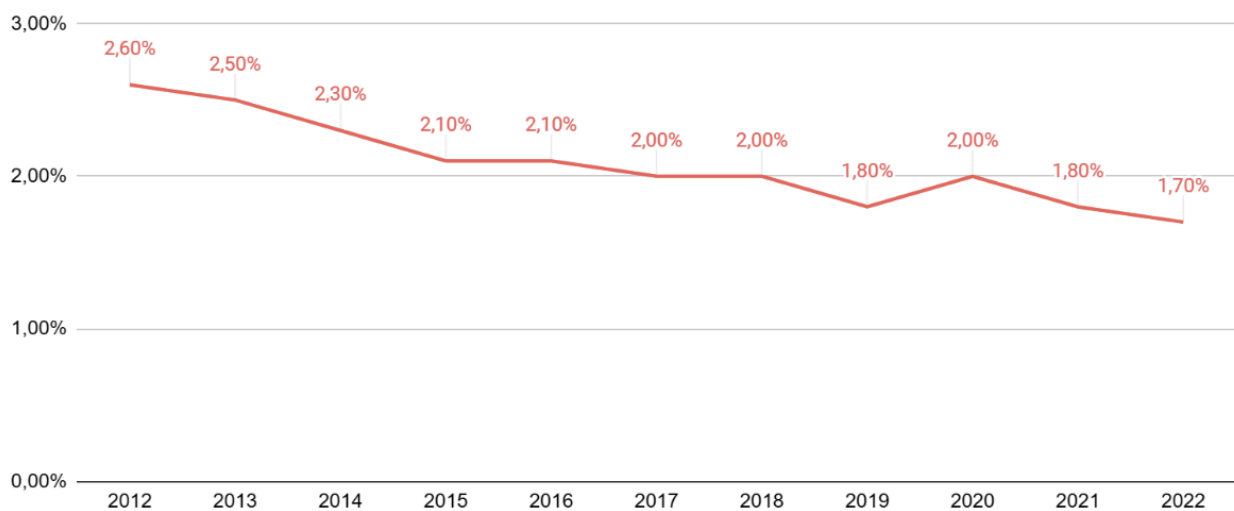
³⁹ The budget law does not break down certain items that also affect children into sub-categories (such as GP care), so it is not possible to get an accurate answer on expenditure related to children alone. It is important to underline that, in the absence of sufficient transparency, we are working with estimated data and other methods of calculation leading to other amounts are possible.

Figure 2. Expenditure on children as a share of the total budget under the 2022 budget

Source of data: Budget Act

Based on the **latest** data from the **KSH [Hungarian Central Statistical Office]** for the period to 2022, expressed as a percentage of GDP, **there is a modest decline in the level of benefits for families and children** (see Figure 3). The latest data from the

analysis comparing this expenditure in the EU Member States was already included **in last year's report**, but estimates for 2022 suggest that, following previous years, Hungarian expenditure will remain below the EU average.

Figure 3. Expenditure on children and families according to KSH data (% of GDP)

Source of data: KSH STADAT

Of the total expenditure of HUF 3335.95 billion, the **Klebersberg Centre (KLIK)**, which is responsible for the maintenance, methodological and budgetary management of school districts and public education institutions, **accounts for the largest share (HUF 692 billion)**, followed by **housing and baby grants** (HUF 665 billion). In addition to the KLIKs, the Ministry of the Interior has allocated a further budget of around HUF 400 billion in 2023 to support public education, including human services and operating costs for public education, free textbooks and faith and morals education. According to a statement by the Secretary of State for Welfare Policy, which is difficult to track from publicly available data, the government **allocated HUF 1,140 billion**

to social and child protection institutions in 2023, of which the cost of managing and providing care in residential social institutions and institutions providing specialised child protection care was approximately HUF 151 billion.

For the previously mentioned national consultation on „Protecting our Sovereignty” in November 2023, the 10th question of which also covered child protection, the contracts **in the Public Procurement Authority’s Q4 2023 prospectus** show that the Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister spent approximately HUF 11 billion.

Independent monitoring

In 2023, the **Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights** continued to act ex officio or on the basis of individual complaints in a number of cases concerning children’s rights. In 2023, the Ombudsman carried out inquiries, inter alia, into **the disciplinary sanction of exclusion from school of a pupil of compulsory school age and the assessment of a parental request to the maintaining authority**,⁴⁰

the transport to school of pupils with special educational needs and the opinion of an expert committee,⁴¹ and in relation to **the provision of nursery care for children with special educational needs and disabilities in segregated groups**,⁴² but also **in relation to the provision of meals in nursery schools**.⁴³ The Ombudsman produced a comprehensive **report**⁴⁴ on the functioning of the foster care system, the

⁴⁰ Report No AJB-587/2023.

⁴¹ Report No AJB-3741/2023.

⁴² Report No AJB-51/2023.

⁴³ Report No AJB-456/2023.

⁴⁴ Report No AJB-276/2023.

exercise of the profession of foster parent and the rights of children in care.⁴⁵ On the basis of the report, the Ombudsman prepared a complex package of recommendations. The Ombudsman also **examined the** functioning of several child protection institutions.⁴⁶ [In a Communication](#) on the occasion of the World Day for Children's Rights, the Ombudsman said that „all initiatives and proposals to involve children, in accordance with their age, **in a meaningful dialogue on our common concerns and our future** are welcome and should be supported”.⁴⁷

In 2023, the former **Directorate-General for Equal Treatment**, which was merged into the AJBH, **dealt with** far fewer cases than in the years before the institutional change, only thirty cases, of which two concerned children's rights (both related to the termination of employment on the grounds of pregnancy).

According to the annual **report** of the **National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information** (hereinafter: NAIH), the Commissioner also acted in some cases concerning children's rights.⁴⁸ One to be highlighted is the NAIH's **notice** on the change of **published names of children from unknown parents placed in baby incubators in hospitals**.⁴⁹ The investigation was launched because the press regularly publishes the sex of children found in incubators, the names given to them by the people who find them, and even their weight and sometimes their length.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ For more on this, see the chapter entitled The best interests of the child.

⁴⁶ Report Nos. AJB-219/2023, AJB-374/2023, AJB-569/2023, AJB-367/2023 and AJB-3101/2023.

⁴⁷ Since his appointment, the Ombudsman has come under heavy criticism **from** professional and civil society organisations for not addressing certain issues and cases, including those relevant to children's rights.

⁴⁸ In December 2023, the NAIH, following a petition by the Civil Coalition for Children's Rights, declared unlawful the Ministry of Interior's earlier data collection on career interests of children and young adults in child protection.

⁴⁹ NAIH-3885/2023.

⁵⁰ In this case, the NAIH contacted the notaries responsible for the hospitals and requested the documents generated during the establishment of the guardianship authorities' names. On the basis of these documents, the NAIH found that the previously published names of the children from unknown parents placed in baby incubators in the hospitals of the cities under investigation had indeed been changed, and that no violation of rights had occurred in any of the cases. [NAIH-3885/2023] The Communication does not specify whether the guardianship authority changed the full names or only the surnames.

Children’s rights are protected for children living outside their family and in state care by children’s rights representatives working within the Integrated Legal Protection Service (IJSZ). In response to our request for public information, the Ministry of the Interior replied that all the posts of **children’s rights representatives** were filled in the period 2020-2023. According to the IJO’s 2023 **report, in July 2023, the 23 Children’s Advocate positions previously working with national coverage were reduced to 16.** This professional staff (i.e. 23 until July 2023 and 16 thereafter) conducted 3,434 visits to institutions and reception hours, 1,200 child placement reviews and 392 case meetings in 2023. According to the 2023 report, 5675 cases were reported and 2974 individual cases of rights violations were dealt with.

The **National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH)**⁵¹ is responsible for the regulation and supervision of communications and media monitoring in Hungary. From the perspective of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is important to mention **the research** and campaigns carried out by the NMHH, in particular the **theme** of the Safer Internet Day 2023 in February, which also raised awareness of the dialogue between parents and children reg-

arding online games. In several decisions in 2023, the **Media Council** imposed **fin**es on the grounds of the best interests of children. The most media attention of these **cases** was generated by RTL Klub’s „I’m a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here”, in which a Colombian child was put in an abusive and humiliating situation by the presenters.

In its 2023 decisions concerning children, the **Constitutional Court (AB)** has on several occasions⁵² examined constitutional complaints concerning the enforcement of contact. In one of **its decisions**,⁵³ the AB found a constitutional requirement binding on the procedure of the courts in relation to the provisions of the Act on Non-Contentious Court Proceedings (**Bnptv.**) on the enforcement of contact.⁵⁴

In an ex-post review **procedure**⁵⁵ earlier this year, the AB **considered the restriction of the right to strike in public education institutions to be proportionate** in view of the legitimate aim of achieving „still sufficient service” and the need to protect fundamental rights such as (in particular) the right of the child to education and to protection and care. The decision has been criticised by **advocacy** organisations and **professional fora**.

⁵¹ For more information on the data of the NMHH’s Internet hotline 2023, see the chapter entitled Violence against children.

⁵² **AB decision 14/2023 (VII.24.); AB decision 3379/2023 (VII.27.); AB decision 3163/2023 (IV.6.); AB decision 3064 (II.16.).**

⁵³ AB Decision 14/2023 (VII.24.).

⁵⁴ For more on this, see chapter entitled The best interests of the child.

⁵⁵ Decision AB 1/2023 (I. 4.).

The Constitutional Court **ruled**⁵⁶ in 2023 that the requirement to be included in the so-called **paedophile registers** is not unconstitutional, and does not violate the prohibition of retroactive legislation for offenders who were not yet subject to this rule when they were convicted.⁵⁷

In addition, it is worth mentioning the Constitutional Court's 2023 **decision** on **the child care fee** (gyod).⁵⁸ In an individual norm control procedure initiated by the judiciary, the Constitutional Court declared a **twist of the Act on Social Administration and Social Benefits** (Soctv.)⁵⁹ to be contrary to the Fundamental Law and **annulled it on the grounds that it could lead to unconstitutionally unjustified discrimination**. In the case, following the adoption of a grandchild into a family, it was discovered that the child was severely disabled due to autism spectrum disorder, and the applicant applied for a declaration of his entitlement

to Gyod, without success. The judge who brought the case before the AB ruled that the conditions of the Gyod scheme, under which benefits can only be paid to a relative other than the parents if the parent's entitlement has already been established, are contrary to the principle of non-discrimination. In some cases, „the parent could not objectively have been in a position to claim the benefit before.”⁶⁰ The AB considered the judicial initiative to be well founded and annulled the provision in question.

⁵⁶ Decision AB 17/2023 (VIII.3.).

⁵⁷ Another important finding of AB 17/2023 (VIII.3.) is that „the criminal records body, as the data controller, must have objective responsibility for the integrity of the data contained in the register. Unauthorised access to the register results in significant and irreparable harm to the interests of the data controller, and thus the controller cannot be guided by cost-effectiveness considerations in ensuring data security.”

⁵⁸ AB decision 5/2023 (VI. 6.).

⁵⁹ The AB declared the following wording of Section 39(1) of Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits to be unconstitutional: ‚the parent's entitlement to benefits in respect of the child has already been established, but'. Following the annulment, Section 39(1) of the Social Act now reads as follows: ‚Entitlement to child care allowance may also be established for a relative of a child living in the same household as the child other than the parent, provided the conditions set out in Section 38 are met, if the parent has died, the parental custody rights have been transferred to the parent under Section 8:1(1)(2) of the Civil Code, or the child has been deprived of the parental custody rights under Section 8:1(1)(2) of the Civil Code. Section 4:186(1)(a), (c), (e) or (h) or Section 4:186(2), or has been terminated by the court, or has become incapacitated in the permanent and long-term care of the child due to his or her own state of health.”

⁶⁰ AB decision 5/2023 (VI. 6.).

Dissemination of the Convention

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, “State Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention known to a wide range of adults and children by effective and appropriate means.”⁶¹ However, in 2023, only events initiated by NGOs, churches or educational institutions aimed at raising awareness of the Convention were carried out.⁶²

The introduction of the new **National Core Curriculum** (NAT) was completed in the school year 2023/24; the local curricula based on the NAT reached the final year grades in a staggered system. **Children’s rights are not comprehensively reflected** in the document. At the same time, the methodological provisions **refer to** the implementation of **learning rights**, differentiation and special treatment. At the end of lower secondary education, the NAT sets out elementary knowledge of rights as a development task. **In grades 5 to 8**, the developmental task of learning about children’s rights is included in the **Ethics subject**. In the formulation of the ‘requirements’, the content of children’s rights is restricted to the rights to ‘physical and emotional safety’ and ‘development of capacities,’ while no re-

quirements are set for the rights to express an opinion and to participate. On the other hand, it conflates rights with obligations, as if the exercise of rights depended on the fulfilment of obligations.

The content of the **Framework Curriculum** is more extensive than this. The **National Public Education Portal** offers the Convention on the Rights of the Child in children’s language, a quiz on children’s rights and other interactive learning materials for children.

In grades 7-8, in the context of the **subject of Ethics**, the NAT sets as a developmental task and knowledge to be acquired the identification of the characteristics of unequal, exploitative or abusive relationships, the rights involved and the possibilities of protection. The learning outcomes of the lesson are that the child knows the rights of the child and the main documents governing them, can interpret their obligations and participate in the rule-making process, and is aware of fundamental **human rights** and can examine how they apply to different groups of people.

⁶¹ Act LXIV of 1991 on the proclamation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed in New York on 20 November 1989.

⁶² See for example **the conference of** the Civil Coalition for Children’s Rights, the UNICEF **conference**, the **Children’s Rights Days** organised by the Ferenc Mádl Institute for Comparative Law.

Civil cooperation

In 2023, the **Thematic Working Group on the Rights of the Child met once**, with 26 NGOs as members and 16 other organisations are invited to participate in its meetings. **The meeting focused on** the adoption of the Government Decision on the „National Action Plan 2030 for Guaranteeing Children’s Rights”, the provisions on the procedural hearing of children and the Ombudsman’s report on the care of children in specialised child protection and foster care.⁶³

The Civil Working Group on Family Law set up by the Ministry of Justice also met once in 2023 to discuss the changes in legislation affecting children that were introduced in the previous year, in particular the changes to the law on alternating care, the mandatory notification of children in custody cases and the provisions shortening procedural deadlines. In this context, some practitioners, court managers and lawyers, shared their professional experience. Although some representatives of NGOs spoke and asked questions of the Minister of Justice, there was no substantive consultation or feedback from the Ministry, as in the case of the Thematic Working Group on the Rights of the Child.

In 2023, the **Blue Line Children’s Crisis Foundation** turned 30 years old, providing, among other things, a 24-hour **helpline** for children in crisis. The organisation

is one of the NGOs that receive a contribution from the Central Budget. According to **their Report**, in 2023 they received more than 20,000 enquiries and had 1933 conversations with children and young people who had suicidal thoughts. According to the data from the Children’s Helpline, the number of suicidal thoughts in conversations between 2020 and 2023 was 746 (2020), 1304 (2021) and 1505 (2022), so in 2023, there was an additional 28% increase in the number of suicidal thoughts in conversations with children.

In 2023, the **Civil Coalition for Children’s Rights**, the largest umbrella organisation of NGOs working with children in Hungary, issued a statement on **the fate of children in foster care**, the placement of **children under 3 years of age**, and held **its annual conference on Children’s Rights**. UNICEF Hungary also organised a **conference** for parents and professionals on children’s rights.

⁶³ On the first topic (Action Plan on Child Guarantee), the NGOs present were given one day to comment, which was extended by one and a half days due to the earlier non-delivery of the material.

B. The concept of the child

C. Overarching principles

The prohibition of discrimination

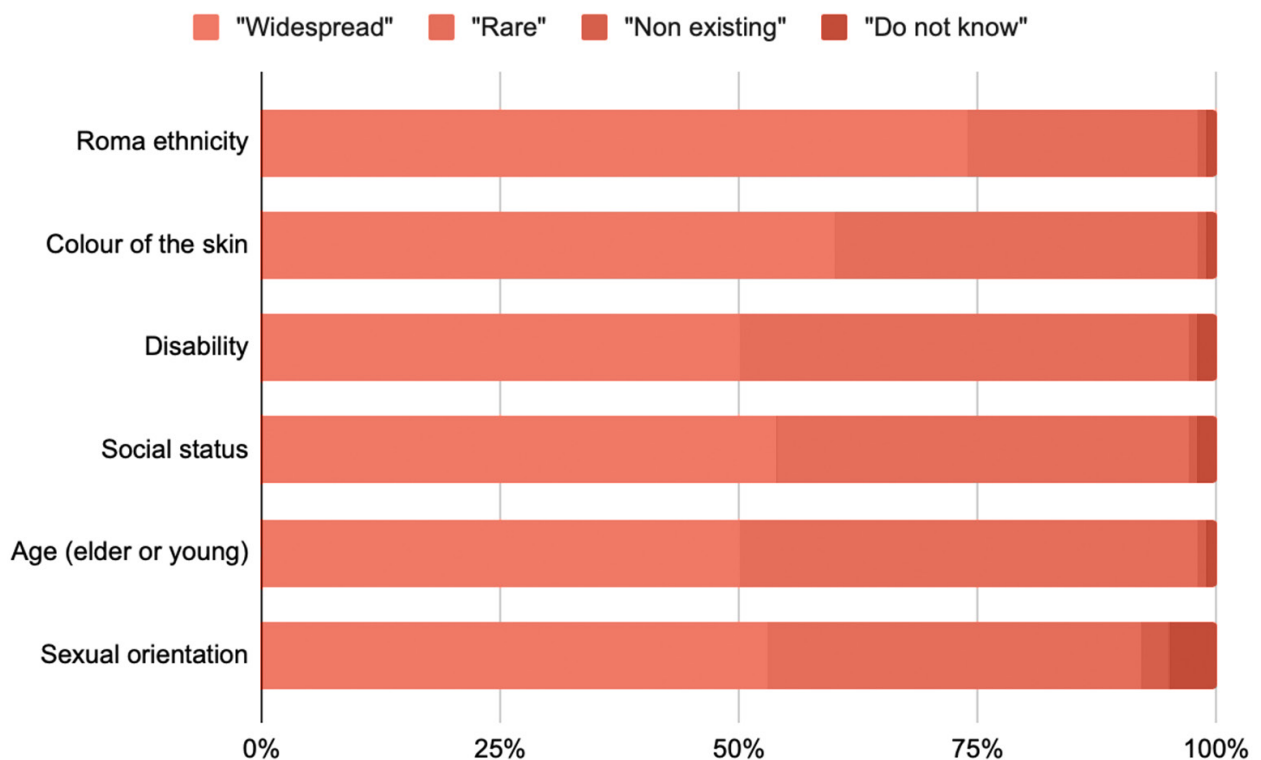
„States Parties to the Convention shall respect and ensure to children (...) the rights set forth in the Convention without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status, or any other status, of the child or of the child’s parents or legal representative.”

- Preamble of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Eurobarometer 2023 published its comprehensive survey on discrimination in December 2023, including EU and national data. According to the survey, **the highest levels of discrimination** in Hungary were found to be **against Roma** (74% - EU average 65%), followed by ethnicity (62% - EU average 60%), race (60% - EU average 61%), social status (low income, poverty) (54% - EU average 49%) and sexual orientation (53% - EU average 54%). Regarding age discrimination, Hungarian respondents felt that discrim-

ination against young and old people was widespread (50% - EU average 45%), higher than the EU average. For Hungarian data, see Figure 4.

Figure 4. Perception of discrimination in Hungary



Source: Eurobarometer 2023

Among the groups at risk of discrimination, in 2023, issues concerning Roma, children with disabilities and children belonging to sexual minorities were the most frequently changed or discussed in public debate in Hungary.

In December 2023, the Parliament adopted the **Act on Anti-Discrimination Measures in Public Education (Act XCII of 2023)**, which consists of only four paragraphs and provides for monitoring whether the proportion of disadvantaged children in primary schools differs significantly from the municipal average. In the event that the pro-

portion of disadvantaged pupils in a primary school is significantly lower than in the municipality concerned, the state will pay a **reduced amount of aid** to the school maintainers in the following year. The only positive aspect of the legislation (which, according to its preamble, was introduced without social and professional consultation in order to access EU funding), according to **critics**, is that it **will be compulsory to avoid segregation in the case of new classes and class splits**. In other respects, this legislation is not seen as a way to reduce discrimination against Roma children in the education system, an acute problem which has led the

⁶⁴ A parent was not allowed to transfer her child from a school attended only by Roma children to another non-segregated school.

European Court of Human Rights **to rule** again in March 2023 that Hungary had violated the prohibition of discrimination in the case of a Roma primary school pupil.⁶⁴

The **Deputy Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of National Minorities** drew attention to the need for educational inclusion in a specific case in **her Resolution** No. 3/2023, and stressed that „the problem of segregation of Roma children in schools has been an unsolved and continuously worsening problem in Hungary for decades, despite the fact that experts have pointed out and continue to point out its harmfulness and danger. Segregation, apart from undermining the chances of a fulfilled life, in most cases is accompanied by a feeling of inferiority and stigmatisation, which can accompany the segregated child throughout his or her life.”

A study published in 2023 on the dropout of **Roma girls** from school also draws attention to the structural problems, to the fact that the Hungarian education system is currently unable to address the fact that two thirds of Roma youth aged 18-24 leave school early, compared to ten percentage of non-Roma students.

Although there is no national strategy document on issues affecting Roma children in 2023, local initiatives such as the **Józsefváros Roma Strategy** are worth highlighting.

Children from sexual minorities will also be affected by the events that took place in 2023 around books and events depicting homosexuality.⁶⁵

It is questionable whether this can be considered a meaningful anti-discrimination measure – given the high care costs associated with children with long-term illness and disability – but from 2023, **children who qualify as permanently ill or severely disabled will be entitled to an additional family allowance of HUF 66,670 per month**, so the amount of the allowance they are entitled to will increase by HUF 10 thousand in tax terms.

The fight against **prejudice** and discrimination **against children in care** will also be strengthened by the World Day **for** Children, initiated by SOS Gyermekfalvak, on 7 **October** 2023, which received wide media attention and was celebrated for the third time in 2023.

⁶⁵ More on this in the chapter on the right to privacy.

Best interests of the child

According to Article 3 of the Convention, „In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”

As in previous years, the reference to the best interests of the child in 2023 was mainly made at the interface between parental rights and children’s rights. In a 2023 **decision**,⁶⁶ the Constitutional Court (AB) established **a constitutional requirement** for the resumption of contact, according to which courts may order the resumption of contact after six months if the conditions are otherwise met. **Indeed, the legislative interpretation which excluded the possibility of resuming contact on the basis of the expiry of the six-month period is, in the final analysis, perfectly capable of harming the „best interests of the child (...).”**⁶⁷

With regard to the content of parental rights, in a **decision**⁶⁸ the AB examined whether

access to the CREDIT system includes relevant matters concerning the fate of the child, and thus whether a parent who does not have parental rights can have access to the data. Although in its final decision the AB rejected the petition, it reaffirmed its earlier finding⁶⁹ that children’s rights „form a coherent whole, with the best interests of the child at its core”. It also emphasised that **the content of parental rights⁷⁰ is limited by the best interests of the child.**⁷¹ Related to this issue is the **amendment** to the Public Education Act 2023, which requires that information about a pupil must be sent to both parents, regardless of the exercise of parental authority, unless the court has limited or withdrawn parental authority in a substantial matter affecting the child’s future.

⁶⁶ **Decision AB 14/2023 (VII.24.)**. The petitioner filed a constitutional complaint against the order of the Budapest District Court.

⁶⁷ The exact quote from the decision is: „(...) violates both the right of the separating parent to have contact with his or her child under Article VI(1) of the Fundamental Law and the best interests of the child under Article XVI(1) of the Fundamental Law”.

⁶⁸ **Order AB 3443/2023 (X. 25.)**.

⁶⁹ For example: Decision AB **9/2021 (III. 17.)**.

⁷⁰ Article XVI (2) of the Fundamental Law.

⁷¹ Article XVI (1) of the Fundamental Law.

⁷² **Decision 3105/2023 (III. 14.) AB.**

In many cases (and not only in the practice of courts and constitutional courts), it can be seen that the best interests of the child are not violated because of the absence of legal provisions or legal institutions (or because of their wording that is contrary to the Fundamental Law), but because the **implementation of legal provisions is not ensured**. In this context, it is worth highlighting the **case**⁷² where a child with special educational needs (and his legal representative) filed a constitutional complaint. The child was placed on private school status on the basis of a specialist opinion due to an autism spectrum disorder, which meant that for three years he was only allowed to attend school for ten hours a week - his application for integrated, inclusive education was in vain. This situation arose because all the authorities acted in accordance with the law, the Constitutional Court found, stating, *inter alia*, that they „do not have the task of examining the educational environment and the institutional system from a sociological point of view.”⁷³

The Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in a 2023 **report**⁷⁴ points out that **the best interests of children in child protection services are often not taken into account**. Firstly, due to the limited number of available places in foster care, children cannot be assigned to a place of care that takes into account their best interests, and often end up in a place far from

their place of residence. Secondly, the Ombudsman’s report is concerned about the legal maximum number of children in foster care and the different selection processes for each foster care network, which makes **it doubtful that foster carers can carry out their tasks in the best interests of the children concerned**. In light of this, the Commissioner asked the Director of the National Child Protection Service (OGYSZ) to develop a uniform selection criteria system in cooperation with the foster parent network operators and has taken the initiative to ensure that the **proposal for the location of the contact is made taking into account the best interests of the child**.

However, the **Code of the Hungarian Advertising Association** adopted/revised in 2023,⁷⁵ which **includes a separate article on the rules for the protection of children and minors**, is particularly progressive. The detailed rules, which indicate specific situations, contain important aspects that take into account the best interests of children. Among other things, children and minors may only be identified in advertising for social purposes, even with the consent of their legal representative, where this is justified. The human dignity of minors must be respected both in advertising and in the process of advertising, and minors must not be humiliated, made vulnerable or ridiculed or depicted in such a way.

⁷² **Constitutional complaint** against the decision of the Curia No. Kfv.II.37.170/2022/2 (fulfilment of the compulsory school attendance of pupils with special educational needs).

⁷⁴ Report of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in case A/B-276/2023.

⁷⁵ Hungarian Advertising Code 2023. The Code was originally established in 1981 and was then revised in 2018 before the 2023 update.

Respecting the opinions of the child

„States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

- Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The right of children to participate is a fundamental principle that permeates the entire legal system, and in 2023 it was a major focus in the **EU**, meanwhile in Hungary progress has been made in only one area, the **hearing of children in court**. Under **legislation** that entered into force on 1 August 2022, in all divorce proceedings (or proceedings for the settlement of parental custody), a child who has the capacity to make a statement must be notified of the opportunity to make a statement. On this basis, the court will give notice of the proceedings to all children, regardless of age. In response to the **press reaction** surrounding the form of the notice, the National Office for the Judiciary, in cooperation with the Children's Rights Cabinet, has prepared, with the assistance of a psychologist, a **model notice**, the text of which **is available exclusively to judges**.

No official statistics are available on how many children were heard in court or in administrative proceedings in 2023, or under what circumstances each hearing took place. Professional materials and descriptions on the methodology of hearing children are also not publicly available. According to **lawyers' descriptions**, hearings are often conducted by judges by sending par-

ents out of the courtroom or by talking to the child in a specially designed child-friendly interview room. While judges who do not feel prepared to hear a child will not hear the child. According to the **National Office for the Judiciary**, children are very active in expressing their views and often express their opinions.

In 2023, after three years,⁷⁶ **National Student Parliament** met again, where students put forward their proposals on 58 points. **Students** can follow which of the proposals have been implemented on a **website**, but there is no information on the details of implementation or the facts on which the decision was based. In nine of these counties, there was no agenda item for delegates to present their comments and suggestions. In the counties where the agenda provided this opportunity, the main issues raised by the students **were the mental health of fellow students, the lack of school psychologists and special education teachers, the overworking of students, the lack of up-to-date teaching, the lack of equipment and the physical condition of the institutions**.

In addition, no programmes have been implemented at national level to promote the meaningful involvement of children. Among

the smaller initiatives, it is worth highlighting that in 2023, seven organisations of the Child Participation Working Group of the Civil **Coalition for Children’s Rights** operated **child participation programmes and projects** that achieved the safe and genuine involvement of children. And **the Municipality of Budapest’s 8th District** has developed a two-year **programme** to ensure that the views of local children are reflected in municipal decision-making.

For children **in state care that have been removed from their families**, there is no data on the need to consult and respect their views, either on their placement or on their daily life.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Section 78 (8) of Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education provides for the student parliament as follows: “The Minister responsible for public education shall convene the student parliament every two years. The Student Parliament shall be a national information forum for students on public education, which shall review the implementation of students’ rights in its proposals and may adopt recommendations setting out its opinions and proposals.”

⁷⁷ The legislation provides for several ways to consult children. Section 8(1) of Act XXXI of 1997 on the Protection of Children and the Administration of Guardianship ensures the right of children to be heard in all matters concerning their person and property and to have their views taken into account, taking into account their age and level of development. This rule is further detailed in Section 11(2) of Government Decree 149/1997 (IX. 10.) on guardianship authorities and child protection and guardianship proceedings, which stipulates that in certain guardianship proceedings the guardianship authority shall hear children directly or through others on matters concerning them. However, in the absence of data, it is not possible to know what and how this is done in practice. In addition, institutional practices in this area are known, such as the work of the quality assurance team of SOS Gyermekfalvak. In this context, children’s feedback and suggestions are incorporated into the annual programme planning.

D. Civil rights and liberties

Citizenship

Hungary sets an example by **providing birth certificates for all children born on its territory**. It ensures recognition as a stateless person for those who are not recognised as nationals by any state applying its own law. However, there are still systemic gaps in access to the procedure, in the rights conferred by stateless status and in the prevention of statelessness at birth.⁷⁸

The Citizenship Act restrictively allows only children born to stateless parents (i.e. children who inherit neither parent's citizenship) who have a place of residence⁷⁹ in Hun-

gary to acquire Hungarian citizenship.⁸⁰ Since residence cannot be established for stateless persons, **the child born in Hungary to stateless parents becomes stateless at birth**, in violation of the International Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.⁸¹ Those who establish Hungarian residence during their minority can apply for naturalisation on preferential terms after 5 years.⁸²

⁷⁸ A detailed country report on statelessness and citizenship is available on the **Statelessness Index** website.

⁷⁹ The concept of domicile is defined in Act LXVI of 1992 on the Register of Personal Data and Addresses of Citizens. Only Hungarian citizens, foreign nationals recognised as refugees or as persons granted asylum, and foreign nationals holding a national or EC settlement permit are entitled to establish such a residence. Those who are in the country on other grounds – for example, if they have a residence permit – are not allowed to establish a residence, their address is called accommodation by law. However, many entitlements are only available to those who have a residence.

⁸⁰ Section 5/A (1) (b) of Act LV of 1993 on Hungarian Citizenship (hereinafter: Hungarian Citizenship Act.).

⁸¹ Section 1 of Act XV of 2009 on the proclamation of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, adopted in New York on 30 August 1961.

⁸² However, the naturalisation procedure is completely closed to the applicant: the reasons for the decision taken by the President of the Republic in his discretionary power cannot be disclosed to the applicant, and the negative decision cannot be challenged in court. Section 4(4)(b) of the Act.

Freedom of association and peaceful assembly

In the year 2023, there were several organisations actively shaping public policy discourse, created by young people from a bottom-up approach. The **United Student Front** and the **Adom Student Movement** were the **organisers** and co-organisers of several protests and initiatives across the country that mobilised thousands of people, although the exact number of children who also took part in teacher protests initiated by trade unions and other organisations is unknown. Later in the year, a social coalition called the **National Common Will** (OKA) was set up by the United Student Front, Civil Base and PDSZ.⁸³

During the year, **tear gas was also used against student protesters at two demonstrations**. On two occasions during the spring, after the end of a duly announced demonstration, a student called on the demonstrators to leave for the Carmelite monastery. In the first case, a **fine** of HUF 100,000⁸⁴, **was imposed**, while in the second case the student who had called for the demonstration to continue **was fined** the maximum HUF **150,000** for failing to announce it. Several students were also arrested and there were some students for whom the **prosecution offered** to suspend their case if they did not participate in demonstrations for a year.

“Until now, I didn’t particularly like the police. After this, I would not dare to ask for help, for example on the street. I know they were following orders, but they were hurting children.”

(Observation of a Kid Colleague)

Five members of the United Students’ Front and two teachers, as individuals, applied to the National Electoral Office for **a referendum consisting of seven questions**, and

in each case the questions **were refused** certification (in four cases there were requests for review, in which the Curia upheld the decisions of the Electoral Office)

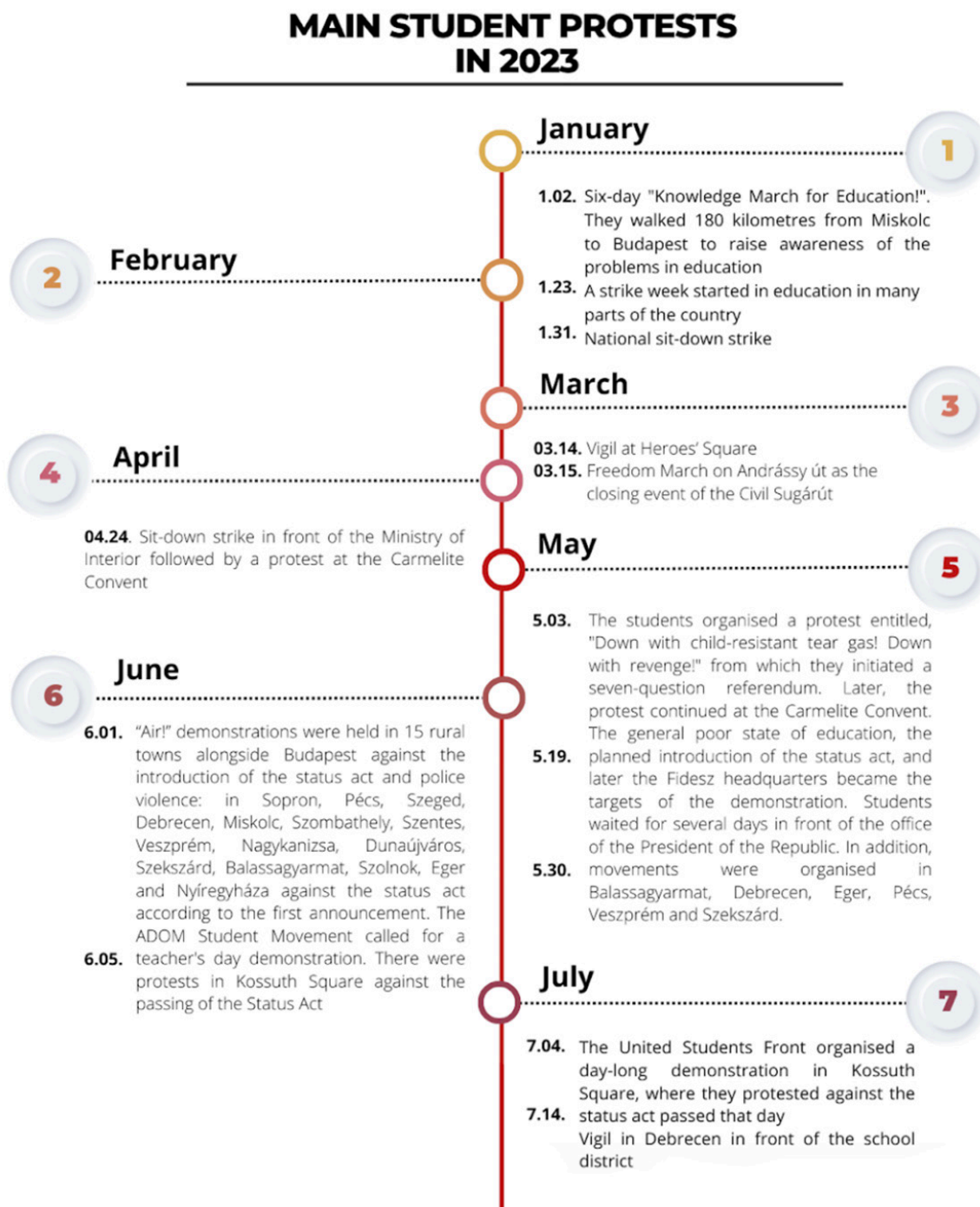
⁸³ Since its foundation, the movement has gained several civil members, and defines itself as a political organisation **on its FB page**.

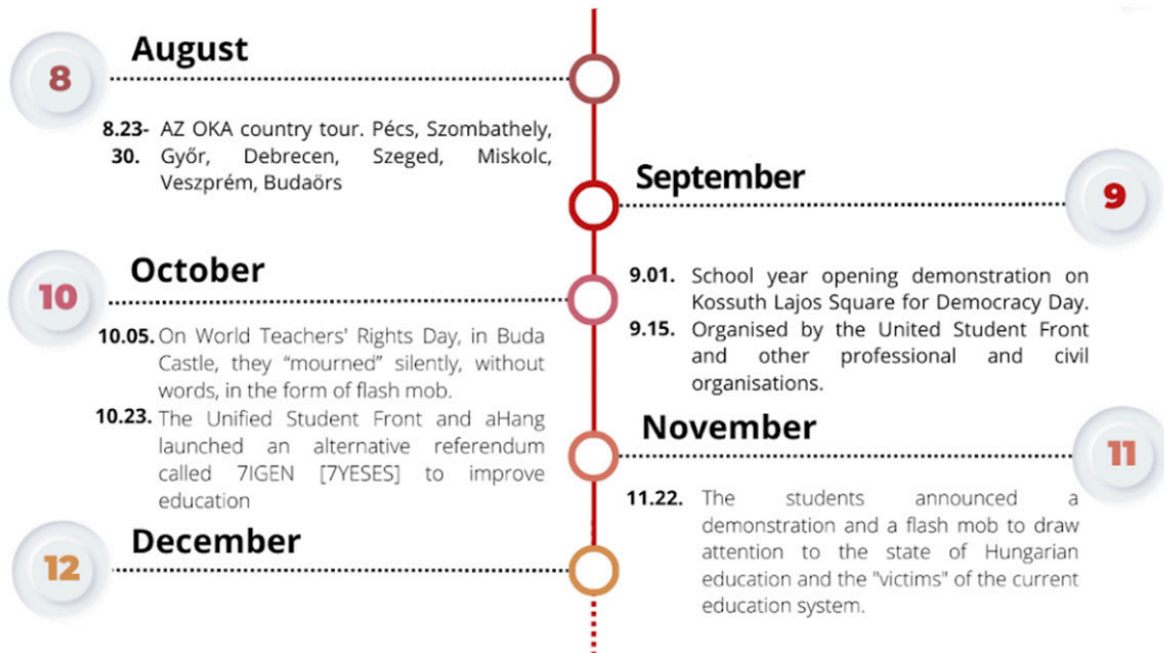
⁸⁴ The Constitutional Court later reduced this to HUF 40,000.

The students remained active throughout the **summer** and followed the **adoption of the status law**. However, with the start of the school year, they again faced **tougher police restrictions**. On several occasions during the year, the police **declared** unannounced demonstrations **illegal**. Despite the protests and police action, which attracted a lot of media attention, 2023 did

not see the **full provision of information** to help under-18s exercise their right to participate. For example, what makes a demonstration or participation in a demonstration illegal and what kind of clothing (e.g. wearing a mask) is required. See Figure 5 for a list of the main student protests and their themes in 2023.

Figure 5. Presentation of major student protests in 2023 by timeframe and theme.





Protecting privacy

In EU law, a package of legislation **was adopted in 2022** and **transposition** into Hungarian law started in 2023, requiring service providers of online giants and very popular online search engines **to take appropriate and proportionate measures to protect minors**. The protection measures include a particular focus on child sexual abuse material and explicit **child rights considerations** for service providers.

The annual **report** of the **National Authority for Data Protection and Information** (NAIH) reveals that there have been data protection concerns in a number of areas, particularly in relation to **the availability of children's personal data**. The Authority has found that **the accessibility of personal data** generated during the examination of forensic psychologists appointed in fam-

ily law cases⁸⁵ or the restriction of **access to such data is not specified in the court orders appointing them**. However, what is said during the examination may contain information, the disclosure of which by the legal representative could have adverse consequences for the child. To remedy this, the courts have different practices, in view of which the NAIH **considers it appropriate for the courts to make a decision to this effect** when appointing the expert, **in the best interests of the child**. In order to ensure this, it considers it necessary to amend the relevant provisions of the Act on Forensic Experts and the Code of Civil Procedure..⁸⁶

In 2023, several cases were brought before the NAIH where the parents of the child concerned, who are separated but jointly exercising parental rights, are both separately

⁸⁵ NAIH-6627-1/2023.

⁸⁶ NAIH Annual Report 2023. pp. 26-27.

entitled to access the child's data as a result of the right of access exercised on behalf of the child. In one such case,⁸⁷ the NAIH held that „the data controller health care **provider may not refuse to grant the right of access** to a legal representative **on the ground that it has already disclosed the records to the other parent in the framework of the cooperation under the Civil Code.**”⁸⁸

The NAIH investigation into the 2022 e-Create data breach has been completed.⁸⁹ The NAIH found that **eKréta Informatikai Zrt.** (Educational Development Informatikai Zrt. since 20 April 2023) **violated its obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation on several points** and imposed a fine of HUF 110 million on the company.

In the chapter on the prohibition of discrimination, it was already mentioned that in 2023 the consumer protection authority fined several publishers under Section 20/A of Government Decree 210/2009 (IX. 29.) for not storing books about sexual minorities in closed packaging and separately from other products for children.⁹⁰ In addition, **access to the National Museum's World Press Photo exhibition was first restricted** and then **banned altogether for children under 18 years of age**, citing the Law on the Protection of Families.⁹¹ In the Museum of Ethnography, images of homosexuality by Claudia Andujar, a Brazilian photographer of Hungarian origin, **were removed**. Members of the United Student Front **organised an action** in the museum, which resulted in **a fine** of 80,000 forints. It is worth mentioning these cases **in the context of the issue of interference in children's privacy**, because they highlight the **disproportionate interference in our privacy** that is sometimes made on the grounds of children's interests and protection.

⁸⁷ NAIH-3606/2023.

⁸⁸ NAIH Annual Report 2023. p. 28.

⁸⁹ NAIH-4794/2023.

⁹⁰ Due to a linguistic and drafting inaccuracy in the legislation imposing the folioing (a comma was missing), the first penalty imposed was successfully **appealed** by the publisher concerned.

⁹¹ Act CCXI of 2011.

Access to the right information

„States Parties (...) shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health..”

- Extract from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

„Normally I cannot decide whether a content is AI or reality.”

In 2023, data on online space dominated the social and professional debate on Hungarian children’s right to information. According to a **study** on children’s digital activities and risks of online victimisation published in 2023, **almost all children aged 5-15 years old use the internet every day**. And inter-

net use increases with age and over time. The 2023 data from the **Digital parenting** research series launched by the NMHH in 2017 shows that the number of Hungarian children with their own mobile phone has increased significantly in recent years.

„We have been uploading notes in class, doing online games and quizzes. They always do online flashcards before tests, so it’s great to be able to learn online.”

(Observation from a Kid Colleague)

In a 2023 **survey**, children and young people aged 14-25 were asked about their internet use habits. More than 43% of respondents spend more than 4 hours a day online, and almost **50% consider that they spend too much time on their phones**, using social media or playing games. Young respondents cited Instagram (71.54%), Facebook (64.28%) and TikTok (64.06%) as their main channels of information. The proportion of respondents who selected individual news portals was much lower (43% and below). More than 90% of young people surveyed have received

a message from someone they do not actually know and approximately 55% have been harassed in online media.

This **research**, published in 2023, shows that **parents' and family's internet content consumption habits have a major impact on children's internet and social media use**.

Related to this topic, in November 2023, the NMHH and the IJSZ launched a **joint programme** to raise awareness of online safety through school posters.



Source of photo: **NMHH**

Turbulent events in Hungarian and world politics and public life have made it increasingly apparent that there is a lack of comprehensible reporting for children in public service news in Hungary. To compensate for this gap, **kispolgar.hu** was launched in 2023, and **diaktajekoztatas.hu** also

features news specifically for children and young people.

In response to public events that also affect children, NGOs have produced important **information brochures** on children's **democratic rights** and how to **talk to** children about public and world affairs.

“In my class, the burnout was caused by the fact that they keep changing the final leaving exams, nobody knows what’s going to happen in May, even though we’re already in April. The OKJs are the same way, and they are making it more and more impossible for us. We found this out last year too, why do we have to find out in year 11 that we are writing a new kind of exam, of which there is only one sample exam. We don’t even know what the new subjects are at all, a lot of things have been added. A lot of people are now in a situation where they can’t calculate how many points they’re going to get, whether they’re going to get into university, because they don’t even know what to expect.”

(Insight from a Kid Colleague)

The NAIH reports that in 2023, **most data requests were made in relation to the teacher shortage phenomenon**. It is interesting to note that some school districts did not publish data on teachers or teacher shortages, presumably in reference to the new status of teachers. The NAIH’s position in this regard is that “the availability of the data requested in this area is in the public interest, in view of the right of children to education.”⁹²

2023 marks 10 years since the government **adopted the draft law** on the provision of textbooks in national public education without any professional-social debate. After that date, only textbooks from state, church and foreign publishers will be included in the **textbook list**, not books from private publishers.

⁹² NAIH Annual Report 2023. p. 160.

E. Violence against children

„States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse (...)” – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19

Abuse, neglect

According to KSH data, in 2022, **family and child welfare services and centres received 106,130 child-related reports**, 2,753 more than in the previous year.⁹³

According to the most recent data of the KSH, on 31 December 2022, 65,164 children were registered **as at risk** at family and child welfare services, while the number of minors at risk registered at family and child welfare centres was 45,366 (total: **110,530**)⁹⁴. These figures show a slight decrease in the number of children at risk and a slight increase in the number of children in

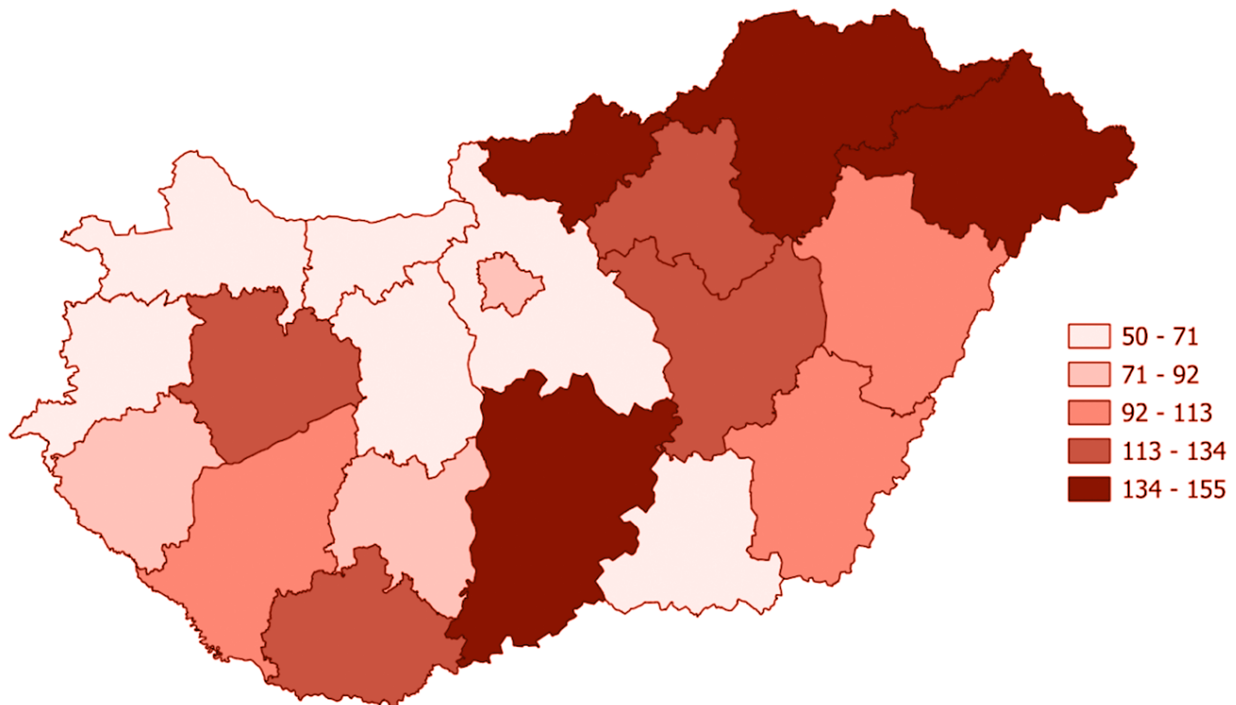
protection compared to the previous year. As a proportion of the child population, most children at risk live in the north-eastern part of the country (Borsod, Szabolcs and Nógrád counties) and in Bács-Kiskun county (Figure 6).

⁹³ Data source: the KSH OSAP data collection No. 1696 (Data on family and child welfare services).

⁹⁴ Source of data: data collection No. 1696 and 1210 OSAP of the KSH (Data on Family and Child Welfare Services and Report on the Activities of the Guardianship Office.)

⁹⁵ On 31 December 2021, 110,750 children were registered as vulnerable and 27,229 children were in protection. Source: **Child Rights Report 2022**

Figure 6. Number of children at risk per thousand children of the same age (0-17) by county, 2022.



Source of data: KSH 1696 OSAP data collection

The main causes of children being at risk are: parenting problems, parental conflict, financial problems and children not attending school.

In the majority of child abuse cases brought to the attention of the child protection system, children were abused within their families. According to KSH data for 2022, **5,083 children** were recorded as **physically abused**.⁹⁶ **Of abused children, 89% (4,545) were physically abused within their family. In cases of sexual abuse of children, KSH data show that child protection was aware**

of 1,013 children involved. Of the children concerned, **79.6%** had suffered abuse **within the family**. Child protection staff identified **6,901 cases of psychological abuse of children** (see Table 1).

⁹⁶ Data source is the KSH data collection No 1696 OSAP (Data on family and child welfare services).

Table 1. Number of abused and neglected children registered in the child protection system, 2022.

Data of abused and neglected minors in care, 2022	
Physical abuse	5,083
Psychological abuse	6,901
Sexual abuse	1,013
Neglect	41,489
Total:	54,486

Data source: Data collection OSAP 1696

In the school year 2022/2023, ten students in Újpest attempted suicide, one of the boys lost his life. Subsequently, the district conducted a survey of students, which showed that 47% had experienced verbal abuse, 31% emotional abuse, 21% physical abuse and 20% sexual abuse.

The IDEA Institute carried out a survey in 2023 of the adult population's experiences of bullying in schools.⁹⁷ Two thirds of respondents believe that **violence and bullying against children in schools occurs on a more or less regular basis**. Such incidents are felt more often by those who have some form of school involvement. The

more aggressive, bullying behaviours are in most cases perceived by adults in the home as definite, serious incidents, but they are much more permissive with the incidents they encounter most often in their environment (e.g. Mockery, spreading rumours, exclusion, obstruction and pushing). Online humiliation, provocation and humiliation are considered by adults at home as serious aggression, equivalent to acts such as hitting, threatening, blackmailing, stealing or vandalism.

No national representative data on online child abuse and maltreatment is available for 2023. According to the annual report of

⁹⁷ An online survey of 1,800 people aged 18 and over, representative of the online population by gender, age, education, type of municipality and region.

⁹⁸ In early 2023, a **study** reviewing the first 12 years of the Internet Hotline's operation was published, looking beyond the milestones of internet content regulation and the Hotline's operation to examine the potential impact of new EU digital regulations on the future of hotlines.

the NMHH's Internethotline (internet reporting and assistance) service for 2023, they **received 2,758 reports**, of which **55%** were related to **child pornography and 13% to online abuse**.⁹⁸ The report also **highlights** the increasing number of cases of online child sexual abuse **involving intimate videos taken by children of themselves**.

The International Children's **Emergency Hotline** received a total of 4,419 reports in 2023. 715 were classified as illegal content, of which 549 recorded **sexual abuse of children**.⁹⁹

According to criminal statistics, **1,360** children under the age of 18 were registered as victims of **child endangerment** offences in 2023,¹⁰⁰ which shows that the decrease seen in recent years has continued.¹⁰¹ An analysis of the sociological background of child endangerment offences was published in **Criminological Studies in 2023**, which concludes that sentencing in these cases is unduly lenient, **proceedings are protracted** and multiple, unprofessional hearings place a heavy burden on children.

Few data are publicly available on cases of abuse of **children growing up outside their families in state care** in 2023. Although a

mandatory **procedure** for reporting and investigating child abuse in child protection specialised care has been in force since 2018, i.e. abuse in foster care and institutional care cannot remain hidden,¹⁰² statistics are still not available and there is no systemic professional communication on cases. It is not known exactly how many children and what type of abuse they suffered after being removed from their families, what support they received and how they were helped.

We get an (incomplete) picture from the data provided by the OGYSZ and from some of the AJBH studies. In 2023, the OGYSZ received 36 reports of child abuse (nine cases of suspected adult abuse, the rest of peer violence). The majority of cases involved physical abuse, but four cases involved sexual abuse. In the current system of statistical data collection, there is no record of what the institutions involved did in these cases.

In 2023, the Commissioner carried out inspections in one specialised residential home („Kutasház”) and two children's homes.¹⁰³ In the former case, he found that „the children interviewed reported on life situations and events without recognising the abusive aspects of the situation.” The report also states that „The experience of

⁹⁹ The data was provided by the National Children's Emergency Service on the basis of an individual request.

¹⁰⁰ Data source: the Uniform Criminal Investigation and Prosecution Statistics (ENyÜBS).

¹⁰¹ Endangerment of minors, number of victims 2,677 in 2021, 2,631 in 2022.

¹⁰² Institutional, maintenance and sectoral methodology for the investigation and management of child abuse cases in child protection and correctional institutions - EMMI 2018; 2022.

¹⁰³ Győr-Moson-Sopron County Children's Protection Centre „Kutasház” Special Residential Home in Bergkő. **AJB-219/2023.**; Bolyai Farkas Children's Home Centre Janka Zirzen Janka Children's Home. **AJB-374/2023.**; examination of the operation of the Somogy Vármegyei Ferenc Rákóczi II. **AJB-569/2023.**

the present investigation has shown that it is justified and timely to assess how and through what specific programmes children in vulnerable situations, who have suffered previous abuse and trauma and are in special **care from their families**, are currently being made **more aware of their rights**, especially the recognition of the abuse they have suffered, particularly in view of the previous epidemic situation.” The report also points out that police proceedings are under way for suspected abuse by adults and endangerment of minors and that „overall, it can be concluded that the material and staffing conditions of the „Kutasház” and „Forrásház” residential homes are currently unsuitable for the care and upbringing of children with special needs and dual needs”.¹⁰⁴

Other children’s home studies tend to **draw attention to peer abuse**, stating that „On the one hand, the children’s home followed the necessary procedures required by law following the abuse of a child in care. On the other hand, peer abuse continued during the period under review, with more than half of the recorded cases of abuse being peer abuse, raising questions about the actual effectiveness of the measures taken.”

In another **investigation** on abuse in children’s homes, the Commissioner pointed out that the methodological guidelines on peer abuse do not specify in **which cases it is appropriate to report to the police**, so that in cases of peer conflict, instead of pro-

viding help and support, the affected children are reported.

In the case of children growing up outside their families, the problem of abuse was highlighted in 2023 by several **high-profile media** cases.¹⁰⁵ Although there is no aggregate published data on children who have been injured or abused in foster care, there were an alarming number of reports in 2023. **In Debrecen**, a foster parent so severely abused a 2.5-year-old child in her care that she died of her injuries. **In Nyíregyháza**, a foster parent was also arrested after she reported to the police with the body of a two-year-old child she was fostering in the boot of her car. A ten-month-old baby was bathed in such **hot water by** the foster parent that he suffered severe burns and his life could not be saved in hospital. Six months after her adoption, a five-year-old adopted girl began to talk about **the sexual trauma** she had suffered at the hands of a professional foster carer, and the foster carer was prosecuted. Nine children in foster care **were taken** from a rural primary school and the foster parents were prosecuted for the crime of sexual coercion. The case of sexual abuse of children at the St Joseph Home in **Szovata, Transylvania**, which has been going on for years, has also sparked a major public debate in Hungary, involving the St Francis Foundation, which runs the home, and its director, Father Csaba Bőjte.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ According to the information available to us at the time of writing, the Kutasház has been closed and criminal charges have been brought against it for the abuses that took place. This information cannot be supported by public data

¹⁰⁵ The media portrayal of these tragic cases (with few **exceptions**) was often generalised, often **violating** children’s right to human dignity and **stigmatising** foster care as a profession.

In recent years, Hungarian society has learned more and more **about child abuse and violence against children playing sports**. In 2023, a **study** on the topic was published, which examined the involvement of children in swimming and water polo, and the results show that all forms of abuse occur in the world of swimming pools. Also in 2023, the **research** entitled „Keeping Children Safe in Sport” was made public, which, based on data from 5,076 participants, concluded that 36.4% of those who played sport as children would rate themselves as having experienced abuse while playing sport as adults.

In 2023, the Margit Slachta National Institute for Social Policy **launched a training course** and **organised a workshop** for social professionals in five locations across the country, as part of a flagship project to **effectively promote the recognition and prevention of abuse** of people with disabilities, elderly people and domestic abuse.

According to data from the Margit Slachta National Institute for Social Policy, in 2023 there were 1,401 meaningful calls to the **Child Protection Hotline** – as no statistics are kept on the subject of the calls, it is not known how many (and what type) of calls were related to abuse.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ For more on the situation of the foster care network, see the chapter on Family environment and alternative care.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to the Child Protection Hotline, there are also Child Protection Signposting Emergency Services at district level. Data on their work is shown under the specific activities of the Centres, in terms of the number of activities in a given year. Data on the number of persons concerned is not available. The need for a review of the OSAP data collection system is underlined. See also the chapter on Data disclosure and access to data of public interest.

Corporal punishment

There has been no comprehensive research or study on corporal punishment in 2023, but the issue has been raised in relation to **children in sport and school**. Figure skating children (and their coaches) have even been the **subject of a parliamentary motion** and there has been considerable **media attention** surrounding the debate around „violent coaching” and „mentally distressed athletes”. The case, which erupted in the spring of 2023, escalated to a police charge in the autumn, after disciplinary proceedings within the figure skating federation were dropped. The federation filed a denunciation, and at the same time made a public **promise** to introduce a signalling system as part of their child protection programme.

Information on corporal punishment of children in educational establishments is provided in the **report** of the **Commissioner for Education Rights** 2023, which summarises the experience of the previous year. The Commissioner for Education received 1028 complaints, the majority of which were submitted by the students themselves. Many of the complaints were about emotional and verbal abuse, but there were also a number of cases of corporal punishment or institutional situations that endangered the physical safety of students. The Commissioner for Education stressed in his report that „We have consistently taken the view that the most serious offence that can occur in an educational establishment is corporal punishment and physical abuse of pupils. Human, civil, child and pupil rights cannot be taken away by the teacher, they are not a matter of pedagogical discretion.”

F. Family environment and alternative care

„States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child.”

- Extract from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Family environment

Supporting families and encouraging child-bearing is a priority for the government in 2023. A commitment to protecting families was a key element of government communication.

In addition to the previous benefits, which were mainly aimed at home ownership and property improvement, new **forms of support** have been introduced, primarily to help young couples financially and to encourage them to have children.¹⁰⁸ From

1 January 2023, **mothers under 30 years of age will be exempt from income tax** - this also applies to wages and childcare benefits. In addition to the tax relief, their student loan debt will also be waived. Last year, the interest rate on the baby bond was increased to 17.5% and the amount of family tax credit for parents of permanently sick or seriously disabled children was increased.

Over the period 2020-2023, public spending on traditional family support instruments

¹⁰⁸ For families with young children from disadvantaged social backgrounds, these subsidies are difficult to access. For more information, see the chapter on living standards.

(e.g. childcare benefits, childcare allowance) increased by 28%. The new types of instruments (e.g. Baby Waiting Allowance, Family Tax Credit) have seen a more pronounced increase of 56% over this period. It is important to stress that these are mostly available to **higher income** families.

In 2023, the State Secretariat for Families also launched a call for proposals for the creation of **family-friendly workplaces**. In order to support work-life balance, the number of **paternity leave days** has been increased following the transposition of two EU directives¹⁰⁹ into national law. According to the changes to the Labour Code, which will enter into force on 1 January 2023, fathers are entitled to 10 days off until the end of the second month after the birth of their child or the finalisation of the adoption decision.

According to **KSH data**, 85,200 children will be born in 2023, 3,291 fewer than in the previous year. **This is an all-time low** – the previous low was in 2011, when 88,049 children were born. In terms of population per 1,000 inhabitants, there will be 8.9 births in 2023, the second worst ever – only 8.8 in 2011 was lower. **The total fertility rate**¹¹⁰ also fell, in line with the pattern of recent years, to **1.50 in 2023**.

An analysis of the figures shows that, **despite the government's efforts and the forms of family support available, the minimal increase in the propensity to have children seen in previous years has slowed**. The experience of the 2022 longitudinal research of **TÁRKI** shows that current family policy is not relevant for the decision to have a first child, but rather may have an impact on whether families with two or more children have another child or not.

Compared to recent years, **the number of marriages has fallen sharply** – 50,150 couples married in 2023, 22% fewer than a year earlier, or 13,817. There were 45 fewer marriages in January-February, 31 fewer in March-April, 23 fewer in May-August and 7.5% fewer in September-December than in the same months of 2022. The marriage rate was 5.2 thousandths, 1.4 thousandths lower than a year earlier.

According to the **census data**, **the number of divorced persons** (1,008,915) and the share of single person households (35.5%) continued to **increase**.

As of 31 December 2023, 2,564 couples and 169 singles were registered as eligible **for adoption** by the KSH¹¹¹. **The number of children available for adoption** was 1,998, of whom 553 were under 3 years old, 795 were aged 3-9 years old and 650 were aged 10 years

¹⁰⁹ European Parliament and Council Directives (EU) 2019/1152 and (EU) 2019/1158.

¹¹⁰ The total fertility rate shows the average number of children a woman has in her lifetime. The value of 2.1 required to maintain the population at a constant level was last recorded in 1977. However, it should be added that this indicator is still much higher than in 1997 and 2013.

¹¹¹ Source of data: data collection No 1209 OSAP of the KSH (Report on the situation of the regional child protection services).

old or older. In 2023, a total of **984 adoptions were completed** through the intermediary of specialist services: 579 within the county, 237 by other county adopters and 168 international adoptions.

Looking at the statistics on adoption, it can be seen that the number of registered adopters decreased in 2023. However, the number of registered adoptable children has increased compared to the previous year. The chances of children being adopted decrease as they get older. **Despite the fact that there are still more children waiting for adoption than there are children available for adoption, the profile of children waiting for adoption and the preferences of adoptive parents do not match.** During the pre-adoption process, parents can usu-

ally express their preferences regarding the age, health and ethnicity of the child. A 2023 **study** found that this has a negative impact on the chances of adoption, especially for Roma and children with health problems. The research identified three groups of adopters: ‚picky adopters’ who only want a healthy child free of any ‚difficulties’. The second group is made up of ‚altruistic adopters’, for whom no aspect was particularly important and who would be happy to adopt any child they wanted. The third group is made up of ‚rational adopters”, who consider some aspects to be very important, in particular that the child should be an infant (almost three quarters of the respondents, 72.8%, would definitely adopt an infant).

Children living outside their family

According to KSH data,¹¹² the number of underage children in child protection specialised care continued to increase on 31 December 2023. The share of children in specialised care in the same age population continued to increase in 2023, **doubling** since 2010. Of the 21,428 children, 14,668 were in foster care. **For children with special needs, the proportions are the opposite: only three out of 284 minors were in foster care.** There were 2,387 young adults in aftercare.

Among children under three years old, the proportion of children aged 0-12 months entering the child protection specialised care system is dominant and increasing: 66% of children under three years old entering specialised care in 2019, 68% in 2020 and 71% in 2021 were aged 0-12 months. **In 2023, 935 infants were living in a children’s home or in foster care.** The legal obligation to place all children under 12 years of age in foster care by 31 December 2016, as mentioned several times in our annual

¹¹² Source of data: KSH data collection No. 1209 OSAP (Report on the situation of specialised territorial child protection services).

reports, was not met by the end of 2023: in 2023, 1,855 children under 12 years of age were living in children's or residential care, and **207 of the 0-12 months old babies were living in children's homes (a significant increase compared to 151 last year).**¹¹³

During 2023, 4,495 children were admitted to child protection specialised care, the largest proportion being infants aged 0-12 months (1,151). This compares to **4,037 children who were removed** from childcare. In more than half of the cases, the children removed from their families were in the system **for more than three years**, which shows the low effectiveness of home placements.

In our report on 2021, we discussed in more detail the growing church involvement in child protection provision. As we highlighted then, „in 2010, 7% of children in foster care were placed in a church-run network; in 2019, around 50 per cent". This **trend** has continued in the field of foster care networks: by the end of 2022, 91 per cent of licensees were affiliated to a church, and a proportion of civilian foster carers are also church-affiliated. In terms of capacity, the picture is even more lopsided: **98.4% of foster care places are held by a church or a church-affiliated NGO.**

In the year 2023, a social, child welfare and

child protection service provider, institution or network **maintained by a church**, which was previously granted an operating subsidy by the government for the year 2023 under the Budget Act.¹¹⁴ **was entitled to a supplementary overhead subsidy.**

According to KSH data,¹¹⁵ the number of foster parents has not changed significantly in recent years. 5,678 out of 5,909 foster parents were working in a church-based network on 31 December 2022. There are several reasons why the number of professionals has not changed significantly despite recruitment campaigns. In 2023, the amount of child benefit increased by 25 percent, but this falls far below the rate of inflation in recent years and does not mean that the wages of foster carers have increased.¹¹⁶ As the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights points out in his comprehensive **report**: „The unchanged amount of the foster care allowance and the family allowance, and the fact that the foster care allowance is in line with the minimum wage, do not motivate or are increasingly discouraging the responsible performance of the crucial tasks which require professionalism and competence, and have a negative impact on interest in the profession of foster parent, it hinders the recruitment of foster parents, thus making it increasingly difficult to recruit sufficient numbers of new foster parents, and the childcare system is unable to meet

¹¹³ The problem of newborn babies „waiting" in hospitals for their situation to be resolved was discussed in the chapter on Legislation and measures.

¹¹⁴ Government Decree No. 173/2023 (12.V.12.) amending Government Decree No. 489/2013 (XII. 18.) on state support for church and non-state social, child welfare and child protection service providers, institutions and networks.

¹¹⁵ Source of data: data collection No. 1208 OSAP of the KSH (Report on the situation of children's homes, foster care networks and external placements).

its international commitments, primarily for financial reasons.

On the basis of the above, I conclude that the current legal situation in relation to remuneration is capable of causing serious injustice to the right to protection and care of children in specialised child protection care and foster care, and is not compatible with the principle of best interests of the child.”

Another reason behind the stagnation in the number of foster parents may be **the low level of social esteem for the profession and the activity**. In 2023, there were several tragic cases that received widespread media coverage.¹¹⁷

It is important to talk about these cases, so that in the future there are fewer tragedies and less pain for children growing up outside their families. On the other hand, it is also important to show the other side of the child protection profession, raising its prestige and the esteem of professionals. On the other hand, it is important to recognise the structural causes behind individual stories, which professionals have been **highlighting** for years.

In its 2023 **report**, the **Commissioner for Fundamental Rights** reiterates that **the lack of a uniform protocol for the selection of foster parents and the limited professional support** (many networks do not have psychologists, foster care advisors are over-

worked, supervision is not available for professionals in most cases) are likely to jeopardise the right to protection and care of children in foster care. Inadequate training of foster carers should also be highlighted. The prerequisite for becoming a foster parent (in addition to the psychological examination and the environmental assessment) is the acquisition of the qualification required by law: the completion of a 60-hour basic course for foster parents (28 hours of pre-decision training and 32 hours of foster parent training), followed within 2 years after the first child is placed, by the completion of 500 hours of training in the OKJ or 240 hours of training under the Central Education Programme. However, thanks to legislative changes,¹¹⁸ the 2-year period is being extended, meaning that in **2024 we may still see foster parents who have been working since 2016 but have only completed the 60-hour basic training** (the qualification prerequisite for the course is completion of 8 primary school years).

The problem of material and staffing conditions in children’s homes has been highlighted by several Ombudsman reports.¹¹⁹ Among the institutions examined in these reports, 3 out of 5 posts in a group of children’s homes were vacant.¹²⁰

Both the child protection profession and the public were shocked by **the case of** a four-year-old boy who had been living in the same foster household since birth, whose foster parents had at one time wanted to

¹¹⁶ As of 1 January 2023, the amount of the foster care allowance and the special allowance for foster parents increased by 25%, and is paid to foster parents as a combined foster care allowance, while the foster care allowance (salary) remains unchanged.

¹¹⁷ For more on these issues, see the chapter on abuse and neglect.

adopt him, but then withdrew their intention because it was not supported by the professionals concerned. The boy was then unexpectedly placed with a new foster parent, on the grounds that the **previous foster parents had made it difficult for him to be adopted**. The boy, the other children in the household and the foster parents must have been severely traumatised by what happened. **An open letter** has been sent to the President of the Republic and a petition has been launched on the case of the boy and the foster parents.

On the one hand, the case draws attention to the importance of professional and psychological support for foster parents, as stressed by the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights **in his report** cited above. On the other hand, it has raised the question, which is a divisive issue in the child protection profession, of whether it is right for professional foster parents to adopt a minor placed in their care. On 23 May 2023, the **Equal Opportunities and Children's Rights Department** organised a comprehensive **workshop at the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights** on foster care adoption and closely related issues. The workshop also discussed the transfer of „good practice”: some places invite the foster parent to join the placement team so that he or she can become competent in his or

her own case. It was said that mental support for foster carers at the time of adoption is of paramount importance to help them through the process of reflection. It was reported that the OGYSZ Adoption Team applies **a consistent set of criteria** when considering a foster parent's intention to adopt.

Specialised child protection services to care for and help children living outside their families, both in the foster care and institutional settings, faced a number of serious problems in Hungary in 2023. It seems no coincidence that the ÁGOTA® National Child Protection Conference 2023 was organised under the title „Challenges and Opportunities in Child Protection Specialist Care”. **In a panel discussion at the conference**, participants touched on the main challenges of child protection specialist care: **the persistent shortage of places, the lack of permanent human resources, and the lack of services for children**. They called for a holistic approach to tackling these problems and stated that the challenges of child protection services can only be addressed in a complex, cross-systemic way, through interprofessional cooperation and partnership.

¹¹⁸ Section 47 of Act CLXVI of 2016; Section 60 of Act CXVII of 2018; Section 35 of Act CXLVII of 2020; and Section 64 of Act L of 2022. For a more detailed explanation of the 2023 legislative changes, see Legislation and measures.

¹¹⁹ AJB-219/2023; AJB-374/2023; AJB-569/2023; AJB-367/3023; AJB-3632/2023; AJB-3790/2023; AJB-3807/2023.

¹²⁰ The problem of staff shortages in specialised care has been addressed in more detail in our previous **report**: “In 2020, more than 10 percent (394) of the 3,649 posts authorised in children's homes and residential care homes were unfilled. The situation is even more worrying for special care institutions, where 164 of the 644 posts, or one in four (!), remained unfilled”.

G. Children with disabilities

„Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance with paragraph 2 of the present article shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child’s achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development.”

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23.

The number of children living in institutions for disabled persons¹²¹ has stagnated in recent years, with the latest available data from the KSH for 2022 showing that 657 children lived in such institutions, 402 of whom were aged 0-13 and 255 in the 14-17 age group¹²². The placement of children **in supported housing** continues to be ad hoc, with six children living in this type of care on 31 December 2022.¹²³

There is also no change in the placement of

children with special needs in specialised care in 2023. On 31 December 2023, the proportion of children with SNI living in specialised care was 39.2% and 6.0% in care institutions, slightly higher than in the previous year. **On 31 December 2023, 282 children with dual needs were living in specialised childcare, of whom only 2 were in foster care.**¹²⁴

¹²¹ Care home for disabled persons, home for disabled persons, rehabilitation institution for disabled persons, rehabilitation residential home for disabled persons, residential care home for disabled persons.

¹²² Data source: data collection No. 1202 OSAP of the KSH (Statement on the operational data of institutions providing long-term residential and temporary accommodation).

¹²³ Data source: the KSH data collection No. 2257 OSAP (Data on subsidised housing).

¹²⁴ Source of data: data collection No. 1209 OSAP of the KSH (Report on the situation of the regional child protection services).

In the school year 2023/2024, the number of children with SNI increased even further, with 107 421 children registered according to preliminary data from the KSH, which is 5 000 more than in the previous school year. In the 2022/2023 school year, 8.3% of primary school pupils have special educational needs, more than two thirds of whom were in integrated education, according to KSH data.¹²⁵ The most common cause of special educational needs (69%) was severe learning, attention or behavioural difficulties.

The number of children with severe and multiple disabilities in special education has fluctuated between 2,400 and 2,600 in recent years. Data from the KSH also show that **the spatial distribution of children with special educational needs is very uneven.** The data show that in the more disadvantaged counties (e.g. Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Hajdú-Bihar), the spatial disparities are lower than in the more developed counties (e.g. Győr-Moson-Sopron). **A study from 2023** has analysed these spatial disparities in detail. Although no clear explanation can be given on the basis of the data, several reasons behind the differences are likely. The reasons could include the lack of special needs teacher training in North-East Hungary until 2017, which has reduced the chances of access to local services, the different functioning of the expert committees, or the fact that children of disadvantaged parents reach the expert committees later. **Another 2023 study** also finds that **children with atypical development in dis-**

advantaged families are at risk of systemic problems. They are more likely to have hidden developmental problems or, if identified, to lack access to appropriate services.

According to the data from the KIR system,¹²⁶ in the school year 2022/2023, 6,654 children attended early development, 29 969 children were treated by a specialist from the travelling network of special education teachers or travelling network of teachers and 155,383 children attended speech therapy. Depending on the child's condition, needs and the family's workload, the time-frame for carrying out developmental tasks is: a) at least one hour per week between the ages of 0-2 years, b) at least two hours per week between the ages of 3-4 years, c) at least five hours per week between the ages of 5-6 years.¹²⁷

In 2023, the „**Methodological Guide for Disability Counselling Services**” was prepared, which aims to ensure a **uniform approach** to disability counselling at the national level, to standardise the work of counsellors from a professional, legal and ethical point of view, to describe the practice of professional task provision and the activities of counsellors. Furthermore, **the training programme for disability counsellors** was published. Since 1 January 2022, disability counselling has been a service within the scope of family and child welfare centres, the aim of which is to contribute to the independent, self-determined, active living of persons with disabilities, to the development of a supportive service environment,

¹²⁵ This ratio should be interpreted in the light of the fact that the KSH data show together children with special educational needs who are truly integrated and children with special educational needs who are educated in separate groups.

¹²⁶ Public education information system.

¹²⁷ Section 4 (6) of Decree No. 15/2013 (II. 26.) of the Ministry of Human Capacities.

to full and effective social participation and inclusion by developing special services.

In 2023, the **Disability Advisory Board** was established to assist the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in the implementation of the independent mechanism on disability, a forum of experts with outstanding theoretical knowledge or practical experience in the field of disability rights and delegates from organisations representing persons with disabilities, representing the diversity of civil society. The establishment of the Disability Advisory Board could be an important step forward, if it functions properly, as the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights receives an outstanding number of complaints, especially from parents, concerning rights violations of children with special educational needs. Most of these cases concern the lack of access to appropriate specialised educational services (e.g. speech therapist, psychologist) or to developmental training as required by the expert committee, or, in some cases, the designation of an inappropriate school or difficulties in accessing the designated school.¹²⁸

In 2023, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights examined a ministerial decree on personal care services for children, which

allows for the **care of children with special educational needs in day-care centres in separate („special”) groups** without a legal mandate.¹²⁹ The investigation concluded that the regulation is inadequate and should be regulated by law, and revealed that the specialised pedagogical service does not have the competence to (also) carry out expert committee activities in day-care centres, which is an activity beyond its competence. The Ombudsman has asked the Minister of Culture and Innovation to prepare amendments to the legislation on day-care for children that meet the requirements of equal treatment.

In 2023, **the amount of the family tax credit** for children with a long-term illness or severe disability has increased and must be claimed on the advance tax return for family tax credits from the employer or payer of regular income. In 2023, a change in the law will remove the problem that eligible families had to go through a regular procedure to repeatedly re-assess whether they are still entitled to GYOD (children's home care allowance), even if there is unfortunately no improvement in the condition of their child who is unable to support himself/herself due to a severe disability or long-term illness.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ AJB-3741/2023., AJB-1853/2023.

¹²⁹ AJB-51/2023.

¹³⁰ Under Section 25 (4) of Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits (Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits), the amended review rules were introduced for GYOD from 22.07.2023 (the amended provisions of the Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits (Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits) were introduced from 22.07.2023). The general 2-year review obligation previously applicable to the GYOD has been abolished, the explanatory memorandum of the amendment states that, in addition, the eligibility for benefits will be reviewed by the authority upon expiry of the period of validity of the specialist/expert opinion certifying the need for care and the ability to provide for oneself (the validity of the medical certificate certifying the state of health is aligned with the validity of the professional opinion) (**explanatory memorandum of Act LX of 2023**).

H. Basic health and well-being

„States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services..”

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 24.

Health and health care

„When I broke my finger they were supposed to put a splint on it and they said there wasn't one, so they either put a cast on it with my whole arm or they don't put anything on it. One of my classmates who broke her little finger told me that she didn't get a splint either and they didn't have a cast. He ended up buying it at a pharmacy because they didn't give it to him at the hospital.”

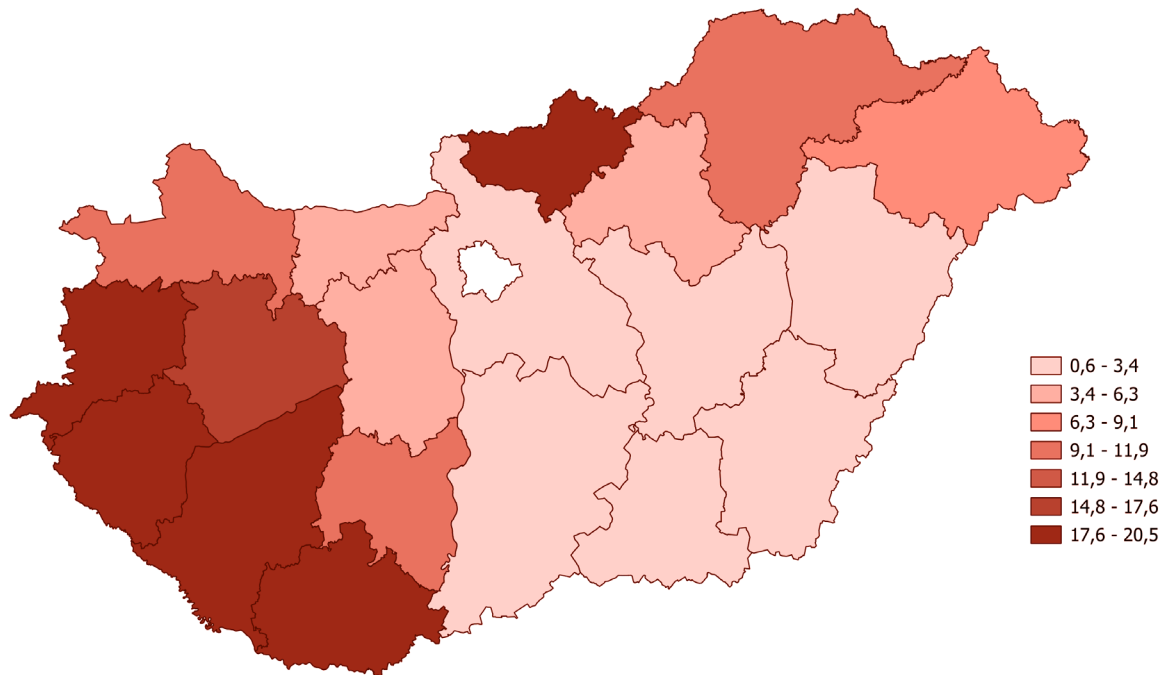
(Insight from a Kid Colleague)

We have been reporting on shortcomings in primary health care in our annual reports for years. Statistics on general practitioner coverage for 2023 are not yet available. However, data from the KSH shows that by 2022, the number of paediatric GPs will have decreased even further, resulting in an increase in the number of unfilled GP practices. **103,731 children**

aged 0-18 years old did not have access to local paediatric (and other GP) care on 31 December 2022.¹³¹ While in Central Hungary and Southern Great Plain the proportion of children without access to local GP care is below 5%, in the counties of Western Transdanubia and Southern Transdanubia the proportion of such children is 20%.¹³²

¹³¹ In such municipalities, the population is served by a general practitioner's surgery in another municipality under a contract of some kind, due to the obligation to provide care in the area.

¹³² Data source: data collection No. 1021 OSAP of the KSH (Report on the activities of general practitioners and general paediatricians).

Figure 7. Proportion of children without access to GP care by county, 2022 (%)

Source of data: No. 1021. OSAP data collection of KSH (Report on the activities of general practitioners and general paediatricians)

The rising number of unfilled GP practices may also be a reason for the **new GP on-call system** that came into force in 2023. The new system, coordinated by the National Ambulance Service (NAS), means that if there is a problem, everyone, regardless of where they live, should dial 1830 and an NAS staff member will suggest a solution or direct the caller to the right place.¹³³ The new on-call system has been introduced in several phases and its implementation **has not been smooth**, e.g. some GPs have not signed the on-call contract due to uncertainties about their funding. The new system **has reduced the number of on-call points that can be visited in person**. In

Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, for example, there is only one paediatric on-call service, at the Nyíregyháza hospital. The **President of the Association of General Paediatricians (HGYE)**, however, expects the restructuring to level out on-call services nationwide, because **paediatricians were previously unable to participate in on-call services**, as many of them are elderly, in their 70s and 80s, and not only run their own practices, but also substitute or work in schools, so they cannot fit on-call services into their time without jeopardising day care.

¹³³ A GP on-call service is available from 16:00-22:00 on weekdays and from 8:00-14:00 on weekends or public holidays, and an ambulance service is available after 22:00 on weekdays and after 14:00 on weekends at designated sites. Complaints about GP care that cannot wait until office hours can be dealt with in person. The on-call service is staffed by GPs, paramedics and registered nurses with extended competence (under the supervision of a doctor).

„I was sick a lot in November and December, and I didn't really have any serious problems, but I was at home with a fever for two weeks and I had a very bad cold. I went to see my GP, which seems to be open for two hours at three in the morning and that's when everyone goes. There are three-quarter hour delays, and then we can't fit everyone in. I actually did all my blood tests in private because it just wouldn't have worked, it wouldn't have been done in time.”

(Insight from a Kid Colleague)

Data on school medical services are available **on the website** of the National Health Insurance Fund. According to the data, **16.9% of school medical services are vacant**.

As part of the changes in the health sector, **the state took over the provision of care by the municipalities** from 1 July 2023. From then on, the professional management of the network of public health nurses will be the responsibility of the National Directorate General of Hospitals and the professional supervision of the National Centre for Public Health. The regional management of these services has been entrusted to the county hospitals, with which the former municipalities must cooperate. **The main problem** with the restructuring, according to critics, was the lack of information for stakeholders, which led to considerable uncertainty.

The Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with the subsequent war and the worsening economic situation in recent years, has had a lasting impact on young people's **mental health**. But the **care system is not prepared for the increased burden**. Not only is there no meaningful increase in capaci-

ty, but there are also **significant gaps** in the service currently in place. Public data from the National Centre for Public Health (NNH) shows that the capacity for outpatient child and adolescent psychiatric care has declined since 2022, with fewer sites providing care nationally (66) than in 2018 (69). **Inpatient psychiatric care** is available in only seven of 19 counties, plus the capital. Although its capacity has increased, with **new beds being added** in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén counties, where there were none before, the case of the boy who **escaped** from the newly opened psychiatric hospital in Miskolc highlights the difficulties of maintenance. Staff at the hospital said that the ward was understaffed. This highlights that it is not enough just to provide places, but also to ensure that **there are enough specialists**.

In recent years, **obstetric care** has been significantly restructured in order to eliminate the practice of **gratuities**. Under the new rules, a doctor cannot treat a mother in private and public care at the same time, and only doctors on duty are allowed to manage deliveries. However, this measure has led to a lot of uncertainty for mothers and, al-

though it has had a positive effect in reducing the use of gratuity, it has also had negative consequences. A significant number of doctors continued to work exclusively in the private sector, leading to a shortage **of specialists**, which in turn has resulted **in the closure** of maternity wards or **limited** on-call time. And many mothers choose private rather than public maternity services to feel safe. This, however, results in significant inequalities, as there are no private clinics in most parts of the country and therefore this care is not accessible. A **study** published in 2023 provides a comprehensive picture of **the lower quality of obstetric care for disadvantaged and Roma women**.

Following **tragedies in** previous years due to severe allergic reactions, it has become urgent to develop regulations for public education institutions to ensure **that life-threatening allergic reactions are properly recognised and promptly treated**. According to the amendment to the Public Education Act, parents have a duty to inform the institution of the medical condition of their child diagnosed with an increased risk of allergic disease that requires special attention and of the emergency measures to be taken, and to ensure that the child or pupil has life-saving medication with him/her at all times.¹³⁴

The health of minors

„We’ve been talking a lot lately about how everyone is really burnt out, especially regarding school. So everybody’s so overwhelmed that they can’t take it anymore, and they’re sick of the finals, and they’re sick of the curriculum, and they’re sick of the protests anyway. Nobody has the desire or the energy to deal with it, and everybody is just wasting away. So I think that’s about where we are right now.”

(Insight of a Kid Colleague)

In 2022, the **HBSC survey**, the most comprehensive survey of the physical and mental health of school-age children, was conducted for the tenth time, with results published in 2023. Its main findings show that nearly

two-thirds of pupils are of normal nutritional status, just over a **fifth are overweight or obese**, with a higher proportion of boys being overweight by gender. It is important to note that over the past 20 years, **overweight**

¹³⁴ Section 72 (1a) of Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education.

rates have increased significantly for all genders. **Less than half of young people are satisfied with their weight**, one in five are trying to lose it in some way, and girls have a slightly higher rate than boys. At the same time, the results show that **just over a fifth of young people do enough physical activity**, despite a slowly improving trend over the last 20 years, particularly among boys. **Daily consumption of fruit and vegetables is low for less than a third of young people**, but it is positive that daily consumption of sweets and sugary drinks is decreasing. **The share of daily energy drink consumers is 14%, a slight increase since 2014.**

The average sleep time during weekdays is **unsatisfactory**, at just over 7.5 hours, while at weekends it is just over 9.5 hours. The average sleep time of pupils on school days is more than 20 minutes shorter than in 2018.

The proportion of students rating their own health as excellent fell by more than 10% between 2002 and 2022, and has never been lower than in 2022. In addition, **more than half of all school pupils experience two or more psychosomatic symptoms (e.g. headaches or fatigue) on at least a weekly basis**. During the COVID-19 pandemic there were very negative changes in these indicators. The epidemic has had more of a negative than positive impact on young people's lives, yet most students rated its impact as neutral. **22% of school-children said they had a chronic health problem**, which is similar to the figures recorded in previous years.

The results show that **mental health deteriorates with age**, which may indicate that the school and social environment is less and less responsive to developmental needs. The deteriorating mental health of children is also highlighted by professionals. In its report on the year 2023, Kék-Vonal [Blue Line] **reports** that more and **more children are coming to them with anxiety, depression, self-esteem problems and depression**. The organisation says that the proportion of children coming to them with self-harming, suicidal thoughts is particularly worrying, and that there has also been an increase in the number of cases where acute suicidal thoughts are present or the person has reported having already attempted suicide.¹³⁵ To prepare this report, we sent a request for data to other telephone helplines. The records of the organisations providing the data show that children most often contacted the helplines in 2023 because of emotional problems, fear, anxiety and persistent unresolved tension. According to the ratings of those who answered children's calls, the „need to communicate, talk” and the „need to vent, listen” were the most strongly reported.

Suicidal thoughts are often triggered by abuse suffered by children. According to the KSH death statistics, in the 10-14 age group 1-3 persons have committed suicide in recent years, while the number of completed suicides in the 15-19 age group ranged from 20-30 persons. Based on the data, it is important to note that even in this age group, boys are more at risk, with **more than twice as many boys committing suicide as girls**

¹³⁵ The organisation points out that in these cases, the most important thing is to reach a level of trust as quickly as possible, where the child can be expected to give up anonymity and call an ambulance or police via 112. The Foundation reports that this happened 28 times in 2023.

in 2022, and this gap increases further in adulthood, with around three to four times as many men committing suicide as women. This highlights the need for a strong focus on **boys' mental health**.

The results of the HBSC survey on sexual health show that **nearly 45% of students in grades 9-11 have had sexual intercourse**, which is not a significant change from the 2018 survey. Pupils who had already had sexual contact were most often aged 15 or 16 at the time of their first sexual contact, with around a quarter having had their first sexual contact at age 14 or younger. It is important to highlight that **one fifth of students who had already had sex did not use protection during their last sexual intercourse**. Just over half of young people used condoms, 10% used the pill and 10% used both methods. In all sex and year categories, condom-only protection was the most common method. According to KSH data, **the number of children born to underage mothers will continue to decline by 2022**, showing a slow and steady decline since 2016. However, in 2022, **the number of abortions increased slightly**, although it showed a downward trend between 2016 and 2021.

The HBSC results on substance use **show that 16% of school-age children are current regular smokers (at least weekly)**, an increase compared to 2018. No significant gender differences were observed. **Nearly 40% of students have been drunk at least once in their lifetime**, again with no gender difference observed, but the prevalence of

binge drinking in the 2022 survey was significantly higher than in 2018. **About 17% of students in grades 9-11 had tried marijuana in their lifetime, and about 12% had misused a legal substance (e.g. a sedative or sleeping pill)**. The rate of trying marijuana or other drugs did not increase from previous surveys.

The number of services available in child and youth didactics has also decreased. Outpatient care is still available in only two counties, but the number of sites has also decreased. Rehabilitation inpatient care is now available in only two counties instead of four, leaving 70% of the number of beds available in 2022 in operation in 2023, according to public data from the National Health Service. The Satymaz rehabilitation institute had to close due to a **tenfold increase in running costs**.

Quality of life

„States Parties shall recognize for every child the right to benefit from social security (...).” – Extract from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2023 was a year of economic difficulties. Households were hit particularly hard by the rapid rise in **inflation**. Although inflation started to run out of control in 2022 and eased somewhat by 2023, **Hungary had the highest inflation** rate of EU countries in mid-summer: while the average inflation

rate in the EU was 6.4%, it reached 19.9% in Hungary. This rate of inflation **had fallen by the end of the year**, but it only means that the pace of inflation has slowed.

„It is terrible to see money slipping out of everyone’s hands. I think it’s very common for parents to pass on financial anxiety to their children almost by accident, and an inflation of 23 has really had a huge impact.”

(Insight from a Kid Colleague)

At the time of completing the manuscript, poverty data were only available for 2022. Based on these data, this is the first year in a long time that **poverty indicators have worsened**. 24.4% of children are affected. According to the data provided by the KSH, **the risk of poverty or social exclusion affects mainly the low-educated and the unemployed**. The **situation of children has worsened**, mainly because of the higher average number of children in poor families. The data suggest that **having children remains a significant risk of poverty**. The **MNB’s analysis** confirms this and points to the higher proportion of households with

children who spend more than their income and those with insufficient income. The **data** also highlights that income is very unevenly distributed across income quintiles,¹³⁶ with the result that **poor households spend more than half of their income on food and housing** compared to those in the top quintile, leaving them with much less money for other expenditure such as culture and entertainment.

Habitat for Humanity’s **Annual Housing Report** highlights that **people living in housing poverty have been hit hardest by inflation, including rising housing costs**.

¹³⁶ „Income quintiles” means that the population is ranked according to the annual net income per person and the persons so ranked are divided into five equal parts.

Not only have household energy prices risen dramatically, but rent prices have also increased significantly. **Lack of housing affordability** leads to household indebtedness and loss of housing. **Of Hungarian residents, 11.2% were in arrears with mortgage instalments, rent or overheads**, compared to an EU average of 8.9% in 2021, according to Eurostat data. In Hungary, 3000 evictions take place every year. In addition, many families live in unsuitable conditions, such as dwellings with leaking roofs, no toilets or overcrowded flats. The report concludes that while the cost of living, including housing, is rising, there are still no public policies to improve access to housing or reduce housing costs.

In 2023, the government also **restructured the family housing support system**, which has been a major focus in recent years, mainly to save money. The baby loan was available in its old form until 31 December 2023, after which only those under 30 can take it, and until the end of 2024 even those over 30 can access it if they can prove they are pregnant. And the family home creation allowance (CSOK) will be available only in rural CSOK settlements from 2024, and will not be available in cities. Access to these benefits will be limited mainly to families of higher status. **11.9% of those applying for a baby loan are in the lower income quintile.**¹³⁷ And the changes to the CSOK increase the territorial risk of housing poverty. It mobilises less affluent applicants towards rural CSOK small settlements with lower housing

prices, where access to public services is much worse.

Habitat for Humanity's report also points out that the government is increasingly outsourcing a growing share of its **housing poverty assistance to churches and charities**. This is confirmed by the **Gyerek-esély** [Child Chance] evaluation reports of the „Let's Make It Better for Children” strategy of recent years, and other **catch-up programmes**. These programmes were implemented mainly by the Hungarian Maltese Relief Service, Catholic Charities, the Ecumenical Aid Organisation, the Hungarian Reformed Relief Service and the Baptist Relief Service, as well as by smaller local NGOs.

According to KSH data, the number of disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged children will decrease in 2022. This is due to the fact that eligibility for regular child protection benefit, which is an income-related benefit, is a basic requirement for this. This is based on a fixed income level, which has remained unchanged in recent years, so more and more people are becoming ineligible. **84,152 children were registered as disadvantaged (HH) and 76,581 as severely disadvantaged (HHH)**. HH and HHH status is explained by parents' educational attainment, low employment and poor housing conditions. Also from the KSH data, in 2022, **the child protection system recorded 6,677 children as being at risk due to poor family financial situation and other related reasons.**¹³⁸ The highest number of children

¹³⁷ „Income quintiles” means that the population is ranked according to the annual net income per person and the persons so ranked are divided into five equal parts. The bottom income quintile is the population with the lowest annual net per capita income. Education.

¹³⁸ The source of the data is OSAP data collection 1696.

were identified as vulnerable in Budapest and in the counties of Pest, Borsod, Szabolcs and Veszprém. **The amount of the family allowance has remained unchanged since 2008. According to KSH data**, the average monthly amount of family allowance per family was HUF 23,769, less than in 2008. With the inflationary pressures described at

the beginning of this chapter, the family allowance has almost completely **depreciated** by 2023, an amount **sufficient for an average large purchase**.

I. Education, leisure, culture

„States Parties agree that 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 (...)”

- Excerpt from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

„So much has happened that I simply don’t have the capacity to read a news article, or anyone else, or to think about what this means, and we are burnt out with this, not just everyone at work, in the schools as well.”

(Kid Colleague’s insight)

The 2023/2024 school year brought **a lot of changes to** children's lives. From this school year, the system of school-leaving exams, the calculation of admission points, the law on the status of teachers,¹³⁹ which is mainly referred to as the Status Law, and even the school year have changed. The most important new feature of the **school year** is that for the first time this year, **classes will last one week longer** than in previous years. The summer break will start on 21 June, despite calls from professional organisations that this period is not suitable for organising effective school days. Most teaching takes place in non-air-conditioned

classrooms in the heat of late June, where students can no longer concentrate properly. Another change to the school year is the addition to the Public Education Act¹⁴⁰ which allows the Minister of Education to extend the school year until 15 July for reasons „unforeseeable and unavoidable”. This must be notified by 30 April of the year in question at the latest. In the course of the social consultation, our Foundation also drew attention to the fact that this provision is contrary to children's right to rest, play and leisure, and also creates uncertainty and unpredictability for children and their parents.

„If nobody does anything after what's happening now, and it continues the same way, then all the children now, if they grow up, will have a child in them who still has dreams and motivations, but can't do anything about it because they realised too late that they were growing up and nobody did anything. He just burned out from what he wanted to do and shut himself away because, „This is not allowed'.”

(Insight from a Kid Colleague)

The new National Curriculum, adopted in 2020, **will change the system of school-leaving exams** from the 2023/2024 school year. The change will primarily affect the **Hungarian Leaving Examinations**, which will place much more emphasis on lexical knowledge than before, which

the **Hungarian Teachers' Association** called flawed and harmful in 2021. To a lesser extent, the requirements for the **history** leaving exam will also change, with a restructuring of the subject areas, and the requirements for the **science** leaving exam will be renewed.

¹³⁹ „Act LII of 2023 on the New Careers of Teachers

¹⁴⁰ Section 30 (6) of Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education 30 § (6).

From the academic years 2022/2023 and 2023/2024, the **system of admission to higher education has also changed**. Among other things, the statutory minimum point threshold has been abolished, and universities can now determine the minimum number of points required to gain admission, on a subject-by-subject basis. Universities can also decide which two subjects are compulsory for the calculation of the leaving exam points and whether

they are taken into account at upper or intermediate level. They also have the possibility to choose which fifth subject should count towards the points. Another important change is that universities themselves can also award 100 points, for example for sporting achievements, results in academic or artistic competitions, language exams or language skills, for the advanced leaving exam, but points can also be awarded for military service.

„The curriculum is unachievable. I have never completed a single class in any subject that I managed to complete the curriculum for that year, and I have been going to school for ten years. „

(Insight from a Kid Colleague)

In 2023, a law on the careers of teachers was adopted and introduced from the 2023/2024 school year.¹⁴¹ This has been preceded by many debates, which this year have been accompanied by **demonstrations** to improve the quality of education and the situation of teachers. In 2023, students were again active participants in these demonstrations.¹⁴² The adoption of the law has opened up the possibility of **a mass resignation of teachers**. According to **Transparency’s public interest data request**, between January and September 2023, 4,314 teachers resigned in schools run by the school district centres, representing 5% of the total, while more than 5,000 new teachers started work at

the beginning of the school year. It is important to point out that these figures are a snapshot of the situation, with an ageing teacher population and teacher shortages being a long-term phenomenon. The **European Commission’s annual report** draws attention to the fact that teacher shortages are significant in several Member States. In Hungary, the areas with the **greatest shortages are disadvantaged areas in territorial terms, mathematics, science and foreign languages in educational terms, and vocational education and training in terms of the school system**. The journal *Educatio* 2023 has dedicated a **special issue** to teacher shortages. In the studies, several experts

¹⁴¹ For more information, see the chapter on Legislation and measures.

¹⁴² For more information, see the chapter on Freedom of association and peaceful assembly.



Source of photo: Index

drew attention to the fact that, although there is a global problem of finding teachers with the right qualifications, in Hungary the situation has been further aggravated by the recent radical cuts in budget resources, the drastic centralisation of educational management and funding decision-making, and the nationalisation of most of the institutional network. While before 2015 the teacher shortage had been growing slowly and fluctuating, it has since then increased dramatically and its structure has undergone a number of changes. While previous-

ly the teacher shortage had been decreasing upwards along the hierarchy of municipalities, since 2019 **the situation has worsened most in Budapest**, which is linked to the wider availability of alternative employment opportunities. A further concern is the **age profile of primary school teachers**. **65%** of full-time primary school teachers **were aged 45 and over** in the school year 2022/2023, according to the KSH. The proportion of 25-34 year olds was 10% lower than in the previous year, and their number was 800 fewer.

A 2023 **study** also highlighted the situation of **pre-school teachers**. This field is also characterised by an exceptionally high shortage of professionals, as well as low social recognition, weakening of professional autonomy and **deprofessionalisation**. The study points out that, although this is partly due to changes in the institutional system and low salaries, pre-school teachers are also under pressure from parents and their professionalism is questioned, which creates tensions within them that make it even more difficult to address the shortage of pre-school teachers.

The share of **children aged 3 to 5 in early childhood education and care** (93.4%) is slightly above the EU average (92.5%). The new EU target is to reach 96% of children in pre-school education by 2030. However, the **regional coverage** of kindergartens is not balanced, with **31% of children not having access to local pre-school education** in the 2022/2023 school year, **according to the KSH**. Although the national average was 83 pre-school children per 100 places and there is no shortage of places even at district level, it was not always possible to accommodate children without overcrowding at municipal level. However, **the participation of children under 3 is low**, with only 12.9% of children in childcare in 2022, significantly below the EU average (35.7%), partly due to the availability of family support for parents who stay at home with their children until the age of 3 and partly due to the insufficient number of places in day-care centres.

According to KSH data, in the 2023/2024 school year, **712,000 pupils were enrolled in full-time primary education**, 3,000 fewer than in the previous school year. The number of full-time secondary school pupils was 428,000, about the same as in the previous school year. Of pupils 45.4% were in upper secondary schools, 39.9% in technical or vocational upper secondary schools, 13.1% in vocational schools and 1.6% in vocational schools.

However, the number of **early school leavers**¹⁴³ **is steadily increasing**, making Hungary the 3rd worst performer in the European Union. In 2010, the early school leaving rate was 10.8%, in 2021 it will be 12.1% and in 2022 it will rise further to 12.4%. The trend in Hungary contrasts with the EU, where the early school leaving rate is decreasing, reaching 9.9% in 2022. The EU target is for this rate to be less than 9% by 2030.

In Hungary, the current age of compulsory schooling is 16, lowered in 2012 from 18 to the pre-1996 level. According to those in favour of lowering the age limit, this will allow young people to enter the primary labour market, as the 18-year compulsory school leaving age has not increased the proportion of people with upper secondary education. However, a **study** published in the **Labour Market Mirror** 2023 found that **lowering the compulsory school leaving age alongside short-term negative effects** had no beneficial effects, as 16-18 year olds who drop out of the education system are unable to

¹⁴³ This indicator shows the proportion of young people aged 18-24 with no more than primary education and who have not participated in any formal or non-formal education or training during the four weeks preceding the survey.

enter the labour market. The drop-out rate due to compulsory education at 16 is much higher for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, thus **increasing social inequalities**.

Several studies in the Labour Market Mirror address the issue of **school segregation**. The analyses find that **school segregation rates** have increased significantly between 2006 and 2019, especially for children in the bottom fifth¹⁴⁴ according to the social background index. The authors note that this is partly due to the segregation of schools attended by poor and rich children, and partly to the increasing spatial concentration of rich and poor, i.e. **the displacement of poor families from the residential areas of developed regions**. A significant negative result of the segregation of the disadvantaged may be indicated by the **widening differences in children's performance in competency tests by social status** over the period under review. Pupils in segregated schools **are less likely** to have completed upper secondary education, to have a school leaving certificate and to participate in higher education. The results confirm that **pupils in segregated schools suffer a real disadvantage because of the lower quality of education**.

The selective nature of the Hungarian education system is not only reflected in the segregation of poor and Roma children.¹⁴⁵ An **analysis** also shows that children from good

family backgrounds with higher abilities attend six-grade high schools, a finding confirmed by the national competence survey. The results of the competences survey also show that six-grade programmes also work better, as 10th grade pupils in such programmes achieve better results on average than children from the same primary school with the same family background and the same competences at the age of 6 who are in the same school (four-grade programme).

The results of the 2021 competency assessment **show** that **the school closures and online learning caused by the Covid-19 pandemic caused a learning loss**, particularly among 6th graders. The results show that **children with good family backgrounds and high ability were the most affected by the epidemic**. In contrast, the results of disadvantaged children were no longer affected, creating a situation where scores were more evenly distributed, not because of the catching up of disadvantaged groups, but because of the large losses in the top groups. And the **2022 results** were even worse for eighth and tenth graders. **40% of eighth-graders and just over 30% of tenth-graders scored below the baseline on reading comprehension tasks**.

According to KSH data, in 2022, **10,609 children were at risk of school absenteeism** (more than 50 lessons and other reasons).¹⁴⁶ This data raises serious questions about the effectiveness of the family sanctions intro-

¹⁴⁴ Income quintupling of the population means that the population is sorted by annual net income per person and the persons so sorted are divided into five equal parts. The bottom income quintile is the population with the lowest annual net per capita income.

¹⁴⁵ For more on this, see the chapter on Non-discrimination.

¹⁴⁶ Data source: the KSH 1696 OSAP data collection ()Data on family and child welfare services.

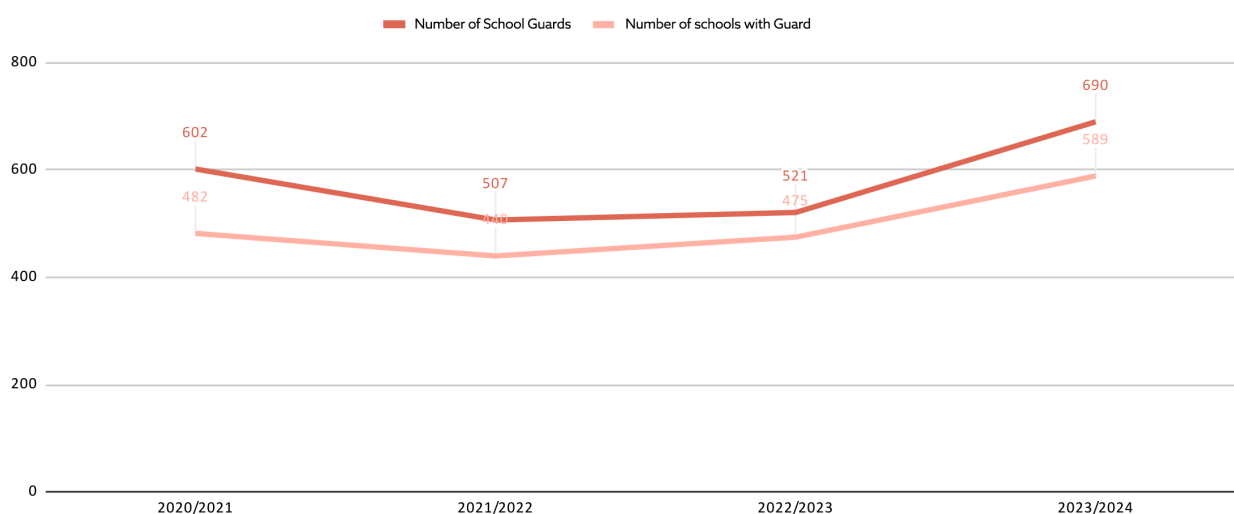
duced in 2012 to enforce compulsory school attendance.

In the year 2022/2023, **there was an increase in the number of grade repeaters, especially in the first grade**, which may be linked to the introduction of compulsory schooling for 6-year-olds in 2020, which means that neither parents nor pre-school teachers can decide whether a child is ready for school.

The **HBSC research** mentioned in the chapter on adolescent health also looked at children's well-being at school. The results show that **three quarters of pupils like school at least a little**, although attitudes towards school change negatively with age, while almost two thirds and **one in ten pupils feel that school expectations are very overwhelming**. Perceived levels of support from teachers and classmates were above average, but there has been an overall downward trend over the last eight years.

In previous years, we have already dealt with the problems of **school police** institutions, which seek to address the complex and multifactorial phenomenon of school violence, primarily through law enforcement. In recent years, the National Police Headquarters has regularly provided us with data on school guards in the context of public interest requests. For the school year 2023/2024, the number of school police officers on duty has increased and the number of schools concerned has also increased (see Figure 8). Based on the available data we can also see that there are **significant area differences**: while in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county there are school police in 104 schools, in Vas county they are only in three schools. The highest number of school police was in the first school year following the introduction of the new system: 335 cases. In the school year 2021/2022, 162 cases were reported, in 2022/2023 199 and in the school year 2023/2024, 116 cases were reported until 31 January 2024.¹⁴⁷

Figure 8. Number of school police and schools with school police in the school years 2020/2021 - 2023/2024



Source of data: ORFK

Since the change in legislation, known as **the „paedophile law”**, from the 2021/2022 school year onwards, educational institutions will no longer be able to provide classes on sexual culture, the harmful effects of drug use, the dangers of the internet and other physical and mental health promotion for non-institutional professionals. According to the regulation,¹⁴⁸ a person or organisation other than the institution’s own teaching staff and the professional providing school health services in the institution and the public body with a cooperation agreement with the institution may only provide lessons or other activities to students if the organisation is registered by the body designated by law. However, the Minister of the Interior, who was empowered to issue the regulation, **did not provide for the establishment of the register and the conditions for its inclusion in 2023.**

In this regard (in the course of preparing the Children’s Rights Report for 2022), the Ministry of Interior wrote in a letter dated **3 March 2023**, in response to our request: „To date, **no government decision has been made** on who and how to involve in the implementation of prevention activities in schools beyond the above.” However, in its letter of **23 February 2024**, it replied to our request this year that „**until the conclusion of the EU infringement proceedings** initiated in connection with Act LXXIX of 2021 on stricter action against paedophile offenders and amending certain acts for the protection of children, it is not timely to draw up detailed rules. The Government has

no control over the duration of the proceedings, and in our view, the drafting and publication of the detailed regulations can only commence after the proceedings have been concluded.” It doesn’t change the outcome, but the changing justifications (and their nature) show the hyper-politicised nature of children’s issues.

The educational integration of children who have fled to Hungary as a result of **the war in Ukraine** in 2022 is an important task. In the framework of the EDUA project, implemented by the Civil College Foundation and the Civil Platform for Public Education, **research** on the situation of children was carried out and **policy recommendations** were formulated. The most important problems are **lack of data and information**, the unpreparedness of the education system, both in terms of institutions and professionals, and the lack of a well thought-out centralised approach to the situation and a flexible adaptation to the situation. Although there are no accurate figures on the number of children who are refugees from Ukraine, it is estimated that the number is certainly well below 10,000, and the number of institutions involved is estimated to be around 1,200. The children do not form a homogeneous group, neither by mother tongue, nor by residence status, nor by social background. A specific Hungarian characteristic is that many of them are native Hungarian speakers and/or dual nationals. In addition, however, **the situation of disadvantaged Roma in Transcarpathia is a major challenge.**

¹⁴⁷ The type of measures used is not recorded.

¹⁴⁸ Section 9/A of Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education.

Recreation, free time, leisure, cultural and artistic activities

„States Parties recognize the right of the child 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.” – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31.

In 2023, the **Institute for Youth Research** published several publications on the 15-29 age group. In the area of culture and leisure, we consider it important to highlight the **data** on young people’s loneliness and lack of friends and communities.¹⁴⁹ One in four

of those surveyed cited uncertainty and an unpredictable future as a problem. The data collection date for this year’s surveys was between September and December 2020 (i.e. during the second wave of the coronavirus), which may have influenced the results.

I feel that actually as children go along their journey, they are faced with more and more challenges unprepared, and yes, that’s bad. Now I’m experiencing this myself with my leaving exams, that this is something that you have to study too much for. And besides, they don’t leave me enough time to figure out what I want. So many of my classmates and yearmates don’t even come close to knowing what they want.”

(Insight from a Kid Colleague)

A Hungarian **study** on young people’s leisure time social choice spaces, published in 2023, is interesting in that it looked at a representative sample of 600 (16-24 year olds) and a non-representative sample of 1000 (12-24 year olds) who were reached through

social media and who were explicitly interested in this area. Their research looked at the positive effects of belonging to communities. The representative sample found that **there is a rough balance between offline and online communities in the lives**

¹⁴⁹ Péter Pillók-Levente Székely: Kívánj tized! A magyarországi fiatalok nemzedéki önreflexiója és jövőképe. [Wish for ten! Generational self-reflection and future vision of young people in Hungary] National Youth Council Association. Budapest, 2022. pp. 74-75.

of young people aged 16-24. The results of the two samples „reveal significant differences, largely in favour of those who belong to communities”.¹⁵⁰ An important finding is that generational stereotypes about young people are nuanced, with high-tech groups of behaviour being accompanied by communities with different characteristics.

A representative online survey of 1,000 respondents was conducted as part of the **MTA's High-Risk Post-COVID** Priority Programmes research series on „Hungarian young people's perceptions of studying, working and living abroad”. The data collection started in May 2023.

The main findings of the **research** show, among other things, that **one in three 16-29 year olds have considered living abroad**, that studying abroad is mainly considered by young people with high status, and that „poor public mood and malaise are associated with high consideration of moving abroad.”

In 2023, **NETFIT data** for the 2021-2022 school year were also released. The survey involved 642,000 students in grades 5-12 whose physical fitness was measured. Based on the results of the National Unified Student Fitness Test, **the fitness level of upper school students deteriorated the most** in the two years studied. Compared to the 2018/2019 measurement, the percentage of students with a high BMI increased by 1.5

percentage points. It is striking that there are large differences by county: while only 6.3% of students in Budapest have a high BMI, 13.9% of students in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county have a high BMI. For more information on the health status of children, see also the chapter on the Health of minors.

In 2023, Hungarian **cinematographic** works on the theme of childhood and youth were presented, such as **Explaining Everything** (dir.: Gábor Reisz), **Running Out of Air** (dir.: Katalin Moldovai), or **Something Birds** (dir.: Dániel Hevér). Among the works specifically for children, the 5th part of the series of books „Bogyó és Babóca” and „**Tales of the Month**” were published, while theatre performances include „**I Stand Up for You**” (presented by the Invisible Group and KVTsociety in partnership with the Anonymous Roads Foundation). Stúdió K Theatre; dir.: Eda Romankovics), or the **play** based on Janne Teller's book Nothing, performed by the Puppet Theatre..¹⁵¹ No feature film specifically aimed at children was made in 2023. Several **universities** have launched an MA in Children's Culture.

¹⁵⁰ Péter Németh-Laszlo Csóka-László-Törőcsik Mária (2023). A fiatalok szabadidős közösségválasztásainak háttere. [The background of young people's leisure community choices.] University of Pécs. In: Marketing & Menedzsment [Marketing & Management] – The Hungarian Journal of Marketing and Management. 2023 / Special issue EMOK 2. p. 45.

¹⁵¹ At the arts festivals (Puppet Festival, Folk Dance Anthology, Weöres Sándor Children's Theatre Festival, etc.), it is mainly groups from primary art schools that are successful with their demanding plays. Examples include the Maltese Charity Service's **Symphony Programme** (11 venues) and the **Superar project** (3 venues), which are innovations specifically aimed at socialising disadvantaged children through music. A voluntary social quality evaluation was launched on the <https://www.szinhazineveles.hu/> portal.

J. Special security measures

„States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties..” – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 22.

Asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children

You cannot apply for asylum in the country, with very few exceptions. As before, only the Hungarian embassy in Belgrade or Kiev¹⁵² will be able to submit a so-called „Letter of Intent to Apply for Asylum”, on the basis of which the National Directorate General for Aliens (OIF) will decide whether an applicant can formally apply for asy-

lum in Hungary. This procedure does not provide a real, effective and accessible opportunity for vulnerable asylum seekers to apply for and receive protection in Hungary.¹⁵³ NGOs working on the issue have also highlighted the systemic violations faced by asylum-seeking children in 2023. These violations affect all refugees, including chil-

¹⁵² The embassy system is in breach of EU law, and the European Commission **launched** infringement **proceedings** in 2021; the case was decided on 22 June 2023. The Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that Hungary had infringed EU law by not allowing foreign nationals residing in its territory to apply for asylum in Hungary under the general rules; they too are obliged to follow the rules that set up the embassy system.

¹⁵³ **Asylum procedure in Hungary**

dren, regardless of age, gender and individual circumstances.¹⁵⁴ In 2023, 98,687 forced returns¹⁵⁵ were carried out by the **authorities**, denying them the possibility to apply for asylum. The European Court of Human Rights has also ruled that refoulement is unlawful in several judgments, and in 2023 the Court **ruled on** several cases involving children.

In 2022, an unaccompanied minor submitted an asylum application from Serbia at the Hungarian Embassy in Belgrade for the first time. **In 2023, ten unaccompanied minors were able to apply for asylum in Hungary.**

Although nearly two and a half million people crossed the Hungarian border **from Ukraine** in 2023¹⁵⁶ (including refugees from Romania); last year only 7,776 applications for recognition as refugees were submitted, but including applications submitted in 2022 but not yet adjudicated, 6,870 people were granted asylum status in 2023. **Almost a third of those recognised as asylum seekers, 2,201, were children.** If we compare these figures with 2022, we see a sharp decrease: in the year of the outbreak of the war, 33,273 applications for recognition as

an asylum seeker were submitted, of which 28,908 were granted by the OIF, and almost half of the applicants were children, 15,096.

In the experience of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, following the outbreak of the war, the government did not set up a central coordination mechanism that was efficient, transparent and accessible to all relevant aid and assistance. Although a new post of Government Commissioner for persons fleeing to Hungary from the Russian-Ukrainian war was created in May 2023, the experience of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee is that the Government Commissioner is not fulfilling their role effectively and central coordination is still not in place. **There is still no comprehensive and comprehensible central information campaign on how to apply for asylum status and the basic rules for staying in Hungary.**¹⁵⁷

The lack of proper coordination has greatly hindered the work of aid organisations and the ability of people in need to get up-to-date, usable and genuinely appropriate assistance. The fact that refugees from Ukraine were **scattered** throughout the

¹⁵⁴ During 2023, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee staff met refugees on the Serbian side of the southern border on several occasions, who were clearly showing signs of violence by authorities, and their independent testimonies confirm the systemic use of violence by authorities at the border.

¹⁵⁵ In 2020, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that the refoulement was unlawful, and infringement proceedings are still ongoing for non-implementation of the ruling. On 30 November 2023, the Court of Justice of the European Union held a hearing on the case, during which it put questions to representatives of both the European Commission and the Hungarian government.

¹⁵⁶ Including the Ukrainian-Hungarian border and Ukrainian citizens entering the Romanian-Hungarian border.

¹⁵⁷ It is also justified to review the scope of the Child Protection Act with regard to children in shelters, most of whom are at risk, because it is not only necessary to support them with special protection measures and benefits, but also to ensure that they are covered by the general child protection rules.

country by the authorities, with significant differences in the quality and availability of services between locations and municipalities, has not changed since the year of the outbreak of the war, and has had a profound impact on the situation and access to justice of children from Ukraine. The fact that the **quality of accommodation varies widely** also results in some children being particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged in relation to their peers. Some accommodation facilities are not even able to meet the basic needs of children: there is no proper heating, families live together in small, crowded rooms. Sometimes, a child may be in a situation of obvious vulnerability (e.g. parents not taking care of him/her, disappearing from the accommodation for long or short periods), but the problem does not reach the child protection authorities; it is often up to local NGOs and volunteers to get the right organisation involved.¹⁵⁸

In addition, if the accommodation is far from a well-serviced settlement, getting children to preschool or school becomes even more difficult, so parents often choose to send their children only to the online Ukrainian school. Moreover, being placed in very distant settlements also creates serious barriers to **integration**.

From 1 August 2023, a new provision will apply stating that **accommodation establishments can only claim state aid for refugees from Ukraine who are not covered**

by the so-called protection category, provided that certain conditions are met and for a limited period of time. An exception is made for those who take up employment, but even in this case, the subsidy is only available if there is a contract between the employer and the accommodation provider, so there is a serious administrative obstacle for people from Ukraine in this area too. The protected persons are: pregnant women (from the moment her pregnancy is established), **persons under 18 years of age** and their parents living in the same household, disabled persons, persons over 65 years of age.¹⁵⁹ Although it does not follow from the wording of the legislation that in the case of a child under 18 years of age, only one parent is entitled to the accommodation allowance, in practice this is unfortunately how the authorities have interpreted the rules. As a result, since the accommodation provider was only entitled to claim the state allowance for one parent, families were split up, usually with the fathers being asked to leave by the accommodation provider.¹⁶⁰ Families are thus faced with an impossible situation if one parent does not get a (registered) job in the family's place of residence: either they are separated or the whole family follows the parent deprived of subsidised housing, seriously jeopardising their integration, especially the physical and mental health and education of the children.

Identification and protection of unaccompanied and separated Ukrainian children

¹⁵⁸ A case in point in the practice of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

¹⁵⁹ Section 3 (5) of Government Decree No. 104/2022 (12.III.) on support for the accommodation of persons arriving in a neighbouring country during an emergency in view of a humanitarian disaster and other related measures.

¹⁶⁰ A case in point in the practice of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

did not work in 2023. Neither the police nor the OIF carried out vulnerability identification between entrants and asylum seekers on the basis of clear instructions and a clear protocol. The Hungarian Helsinki Committee has encountered on several occasions the phenomenon of children in sport arriving in Hungary with their coach (without a legal representative) and subsequently not being assigned child protection guardians. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, the OIF allowed any self-employed person to become the „guardian” of an unaccompanied minor by filling in a self-made **document**, which is contrary to the rules on the appointment of guardians and also a significant risk factor for trafficking. **The OIF does not have statistics on how many of the 2,201 minors recognised as asylum seekers arrived unaccompanied** – a worrying and illegal phenomenon in itself.¹⁶¹

Access to education continued to be problematic for both Ukrainian and Hungarian children who are refugees from Ukraine. For the 2022-23 school year, the Education Office registered 2,746 foreign nationals in the public education system; no specific data on how many of these were Ukrainian nationals was provided. **While in September 2022, 2,746 children under temporary or international protection¹⁶² started the school year in public education in Hungary, this number decreased to 2,484 (including asylum seekers) by 1 September 2023.**

Based on the Hungarian Helsinki Committee’s experience on the ground across the country, even in 2023, Ukrainian citizen children were still rarely attending Hungarian primary or secondary schools because they were not provided with a programme that would have enabled them to meaningfully join the education system. Many participated in Ukrainian online education, complemented by informal educational activities organised by Hungarian aid organisations and volunteers.

In contrast, **access to preschools was reported to be smoother**; however, the fact that Ukrainian refugees do not have social security or address cards (which they are not entitled to as a rule) was often an administrative obstacle to enrolment, but they were still asked for these documents in preschools.

A significant part of the **Hungarian-speaking community in Transcarpathia** is of Roma ethnicity and comes from extreme poverty. In addition to the above, general discrimination against Roma made it difficult for Roma to access education. Ethnic discrimination was also reflected in the fact that Roma children were often not even willing to be admitted to „district” schools, even though they were legally obliged to integrate them into education. In the case of Ukrainian-speaking children, the schools’ refusals often referred to the fact that they could not

¹⁶¹ Pursuant to Section 83 (1) (d) of Act LXXX of 2007 on Asylum (hereinafter referred to as the „Asylum Act”), the OIF is obliged to register unaccompanied minor applicants in this way.

¹⁶² Refugee, asylum-seeking or applicant third-country minor (the Education Office does not have statistics on children with protected status).

provide adequate interpretation and translation and therefore could not enrol the children. However, in the vast majority of cases, language barriers did not even appear in the access to education of Roma children in Transcarpathia, as Hungarian is the mother tongue of a significant part of the Roma community in Transcarpathia. In order to facilitate access to education, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee prepared **a model leaflet for** educational institutions, outlining the current legislative environment.

On the issue of education and **learning the Hungarian language**, it was pointed out that this service is free of charge for the two years following the date of recognition of the refugee status, according to the legislation in force.¹⁶³ The organisation of the education would be the responsibility of the asylum authority, however, according to the OIF, **there is no specific institution designated for free Hungarian language education** and no request has been received by the OIF in the past year for the reimbursement of the training fees of the asylum seekers who have attended such courses. The fact that this service is in reality not available to Ukrainian refugees indicates that the state

continues to have serious shortcomings in the integration of Ukrainian refugees.

As in the case of education, **health** services have often been the subject of unauthorised claims for reimbursement of the cost of care that is free of charge under the law. In many cases, health care providers were still unaware in 2023 that refugees from Ukraine with asylum, Hungarian or Ukrainian documents (e.g. passport, identity card) are entitled to a wide range of health care services free of charge.¹⁶⁴ Although the Hungarian legislator has provided for the creation of a „technical identifier” to replace the social security number,¹⁶⁵ many health service providers still encountered problems in providing free care to refugees from Ukraine last year. As with the education sample sheet, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee also prepared **a sample sheet** to facilitate access to healthcare.

In July 2023, the government decided that **400 Ukrainian children and their companions** will be able to spend several holidays in Hungary in the summer of 2023, with the necessary conditions provided by the central budget.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Section 51 (1) of Government Decree No.301/2007 (XI. 9.) on the implementation of Act LXXX of 2007 (Metvhr.): within twenty-four months from the date of recognition, the participation of the asylum seeker in 520 hours of basic or intermediate Hungarian language education organised by the institution designated by the asylum authority is free of charge, if he/she continuously studies according to the conditions set by the institution or meets the examination requirements prescribed by the language service provider.

¹⁶⁴ A case in point in the practice of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.

¹⁶⁵ Government Decree 171/2022 (IV. 29.) on certain data management issues related to health care in the context of the crisis in Ukraine.

¹⁶⁶ Government Decision No. 1273/2023. (VII. 14.) on measures related to the holiday of Ukrainian children in Hungary.

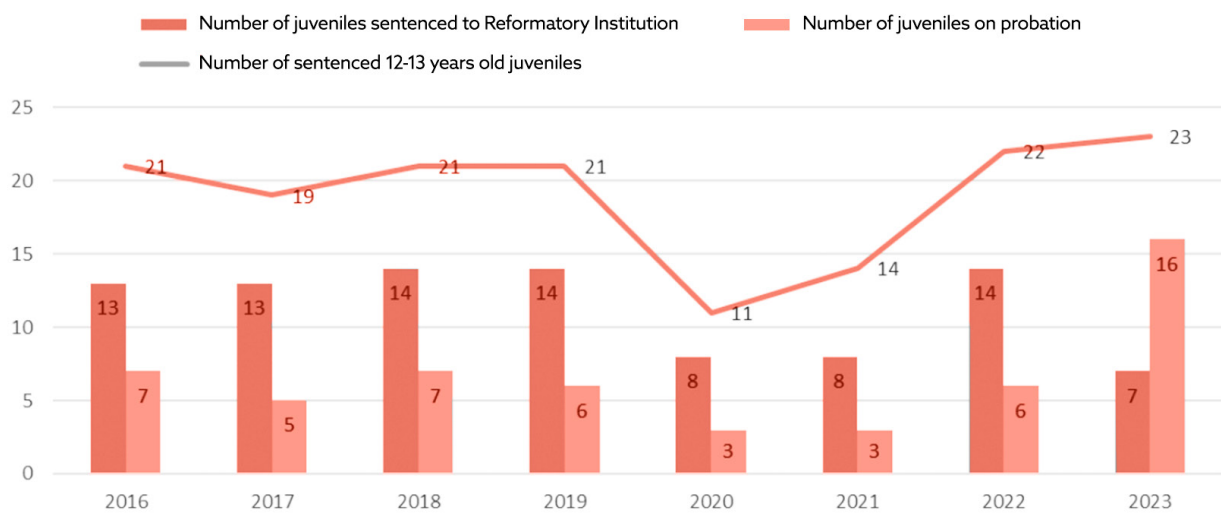
Justice for children

In our previous reports, we reported that juvenile delinquency has decreased and stagnated in recent years. In contrast, **the number of crimes committed by juveniles increased in 2023.**¹⁶⁷ The data does not show how many under-18s this represents in total, as there is no record of the number of offenders since 2018. A **study** examining the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on crimes committed by children and juveniles points out that the number of crimes committed by those present decreased during the period of lockdowns, with stronger parental control playing a role. At the same time, the authors find that Internet use without parental supervision increased the number of crimes that could be committed in the online space, e.g. online harassment, abuse of pornographic content. The research also reveals that **young people in children’s homes**

have been the hardest hit by the epidemic in terms of offending. This group is particularly at risk of offending, but they have also experienced higher rates of offending over this period, including an increase in violent crimes against carers.

Data from the National Office of the Courts (OCJ) in recent years show that **around 20 children aged 12-13 years are sentenced to final sentences each year**, with the exception of 2020 and 2021, when the courts were also operating more restrictively due to the closures caused by the Covid-19 epidemic. In their case, the two most commonly imposed measures are detention in a reformatory and probation (see Figure 9), in addition to probation, probation supervision is also ordered in most cases.

Figure 9. Number of 12-13 year old offenders with final convictions in the current year, 2016-2023



Source of data: OBH

The number of juvenile offenders aged 14-17 years decreased between 2016 and 2020, with 4,065 juvenile offenders sentenced in 2016 and 2,345 in 2020, and has stagnated between 2,000 and 2,300 since 2020, according to the OFH. Probation and probation are also the most common measures imposed. Since 2019, between 400 and 500 juveniles are sentenced to deprivation of liberty each year, but a significant proportion of these are suspended. According to data from the National Prison Service Headquarters (BVOP), **12 juveniles were admitted to a prison for a custodial sentence in 2023**, 9 were serving their sentence on 31 December 2023 and 32 were in custody in a prison. Most of them had spent 1-6 months in prison. According to KSH data, **in 2023, one person aged 12-13 was in a correctional institution** for the execution of a final sentence and 8 for arrest, and 72 14-17 year olds were in a **correctional institution** for the execution of a final sentence and 116 for arrests.¹⁶⁸

We also requested data from the BVOP on youth contact, but for record-keeping reasons they could only provide data for 2023 for those detainees who were in prison on the day the data were released. This means 29 out of 102 persons who were in prison last year, with a total of 123 persons with whom they had contact, which means an average of 4 contact persons, including the defence

lawyer. The most frequent contact persons other than lawyers were the mother (18 persons), the father (10 persons), the brother (18 persons) and the guardian (13 persons).

A new **National Crime Prevention Strategy**¹⁶⁹ was adopted in 2023, as the previous ten-year document expired. The new Strategy¹⁷⁰ also defines the crime prevention tasks for ten years, with the prevention of juvenile delinquency among its designated priorities, as in the previous Strategies. The new document departs from the law enforcement approach of the 2013 Strategy and, by broadening the scope of responsibilities, the concept of **social crime prevention** has been re-emphasised in the text.

¹⁶⁷ Data source: the Uniform Criminal Investigation and Prosecution Statistics (ENyÜBS).

¹⁶⁸ Data source: data collection No. 1511 OSAP of the KSH (Report on the situation in correctional institutions).

¹⁶⁹ Government Decision No. 1291/2023 (VII. 19.) on the National Crime Prevention Strategy (2024-2034).

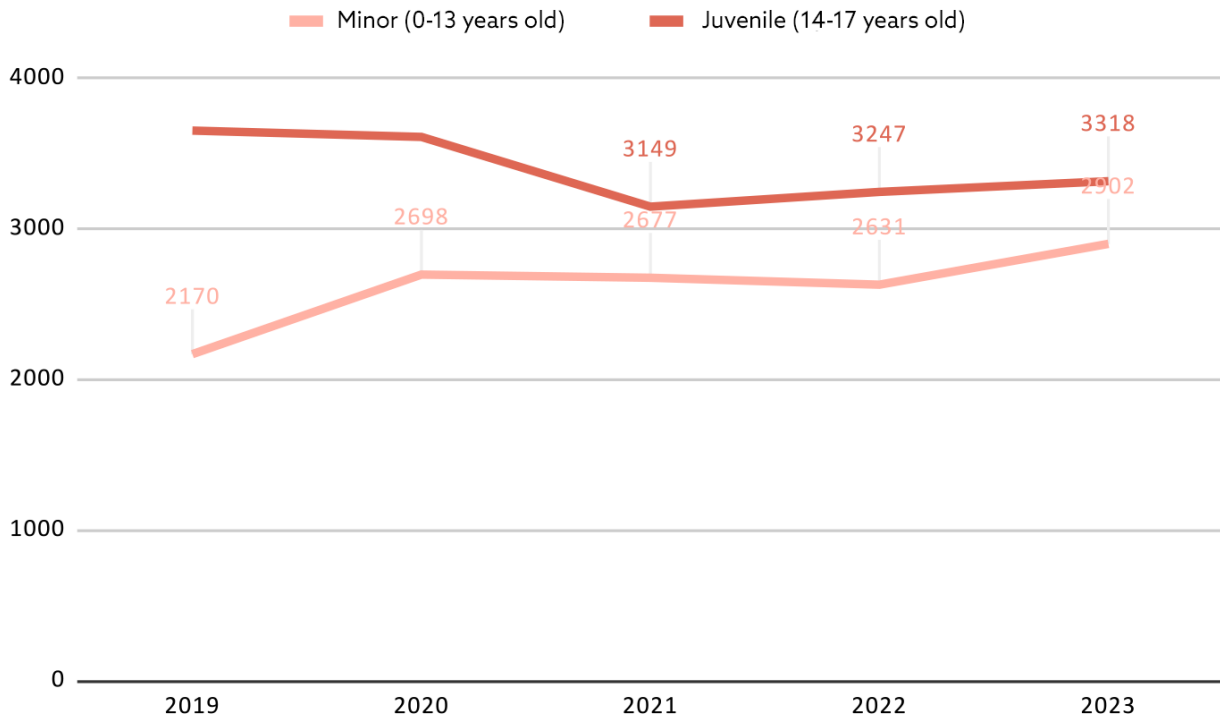
¹⁷⁰ National Crime Prevention Strategy 2003-2013, National Crime Prevention Strategy 2013-2023.

Child victims and witnesses of crime

In 2023, the number of child victims and juvenile victims of crime increased (see Figure 10). Child endangerment was still the most common crime committed against 0-13 year olds, while 14-17 year olds were most often victims of theft. In each age group, the second most common crime was assault. In 2023, the number of child pornography victims in the 0-13 age group doubled compared to previous years, making it the third

most common crime. The data show that the victims were most often girls, and in most cases the perpetrator was a peer within an institution (e.g. school, children’s home). The fourth most frequent crime was sexual violence, the perpetrator of which, for both boys and girls, was an ‘acquaintance’. For female victims, a common perpetrator was the foster parent and the cohabiting step-parent, this was not the case for male victims.¹⁷¹

Figure 10. Number of minors registered as victims of crime by age group, 2019-2023



Source of data: ENyÜBS

¹⁷¹ Data source: the Uniform Criminal Investigation and Prosecution Statistics (ENyÜBS).

The **victim support service** operated with a similar number of cases as last year. According to the Ministry of Justice, 772 cases of minor children (or their representatives) were referred to the Victim Support Service, of which 736 cases were referred to a Victim Support Centre or Point. Most of the people who contacted the Service (751) received advocacy services, 13 received victim status certification services, 24 received immediate financial assistance and 1 received state compensation.

The Ministry of Justice also released information in response to a public interest information request that the 24/7 **Victim Support Line** (+36 80 222 5225) handled 4 calls for minors in 2023, much fewer than in previous years when the number of calls increased year on year, for example 55 calls were handled in 2022. In addition, a request for data was also made to the Family Friendly Hungary Centre, which runs the **National Crisis Management and Information Helpline** (+36 80 205520). Victims of relationship violence and human trafficking can call this line for help. In their response, they informed that they handle 10,000-11,000 calls per year, but as the caller does not need to identify themselves, they do not have real, verified information about the caller.

In 2023, there were **five Hearing and Therapy Centres** run by the OGYSZ (see Table 2) These centres are based on the Barnahus model and provide hearing, assessment and therapy for children who have been victimised, traumatised or in conflict with the law. The hearing is conducted by „counsellors” with specialised training. Their training is provided by the OGYSZ and the National Police Headquarters in cooperation with the National University of Public Service. According to the OGYSZ, 15 counsellors and 7 psychologists were employed in the Hearing and Therapy Centres in 2023. The number of children heard increased in 2023: 190 children **were heard** in 2022, **301 in 2023 and 99 children received psychological support**. The OGYSZ does not keep records of offences involving children.

Table 2. Number of children interviewed and receiving psychological support in Hearing and Treatment Centres in 2023, by age group

Age groups	Number of children listened to	Number of children receiving mental health support
3-5 years old	22	6
6-8 years old	46	15
9-11 years old	57	25
12-14 years old	108	35
15-17 years old	68	18

Source of data: OGYSZ (National Child Protection Services)

In 2023, several high-profile cases were reported in the media. Earlier this year, a 39-year-old man working as a teaching assistant revealed on Tik-Tok that **he had had sexual relations with a 15-year-old student**. He was later dismissed from his job. And in the summer, **a man was caught grooming boys in children's homes and**

committing sexual offences against them – several cases involving child victims received media coverage last year.¹⁷² It would be important to analyse and address the structural, systemic causes behind these tragic events so that fewer such incidents occur in the future.

¹⁷² For more information, see the chapter on Abuse and neglect.

K. Follow-up to the Commission's previous concluding observations

Optional Protocol on Sexual Abuse against Children

„States Parties shall prohibit the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in accordance with the provisions of this Protocol.”

- Extract from the Optional Protocol.

In 2023, 299 children aged 0-13 and 118 children aged 14-17 will be victims of child pornography offences, according to the ENYÜBS.

According to KSH data, in 2023, 10 children were placed in special care because they were victims of human trafficking.¹⁷³ **Between 2020 and 2023, a total of 110 child victims were prosecuted for human trafficking.** Between 2020 and 2023, 96 child

victims were prosecuted for exploitation of child prostitution - of which 15 children were prosecuted in 2023.

According to the Ministry of Justice, in 2023, 10 cases of persons under the age of 18 were granted victim status for offences related to sexual exploitation (exploitation of child prostitution, human trafficking, child pornography).

¹⁷³ Source: KSH data collection No. 1209 OSAP (Report on the situation of specialised territorial child protection services).

In 2023, there were few studies on the subject. There was **a paper** on the links between trafficking and child abuse, **an analysis of** criminal policy on sex offenders, and a **study** on trafficking in human beings through online spaces to assist pros-

ecutors. The authors of the latter paper underline the need for an IT-specialist in addition to the Hungarian anti-trafficking investigation units, as knowledge of the online space is essential for the proper detection of crimes.

Optional Protocol on the protection of children in armed conflict

„The States Parties to the Convention shall take all practical measures to ensure that persons under the age of fifteen years shall not become directly involved in hostilities.”

- Extract from the Optional Protocol.

As in our previous reports, the focus for 2023 is on educating young people for patriotism and promoting the pursuit of defence studies. The three-tiered structure of the Defence **Cadet Programme** and the **number** of participating students and schools are testimony

to this. According to data from the Ministry of Defence, **in 2023 a total of 9,506 students participated in the programme**, an exceptionally high number compared to previous years. The largest number of these, 3,533, joined as ninth graders (see Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of the number of students participating in the Cadet Programme by school year and grade

	Year 9.	Year 10.	Year 11.	Year 12	Total
2018/2019	488	386	429	420	1,723
2019/2020	540	367	469	387	1,763
2020/2021	809	521	536	370	2,236
2021/2022	2,186	1,125	844	463	4,618
2022/2023	2,987	2,171	1,141	810	7,019
2023/2024	3,533	2,812	2,120	1,041	9,506

According to data from the Ministry of Defence, in September 2023, the trial teaching of defence started in six secondary schools (three high schools and three technical schools), with a total of 824 ninth and eleventh grade students.

The **subject** is taught by the military instructor assigned to the institution.¹⁷⁴ The first semester consists of one hour of theoretical instruction per week (16 sessions in total), while the second semester consists of 20 hours of mostly practical sessions, including **shooting**. The government has decreed¹⁷⁵ **the use of the** necessary equipment. The Ministry of National Defence and the Hunga-

rian Defence Forces **in their information note** specifically point out that „the textbook also includes shooting theory, and the instructor said that the reactions to the latter course were likely to make it particularly popular. In addition, the school grounds can be used to safely create the necessary conditions for shooting as required.”

According to the statistics of the Education Office, in 2023, **398 students chose the subject of defence as their matriculation subject at the** upper and intermediate levels, and including defence and military subjects from previous years (252 in 2022 and 208 in 2021). In the admission procedure to higher educa-



Source of photo: honvédelem.hu

¹⁷⁴ Section 9 (16)-(18) of Government Decree No. 401/2023 (VIII. 30.) on the implementation of Act LII of 2023 on the New Careers of Teachers.

¹⁷⁵ Government Decree No. 404/2023 (VIII. 30.) on emergency provisions related to the introduction of the subject of Defence, other than Act CXL of 2021 on Defence and the Hungarian Defence Forces, and Government Decree No. 405/2023 (VIII. 30.) amending the Government Decrees related to the introduction of the subject of Defence, the latter supplemented the provisions of Government Decree No. 253/2004 (VIII. 31.) Government Decree - on weapons and ammunition.

tion, extra points can be awarded for completing voluntary military service.¹⁷⁶ According to the Education Office, 138 people were awarded **extra points in** the general admission procedure and 16 in the admission procedure for the supplementary admission.

As in previous years, the Hungarian Defence Forces organised **Defence Camps in 2023**. The Minister of Defence **said** that from June to August, nearly 4,500 people (about one and a half times the number of 2022) camped in 153 rotations at 59 locations. Students could choose **from 17 different themes**, with the most popular being the warrior camp.

The **Defence Sports Association** continued the former **League of the Brave programme**. A spokesperson for the federation said that the competition is now a precursor to cadet training. There are currently five defence sports centres in Hungary (Újfehértó, Baja, Balassagyarmat, Szarvas, Szigetvár). According to **the** Sports Federation, the sports centre is open not only to cadets but also to primary school pupils, who „chose the firing range on their first visit, where they were able to learn about laser and air weapons in an unusual physical education lesson”.

István Simicskó, President of the Defence Sports Association, **said** at an event that „70-75% of the young people who participate choose the military profession after their training, thus the programme supports the recruitment work of the Defence Forces and also acts as a supply base.”

The **Concluding Observations of** the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in the last reporting period drew the attention of the State¹⁷⁷ to the fact that children should not be allowed to participate in military training sessions in which real firearms are used. It further highlighted that the Defence Cadet Programme¹⁷⁸ must comply with the **Optional Protocol**.

¹⁷⁶ Section 20 of Government Decree No. 423/2012 (XII. 29.) on the higher education admission procedure.

¹⁷⁷ „43.(b) Ensure that children are not allowed to participate in military training where firearms are used, including the Military School Program, the Kratochvil Károly Defence High School and College, and establish regular monitoring of the civilian organisation Defence School's „Patriot School” program to ensure that its curriculum and teaching staff comply with the provisions of the Optional Protocol;”

¹⁷⁸ We first wrote **about the Defence Cadet Programme in our 2018** report. The basic aim of the Defence School (as it defines itself) is to help children understand that „defence is one of the foundations of our national existence” from primary school age. Within the framework of patriotic and defence education, special attention is paid to the promotion of defence-related sports, military tradition-keeping and war grave care.

L. Ratification of the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure

Optional Protocol on the communication procedure

The third Optional Protocol, unlike its predecessors, does not derogate from a point of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but establishes a complaints mechanism for violations of children's rights, and entered into force in April 2014. This allows children to submit their complaints directly to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which investigates them and then instructs governments to take appropriate action. **Currently 53 countries have signed and 52 have ratified.** Hungary has not yet signed

the Optional Protocol, still the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights has a 2021 briefing¹⁷⁹ that the draft of the Ministry of Labour was already before the Government, but has not been adopted, signed and ratified.¹⁸⁰

The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child drew Hungary's attention to the fact that ratification of the Protocol is essential to further strengthen the implementation of children's rights.

¹⁷⁹ AJBH (30.03.2021) - In February 2024, we also contacted the Ministry of the Interior, whose staff referred the request to the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, but we did not receive a reply to our request until the Report was closed.

¹⁸⁰ In the chapter on Data Disclosure and Access to Public Data, we have written more about the fact that we have not received a response to our data request for the Optional Protocol for years.

Cooperation with regional organisations

In July 2023, Hungary and the **UN Children’s Fund** extended **their cooperation** with the UN Children’s Fund.

On 26 September 2023, the **UNICEF Refugee Programme Office** and the Ministry of Interior of Hungary **signed** a Memorandum of Understanding focusing on further strengthening child protection, child welfare, educa-

tion, anti-trafficking and health services for refugee children and their families.

Eurochild is the largest umbrella organisation of children’s rights NGOs in Europe and lobbies at EU level. It has several Hungarian members and produces an annual country report on children’s rights in EU Member States, including **Hungary**.

Sustainability

The European Commission launched the **European Climate Pact** in 2020. The Pact aims, among other things, to support people, communities and organisations by sharing science-based information. To this end, a separate chapter on sustainability is included for the first time in this year’s Children’s Rights Report. Children and young people are the most affected by the climate crisis and it is their future that is at stake, so **it is important to keep children’s interests and rights in mind when working towards sustainability**.

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also provides a clear framework for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and aims to ensure a future for children through a universal agenda with clear goals and targets. **Children’s rights are a prerequisite and a cornerstone for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**.

The European Commission has also prepared its **annual country report** on Hungary for 2023, in which it assesses, among other things, the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations (see Figure 12). According to the country report, **Hungary is making progress on most of the SDGs, but lags behind some EU countries**. The Country Report shows progress in the indicators related to environmental sustainability (Goals 2, 6, 11, 12 and 13) and continues to perform well in the indicators related to growth and poverty eradication (Goals 1 and 8). The report stressed the need for action in the areas of health, education and gender equality (Goals 3, 4 and 5) and drew attention to the fact that Hungary is notably lagging behind in achieving Goal 10 on reducing inequalities.

Figure 12. Hungary's performance in each area of the SDGs¹⁸¹

In terms of performance in achieving the SDGs, **Hungary currently ranks 22nd out of 193 UN Member States, with a score of 79.4.** The ranking can reach a maximum of 100 points, which would mean that all SDGs have been achieved.

The climate crisis is a child rights crisis, UNICEF International has produced the first climate change risk assessment in 2021 to focus specifically on children. The research ranks **Hungary 130th out of 163 countries with a climate risk index of 3.2/10.**¹⁸²

While sustainability awareness is essential to ensure a liveable future for the planet, the public discourse on the climate crisis has led to an increasing number of people becoming climate-phobic, and children are no exception. According to **Publicus Research** and UNICEF Hungary 2022 research, **90% of Hungarian young people aged 13-25 feel**

some level of anxiety about climate change, and 30% feel particularly anxious. Young people expressed fear and anxiety (60%), helplessness (53%) and anger (30%), while only 9% felt calm.

Young Hungarians continued to actively participate and organise **events** related to the climate crisis in 2023. UNICEF Hungary organised the **Climate Heroes Conference** as one of the stages of the Climate Education Children's Participation Programme, while on 15 September, Hungary joined **the global climate strike** organised by Fridays for Future Hungary and the United Student Front. The aim of the student movement was to raise awareness among people and decision-makers that quality education is essential for society to be able to prevent or adapt to the impacts of the climate and ecological crisis.

¹⁸¹ The Hungarian translation of the icons is available **in the relevant KSH publication.**

¹⁸² Children in the Central African Republic are the most exposed to the climate crisis, with an index score of 8.7, while Iceland is ranked 163rd with a score of 1.0.



Photo source: Facebook

„Climate change is becoming increasingly pressing for younger generations. It is our future and many feel it is not taken seriously enough. There are rarely separate bins in public places and institutions, and not enough is said about their importance in schools. The result is that there is a part of our generation that does not understand the importance of the environment or how big of a problem it is.

In Budapest, it is clear that work is underway to make the city green, with more and more trees on the streets and parks being renewed. These are important developments, but they are small compared to what should be done to slow down and stop climate change.”

(Insight from a Kid Colleague)



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