

Children's Rights Report Pilot – 2024

Management summary

From a children's rights perspective, every year is a special year. Each year is 6% of a child's childhood. Each year brings new opportunities to move closer to a world where children receive the care and attention they deserve to grow up in a safe and loving environment.

Respecting children's rights is not just a legal obligation, but a social responsibility and a shared moral imperative: to ensure the well-being and dignity of future generations.

Our report calls on us to put on our children's rights glasses again and again: this will enable us to see more clearly what children really need in order to achieve full human dignity. According to Christian teachings, every child is a unique gift, created in God's image and likeness, and endowed with infinite dignity. This values-based approach can help us to see legislation, institutional practices and social debates not as mere technicalities, but as a service to human dignity.

The year 2024 in Hungary was a time of legal change, institutional transformation and social debate. New legislation, constitutional court rulings and institutional protocols have shown that protecting the best interests of the child is often a question of balancing parental rights, state action and societal expectations. In striking this balance, we must not lose sight of those whom the legislation concerns and for whom the measures are designed: children. Children, who are all precious images of God and who have a fundamental right to be raised in a family and grow up in a safe environment.

Our first pilot report on children's rights had a dual purpose: (i) firstly, to map and summarise the legal and institutional changes in 2024 in a descriptive manner, (ii) (ii) secondly, to examine, in the form of pilot research, how children's rights operate in practice in church-run institutions in Hungary. This pilot research was based on a questionnaire methodology and four church maintainers joined: the Archdiocese of Hajdúdorog, the Diocese of Vác, the Hungarian Province of the Piarist Order and the Hungarian Baptist Relief Service. Their participation ensured that we could gain insight into how child protection, participation rights, and institutional action against abuse operate within different organisational and denominational contexts.

The experience of the year under review shows both positive trends and shortcomings that need further work. The children's rights glasses we wear remind us that behind every decision is the fate, dignity and happiness of a specific child. Therefore, the enforcement of children's rights cannot be a narrow advocacy or a mere administrative task: it is the basis for social trust, justice and a secure future for children. In Christian tradition, children are the greatest gift to a family, but they also represent a responsibility: it is the shared mission of society, the state, the church, and civil society to protect the rights and dignity of children in all circumstances.

Trends in children's rights

Legal and regulatory trends

2024 saw several legislative changes in Hungary that directly affect the protection of children's rights. Viewed through the lens of children's rights, these changes partly strengthen the protection of children, but partly highlight the shortcomings of the system.

Positive trends

1. The child-centred nature of the Constitutional Court's decisions sent a clear message: protecting the life and health of children takes precedence over all other interests. However, consistent application of the decisions is essential for this to happen.
2. Legislative tightening has led to the exclusion of presidential pardons for 'paedophile' offences against children, and compulsory psychological fitness tests and background checks for child protection workers. However, for these measures to be effective and child-centred, it is essential to have sufficient numbers of professionals, regular training and stable funding.
3. The legal establishment of inflation-linked child support payments advanced by the state serves to increase financial security, protecting vulnerable children from economic uncertainty. Regulations can only fulfil their role in the long term if consistent application and uniformity in court and administrative practice are ensured during implementation.
4. The introduction of a new misdemeanour serves to protect children in substitute care from violence and sexual abuse: sanctions will be imposed on those who take in children who have run away from specialised child protection facilities if they fail to comply with their reporting obligation.
5. Health data protection will be strengthened by the guarantees of electronic doctor's notes and the EESZT system, which will allow children's personal and health data to be more secure. However, these steps will only be truly effective if technology systems are kept up to date and data security standards are consistently met by all institutions.

Negative trends

1. A serious and long-standing problem is the misinterpretation of the term ‘paramount interests’, which hinders the consistent implementation of the principle that the particular needs of the child should serve as a compass in all decisions. Clarifying terminology is essential to remedy this situation.
2. The lack of coordination on children’s rights and the absence of a single, independent children’s ombudsman continues to weaken the system. An independent, transparent and empowered institution capable of coordinating the enforcement of children’s rights at national level is essential to improve the situation.
3. A comprehensive and coherent strategy on children’s rights is missing, as the implementation of the 2030 Action Plan is not translated into concrete responsibilities, indicators and resources. For the strategy to be truly effective, clear lines of responsibility, measurable objectives and adequate resources are essential.
4. Sectoral fragmentation continues to undermine cooperation between child protection, education, health care, and justice services, weakening the consistent enforcement of children’s rights. Inter-ministerial mechanisms to ensure effective coordination and unity of action are essential to improve the situation.
5. The enforcement of the rights of children with disabilities continues to be inconsistent: although progress has been made in terms of legislation, the lack of actual care capacity means that many children are still unable to enjoy a family-like and loving environment. Change would require the provision of an adequate number of foster parents, professionals and support services, as well as the prioritisation of family placements for children.

Consequences

The positive trends listed above confirm that progress has been made in protecting children’s rights, particularly through Constitutional Court rulings, stricter legislation, inflation-linked child support payments, and stronger health data protection. These measures can only make a real difference if they are applied consistently in practice, with sufficient expertise, stable funding, uniform application of the law and an up-to-date technological background.

The negative trends clearly show that the lack of a strategic framework and institutional coordination continues to be an obstacle to the coherent implementation of children’s rights. The misinterpretation of the term “paramount interests” weakens the focus on the specific needs of the child, while the absence of an ombudsman for children, the lack of an overarching strategy and sectoral fragmentation all hamper the functioning of the system as a whole. For children with disabilities, despite legislative improvements, capacity constraints continue to prevent all children from growing up in a family-like, loving environment.

Recommendations

1. A precise legal and professional interpretation of “paramount interests of the child” to avoid misunderstandings.
2. The appointment of a separate, independent children’s rights ombudsman, able to coordinate and represent children’s rights at national level.

3. Breakdown of the implementation of the action plan for 2030 into specific responsibilities, metrics, and resources to ensure the effectiveness of the strategy.
4. Establish an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism for coordinated cooperation between child protection, education, health care and justice.
5. Expand the network of foster parents, improve the availability of specialists, and consistently implement the replacement of institutional places in order to effectively ensure the rights of children with disabilities.

Institutional trends

The practical implementation of children's rights is decided in the daily life of institutions. 2024 saw positive developments, but shortages of professionals and capacity issues pose serious challenges.

Positive trends

A positive development is the further strengthening of the process of institutionalisation of the Church's child protection, which contributes to the protection of the safety and dignity of children. However, the durability of the process depends on the long-term commitment of the church maintainers and the provision of adequate professional support and resources.

Negative trends

One difficulty is that around 6% of child protection professionals have left the field, leading to an overload of the existing workforce and a decline in the amount of personal attention given to children. Improving the situation means ensuring that professionals are valued, through appropriate remuneration, career support measures and a higher professional profile.

Due to capacity constraints, particularly in rural areas, many child protection institutions are unable to provide adequate care, resulting in significant inequalities in access to services. The solution to this problem lies in the launch of targeted regional development programmes to increase the professional and infrastructural capacity of rural institutions.

Consequences

While the strengthening of the institutionalisation of child protection in the Church is an encouraging development, the lack of professionals and capacity problems severely limit the impact of positive developments. The increased burdens resulting from careers being cut short weaken personal attention, while capacity shortages in rural institutions lead to persistent inequalities in access to services. To tackle this situation, it is essential to increase the status of child protection professionals through remuneration and career support measures, as well as to launch targeted regional development programmes that will even out regional differences and ensure that all children have equal access to protection and support.

Recommendations

1. Ensuring the long-term commitment of church maintainers, accompanied by appropriate professional support and stable resources.
2. Strengthening the status of child protection professionals through pay rises, career support measures, and enhancing their professional prestige.

3. Launch targeted regional development programmes to increase the professional and infrastructural capacity of rural institutions, ensuring equal access to children's rights for all children.

Socio-cultural trends

The social environment is a key determinant of children's rights. 2024 saw a strengthening of awareness-raising and digital child protection programmes, but serious challenges arose in the areas of crisis management and inequality.

Positive trends

1. Events aimed at raising awareness of children's rights, such as Children's Rights Days and GyerekJogFeszt (Children's Rights Festival), play an important role in shaping social attitudes and promoting wider awareness of children's rights. However, raising awareness of children's rights must be integrated into everyday education and become an integral part of the school education process.
2. Strengthening online child protection—for example, by pre-screening pornographic content, introducing school bullying reporting systems, and banning smart devices from school premises—contributes to ensuring children's safety in the digital space. However, these steps can only be truly effective if they are backed up by the appropriate technological infrastructure and well-trained teaching staff to ensure their practical implementation.
3. A positive development is that the role of student councils is growing stronger, which creates opportunities for children to exercise their participation rights more widely. However, this process can only bring about real change if the students' suggestions are actually listened to, institutional responses are provided, and the children's opinions are truly incorporated into the decision-making process.

Negative trends

1. In times of crisis in child protection, crisis communication remains uncertain and often delayed at both the state and church levels, which weakens children's sense of security and public trust in institutions. To improve the situation, a single, rapid, and transparent crisis communication protocol would be necessary, which would be mandatory for institutions to follow and would support both state and church leaders in crisis situations.
2. Regional inequalities pose a significant problem, as children in rural areas often have less access to prevention and support services than those living in major cities. Improvements require targeted regional development programmes that ensure equal access to child protection, education and social services across the country.

Consequences

Positive trends show that social awareness of children's rights is becoming increasingly prominent, the development of digital child protection contributes to maintaining safety in the virtual space, and strengthening the role of student councils opens up opportunities for children's active participation. However, these trends can only bring about lasting change if they are put into practice: without integrating children's rights into the educational context,

providing the right tech and teaching support, and really listening to student councils, the impact of these positive initiatives will be limited.

At the same time, negative trends clearly show that uncertain crisis communication during child protection crises and the persistence of regional inequalities can undermine children's sense of security and society's trust in institutions in the long term. Unequal access to services for children in rural areas permanently reduces the fulfilment of equal rights.

Recommendations

1. Incorporating programmes aimed at raising awareness of children's rights into school education so that the change in attitude can be sustained in the long term.
2. Strengthening digital child protection measures through technological developments and teacher training to ensure practical implementation.
3. Introduction of institutional guarantees to ensure that student council proposals are actually heard and incorporated into decision-making.
4. Establishment of a single, rapid and transparent crisis communication protocol, which is mandatory in crisis situations and supports both state and church leaders.
5. Launch targeted regional development programmes to ensure that all children have equal access to child protection, education and social services, regardless of whether they live in rural or urban areas.

Integration of church research findings

The pilot project was conducted with the participation of four church-run institutions and clearly showed that, although there were some strong and very inspiring examples, serious inequalities remained between the individual institutions. The "Digital Fast" programme of the Diocese of Vác, for example, draws attention to the dangers of digital overuse in a novel way, but it requires the active involvement of parents and teachers. The "Safe School" initiative of the Piarist Order strengthens the protection of children with complex protocols and training, but in order for it to be truly effective, the programme needs full roll-out and continuous monitoring. The "I Trust in You" program of the Archdiocese of Hajdúdorog focuses on building a sense of security and trusting relationships, but it needs stable resources to operate sustainably.

However, the research also revealed serious shortcomings. The rates of protocol coverage, for example, vary greatly: while 100% of Piarist institutions have a child protection protocol, the rate for Baptist institutions is only 17%. Specialist staffing levels also vary considerably, with some institutions employing dedicated child protection officers, while in others this role is either absent or attached to other job descriptions. Anonymous reporting systems are formally in place in several places, but children often do not feel safe using them, indicating that further efforts are needed to build trust.

Around 1,200 teachers and 15,000 children have been directly involved in the programmes so far, demonstrating their scale. In the short term, however, differences in protocol coverage and specialist availability mean that child protection is uneven.

The 2024 pilot institutional questionnaire survey and experience gained from our association's specific case management work all point to the fact that, in addition to stricter legislation, there is also a need to strengthen pastoral care and community responsibility. In addition to psychological aptitude testing for professionals working with children, it would be reasonable to introduce training programmes that combine modern trauma-informed child

protection with care based on the Christian view of humanity. For children living on the margins of society—particularly those in specialised child protection care, children with disabilities, and children of parents in prison—the principle of subsidiarity means that local church communities can provide valuable support to complement the regular child protection system.

Additional recommendations based on the pilot study on church child protection and its experience

1. Developing a crisis communication protocol based on Christian values, which prioritises truthfulness, transparency and support for healing, with particular regard to child protection cases arising in church institutions.
2. Integrating pastoral care into the work on children's rights through training programmes that combine Christian-based care with modern trauma-informed child protection.
3. Regional networking based on the principle of subsidiarity, which involves local church communities (parishes, church institutions) in helping children living in rural areas to access services.
4. Strengthening a preventive approach through community programmes that focus on protecting human dignity, going beyond a purely regulatory approach and also focusing on the transmission of Christian values through the consistent incorporation of child protection considerations.

The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* is a milestone in the international protection of human rights, as it was the first to give comprehensive and legally binding recognition to the rights of children as independent legal entities. The Convention recognises children not merely as a group in need of protection, but as individuals with their own opinions, decision-making abilities and participation rights.

This report serves to evaluate the implementation of the Convention, and thus its initial pilot form follows the structure and thematic breakdown used by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, so that it can later be incorporated into an alternative reporting process.

I. A. General implementation measures (Articles 4, 42, and 44(6))

Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges States Parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to ensure the implementation of the rights recognised in the Convention. Article 42 stipulates that the principles and provisions of the Convention should be widely disseminated among both adults and children, while Article 44(6) obliges States to make their national reports widely available.

a. Legislation

2024 saw a significant number of legislative changes in Hungary that directly or indirectly affected the enforcement of children's rights. The amendments covered several areas of children's rights, including the protection of children's physical, mental, and moral development, the strengthening of the institutional system for child protection, the protection of health data, and the improvement of safety in the digital space.

Significant legislative changes:

- The amendment to the Fundamental Law, which excluded the possibility of presidential pardons for crimes committed against children.
- Amendments to the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, and the Penal Enforcement Code, which reinforced the strict punishment of sexual and violent crimes against children, including the abolition of the statute of limitations and the prohibition of parole.
- Introduction of a new criminal offence: failure to report child abuse, which punishes persons working with children (teachers, caregivers, doctors) who fail to report signs of child endangerment.
- Amendment to the Child Protection Act (Gyvt.), which made psychological aptitude testing and verification of impeccable conduct mandatory for all staff members working in child protection institutions and reformatories.
- Legislation on inflation-linked child support, which protects vulnerable children from economic uncertainty.
- Strengthening electronic health data protection with the EESZT system, which ensures the protection of children's health and personal data.
- Amendments to the Media Services Act and the Motion Picture Act, which tightened restrictions on the portrayal of minors in media content and the display of age ratings.
- Amendment to the Advertising Act, which restricted the advertising of alcoholic beverages and products that pose a threat to children's health.
- In the context of regulating commercial activities, restrictions on the distribution of content depicting homosexuality or gender identity in the vicinity of educational institutions (within a 200-meter radius).
- Restrictions on the use of mobile phones in schools under Government Decree No. 245/2024 (8 August).

Children's rights particularly affected by legislative changes:

- Protecting the paramount interests of the child (article 3)
- Protection from violence and abuse (article 19)
- Right to health and development (Articles 6 and 24)
- Freedom of access to information and freedom of expression (Articles 12-17)
- Right to education (article 28)
- Data protection and protection of personal rights (Articles 8 and 16)

b. Practice of the Constitutional Court—primarily statistical data, how many decisions were made by the Constitutional Court, which ones are particularly relevant, and what are their consequences.

In 2024, the Constitutional Court issued a total of 21 decisions in cases concerning children's rights. Three of these decisions had a substantive impact on the development of law. 18 orders were primarily procedural or dismissive in nature.

Eligibility for child home care allowance

Decision No. 22/2024 (23 December) of the Constitutional Court reiterated the decision already taken by the Court in 2023. Under previous regulations, relatives living in the same household as the child in care were only eligible for child home care allowance if the parent's eligibility had been previously established and the parent had died or was unable to provide permanent and long-term care for the child due to their own health condition. Furthermore, if parental custody rights are suspended or terminated by a court, the Constitutional Court quashed the part of Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits which states that "the parent's entitlement to benefits has already been established with regard to the child, but" because, for a relative, the determination of the child's home care allowance (gyod) was not conditional on the parent's previous entitlement if it was requested in the event of the suspension or termination of parental custody. This regulation constituted discrimination because it distinguished between the grounds on which relatives cared for severely disabled or chronically ill children when determining eligibility. The determination of the parent's previous entitlement is no longer a prerequisite for the relative's entitlement if the parent is deceased or unable to provide care.

The current regulations broaden the circle of those eligible for care, but regulations that would ensure legal succession in the event of a change in the caregiver would promote the best interests of the child when using GYOD.

Decision No. 21/2024 (28 November) of the Constitutional Court is significant due to its interpretation of the concept of "taking into protective custody". The parents refused chemotherapy treatment for their seriously ill child because they wanted to use alternative medicine. The medical staff involved reported the case to child protection services because the parents did not cooperate in the child's medical treatment.¹ As a result of the guardianship proceedings, the child was first removed from the family and then placed in protective custody. The parents appealed to the Constitutional Court, citing a violation of their right to choose how they wish to bring up their children. The Constitutional Court found that parents must exercise their right to choose how they wish to bring up their children in the paramount interests of the child, and if they fail to do so, the state, as an institution with a duty to protect, is obliged to intervene. In this case, to protect children from irreversible health risks. According to the Constitutional Court, the purpose of taking the child into protective custody² was to "*support the parents in a crisis situation caused by the child's serious illness, which in some cases could have been life-threatening.*" Based on previous practice, it can be concluded that the primary goal of taking a child into protective custody is to put an end to improper upbringing and

¹ The parents left the country with their child in order to seek alternative treatment.

² According to Act XXXI of 1997 on Child Protection and Custody Administration, taking a child into protective custody is an official measure ordered by the guardianship authority in cases where a child is at risk, while also providing assistance for the child's upbringing within the family. Endangerment is a condition resulting from an act or omission that jeopardises the physical, emotional, intellectual or moral development of a minor. The guardianship authority provides assistance and support to parents in providing appropriate care and upbringing, and may oblige the legal representative to use child welfare services.

lifestyle. This measure is often applied in cases involving minors who have committed misdemeanours or young offenders who have committed criminal offenses. The Constitutional Court extended this interpretation and ruled that restricting the right to choose the way of bringing up children is necessary if the parents do not cooperate and is proportionate, as taking a child into protective custody is limited in time and is the mildest form of child protection measures.

Maintaining contact

The third significant decision is Decision No. 3244/2024 (5 July) of the Constitutional Court. In the main proceedings, the mother did not hand over the child's identity documents during the exercise of contact, but the father took the child without identity documents in accordance with the contact arrangements laid down in the decision. The courts did not order the replacement of contact because, although the withholding of the ID cards impeded uninterrupted contact, contact was nevertheless maintained.

The court found that "it does not automatically entail the ordering of substitute contact, nor does it exclude it on principle" if the parent does not hand over the child's documents. It is the task of the courts to explore the content of fundamental rights in specific cases and to interpret and apply the law in specific legal disputes. The Constitutional Court found that the applicant had not presented any grounds in the application that had not been taken into account by the court in the main proceedings and then in the review proceedings (e.g., travel, vacation).

c. Strategies

Hungary currently has no strategy on children's rights that would bring together measures aimed at protecting and enforcing children's rights in a single framework.

At the same time, there is Government Decision No. 1202/2023 (22 May) on the adoption of the National Action Plan 2030 to guarantee children's rights. This action plan sets out goals and directions for 2030, but its implementation is not broken down into specific responsibilities, metrics, and resources.

d. State coordination of children's rights

Hungary currently has no independent ombudsman for children's rights or other coordinating institution that would harmonise the enforcement of children's rights at the national level. Children's rights issues are fragmented across several ministries and authorities.

In public administration, the coordination of children's rights is currently divided among the following areas:

- Ministry of the Interior: child protection, guardianship administration
- Ministry for Culture and Innovation: education, public education
- Ministry of Health: child health
- Ministry of Justice: family law, criminal law issues
- Office of the Ombudsman for Fundamental Rights: complaint handling, legal protection (but not a dedicated children's rights ombudsman)

2024 saw no significant changes to the coordination system.

e. Data collection

The Central Statistical Office (KSH) regularly collects and publishes data on children and families in the following areas:

- Demographic data (number of births, number of children by age group)
- Number and type of children receiving child protection services
- Education statistics (kindergarten and school enrolment, dropout rates)
- Health indicators (infant mortality, vaccination rates)
- Poverty and income data (child poverty, family incomes)

At the same time

- There is a lack of systematic assessment of children's opinions and participation
- Up-to-date, detailed, and comparable data are not available in all areas of children's rights.

f. Monitoring – question from the Children's Rights Ombudsman

Hungary currently has no independent ombudsman for children's rights who would be solely responsible for protecting children's rights and monitoring their enforcement.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Fundamental Rights performs certain tasks related to children's rights and can also investigate complaints from children. In his work, the Ombudsman pays particular attention to protecting the rights of children belonging to vulnerable social groups.

g. NGO and international cooperations

In Hungary, numerous civil society organisations are actively working to protect children's rights and raise awareness of children's rights. Furthermore, the growing visibility of children's rights in academic life should also be highlighted. The Central European Academy (CEA) was established on 1 January 2022 in Budapest as a separate legal entity of the University of Miskolc. The main task of the Academy is to strengthen international academic cooperation in the Central European region, with a particular focus on legal fields and children's rights.

The Centre for Children's Rights and Family Law, operating within the framework of the Central European Academy (CEA), plays a key role in regional cooperation on children's rights.

CEA coordinates several important children's rights programmes and activities:

1. LLM Master's programme in International and Comparative Children's Rights (ICCR):

The Faculty of Law and Political Sciences at the University of Miskolc, in cooperation with the Central European Academy, will offer the first English-language, interdisciplinary LLM programme in children's rights (ICCR LLM) in Central Europe from September 2024. The programme aims to provide comprehensive and interdisciplinary knowledge of children's rights from both an international and comparative legal perspective.

2. Children's Rights Days

The Central European Academy, the Association for Children's Rights, and the Hungarian Comparative Law Association organise the annual Children's Rights Days international conference in Budapest.

Children's Rights Days 2024 (III): The 35th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 100th anniversary of the Geneva Declaration were celebrated. The conference presented the textbooks for the first semester of the ICCR

LLM programme, and a key topic was children's mental health. Slovakia was the special partner country, where good practices coordinated by the Slovak Children's Rights Ombudsman were presented.

The patron of the Children's Rights Days event series was President Katalin Novák in 2023, followed by President Dr. Tamás Sulyok in 2024.

3. International networking in Central Europe:

CEA actively cooperates with countries in the region, particularly Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Romania, the Czech Republic, Serbia, and Slovenia, where joint professional programmes, workshops, and conferences are organised.

4. Academic research network and publications:

The Professors' Network, operating within the framework of the Central European Academy, establishes research groups on children's rights that analyse legal and social science issues with a focus on Central Europe. Since 2021, the network has brought together 185 professors and researchers from 53 universities in 15 countries.

The Academy's own publishing house, Central European Academic Publishing (CEA Publishing), publishes prestigious, open-access books and journals in English, which contribute to academic dialogue and the wide dissemination of research results.

The Central European Comparative Law Association supports comparative legal research and knowledge sharing in the region, with a particular focus on comparative law in the field of children's rights. The association coordinates a comparative analysis of children's rights regulations in Central European countries and maintains contact with several university research groups and civil society organisations. The association actively cooperates with Polish, Czech, Slovak, Romanian, Croatian, Serbian, and Slovenian legal research institutions.

The association works closely with the Central European Academy and the Ferenc Mádl Institute for Comparative Law on conferences, workshops, and publications on children's rights.

The Central European Academy, the Association for Children's Rights, and the Central European Comparative Association play a decisive role in civil and international activities related to children's rights in Hungary. The programmes, conferences, publications and ICCR LLM master's programme they coordinate offer a unique opportunity for professionals in the region to deepen their knowledge, share their experiences and contribute to the development of children's rights culture and standards in Central Europe.

II. B. Definition of ‘child’ (article 1)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines the concept of a child. According to the Convention, any person who has not yet reached the age of 18, unless the laws of their own country consider them to be of legal age at a younger age.³

Hungarian laws also comply with this international rule. The Civil Code, which regulates legal issues relating to private life, states that anyone under the age of 18 is a minor. However, there is one exception, whereby a person can become an adult by getting married from the age of 16. From this point on, they have the same rights and obligations as an adult.

It should be noted that the Hungarian Fundamental Law states that the life of the foetus is protected from the moment of conception.

There is also a specific law on the protection of the foetus, which stipulates the conditions under which artificial termination of pregnancy may be performed. The law stresses that foetal life deserves respect and protection from the moment of conception. According to the law, the best way to protect the foetus is to pay increased attention to pregnant women and for parents to ensure the conditions necessary for the healthy development of the foetus.⁴

The above-mentioned laws together form Hungary’s legal definition of a child. 2024 saw no changes to these laws, meaning that Hungarian regulations remain in line with the provisions of the UN Convention. The current legal environment also provides opportunities to strengthen the protection of children in the foetal stage.

³ The Convention deliberately left open the question of how to define a child of foetal age, i.e., when childhood begins. In order to ensure wider ratification, the Convention defined the concept of a child broadly, since countries that allow abortion on a wide range of grounds would have had to change their laws under the Convention. The Convention does not extend the protection of children to unborn children, although the Preamble to the Convention states that consideration should be given to the fact that children need legal protection *both before and after birth*.

⁴ The Fundamental Law states that foetal life is protected, although in certain cases abortion is permitted. The most recent “tightening” of the implementing decree of the Act on the Protection of Foetal Life in 2022 resulted in the requirement that the abortion application form shall state that *“the healthcare provider has presented the pregnant woman with clearly identifiable evidence of foetal vital functions.”* In fact, the doctor must clearly show the woman requesting the abortion signs of life in the foetus, such as its heartbeat. The inclusion of this sentence was professionally justified, although it caused a stir in the public sphere and sparked public debate on the legal framework of abortion in Hungary. See: The statement by the National Executive Board of the Hungarian Medical Chamber is available here: <https://mok.hu/hirek/mokhirek/a-mok-elnoksegenek-kozlemenye>

III. C. Fundamental principles (Articles 2, 3, 6, and 12 + the child's right to be raised in their own family)

Four principles plus one connect the children's rights in the Convention. The purpose of the principles is to ensure a uniform interpretation of individual children's rights and to ensure that the fundamental rights of minors, derived from their human dignity, are respected in all countries of the world. These principles are non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to survival and development, and consideration of the child's perspective. The fifth principle, which appears in the Convention as a connecting principle, is the right of the child to be brought up in his/her own family. The principles appear as independent rights in the Convention, but they are inseparably linked to all the rights mentioned. This means that the rights mentioned must be viewed through the lens of fundamental principles; their meaning will only be complete when interpreted in conjunction with these principles, rather than on their own.

a. Non-discrimination

Article 2 of the Convention establishes the prohibition of discrimination. Accordingly, the rights listed in the Convention must be guaranteed to all children regardless of their origin, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, incapacity, birth or other status. Non-discrimination does not only mean ensuring equal rights, but also implies the requirement that if, due to the listed protected characteristics, a minor's rights are less effective than those of their peers, positive measures must be taken to compensate for the disadvantage. This requirement primarily establishes the responsibility of the state, but it is also the duty of professionals and parents who come into direct contact with children to recognise the special needs of minors.

Hungarian legislation generally stipulates the requirement of equal treatment, meaning that it does not differentiate between adults and children. Section 8 of Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities (Ebkty.) lists the protected characteristics that may be invoked in legal proceedings. The Ebkty. follows the characteristics set out in the Convention and even expands the list. In the event of a violation of the requirement of equal treatment, it is possible to contact the Ombudsman's Office. Children can also contact the ombudsman directly in the event of a violation of their rights.

2024 saw no legislative changes relating to non-discrimination.

b. Best interests of the child

Article 3 of the Convention stipulates the best interests of the child, according to which authorities must take the best interests of the child into account in proceedings affecting children. This means that all authorities and courts must act in such a way that, after considering all circumstances, the decision is in the best interests of the child.

The Hungarian translation of the Convention uses the expression "paramount interests of the child", but this interpretation does not reflect the meaning of the original text, which uses the expression "best interests of the child". For this reason, Hungarian legislation consistently uses the terminology "paramount interests of the child". This can lead to misinterpretation, because the best interests of the child are not the same as the paramount interests of the child.

In 2024, legislative amendments affecting the best interests of the child relate to the mental, physical, and moral development of the child. These include the amendment to Act CLXXXV of 2010 on media services and mass communication, which stipulates that when minors are portrayed in media content, special attention must be paid to protecting their

intellectual, spiritual, moral, and physical development. Act II of 2004 on motion pictures was amended to classify films that are likely to seriously harm the physical, intellectual, or moral development of minors, particularly those containing pornography or extreme or unjustified violence, as Category IV. It also introduces the display of age ratings for movie trailers, allowing viewers to see the age rating before watching. The Advertising Act⁵ has also been amended, according to which: *“Advertisements aimed at children and young people that present goods or their use in a manner that is harmful or dangerous to life, health, or physical integrity are prohibited.”* This means that the physical and health risks involved cannot be presented as insignificant in the advertisement, so that minors can clearly understand the message of the advertisement and do not consider a product that endangers their life, physical integrity, or health to be desirable based on the advertisement. It also restricts alcohol advertising, including a ban on advertising alcoholic beverages in cinemas and theatres.

Closely related to the above is the amendment to Government Decree No. 210/2009 (29 September) on the conditions for conducting commercial activities, which prohibits the public display, window display or distribution within a radius of 200 metres of educational, pedagogical and youth protection institutions, churches or other places of worship of products that depict or promote a deviation from birth gender identity, gender reassignment, or homosexuality, or that depict sexuality in a direct, natural, or self-serving manner. If a product is intended for children and only part of it falls into a restricted category, it may only be sold separately from other products and in sealed packaging.

A significant change is that, in the procedure for taking into protective custody, the person assisting in taking into protective custody, whether a relative, family caregiver, or other professional, is considered a client under the Åkr.⁶ The person assisting with the taking into protective custody is thus involved in the decision-making process, thereby increasing the transparency of the procedure and ensuring that the interests of the child are better served. Another change, aimed at improving the efficiency and speed of the procedure, is that the guardianship authority will initiate protection proceedings ex officio on the recommendation of the child welfare service or other institution, or at the request of the court. Previously, it was necessary to apply separately to initiate the procedure. A similar amendment stipulates that if a child's place of residence changes, the new authority in charge must be notified of the child protection case. In this case, the taking into protective custody will be automatically reviewed and, if necessary, a new family visitor will be appointed.

Another amendment that serves the best interests of the child is that if a lawsuit concerning parental custody is pending, the court will automatically refuse to grant permission for the child to travel abroad. This reduces the risk of one parent leaving the country with the child for an extended period of time without the other parent's knowledge or consent, making it impossible to maintain contact.

c. Right to survival and development

Article 6 of the Convention declares the right of the child to life, survival, and development. It stipulates that the state must ensure the survival and development of the child to the greatest extent possible. This means that the state must put in place the conditions necessary to ensure that children have access to sufficient clean drinking water and food of adequate quality and quantity, that their right to education is upheld, and that they live in optimal hygienic conditions. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the state must primarily assist parents and caregivers in ensuring that they are able to provide suitable conditions for the child's development.

⁵ Act XLVIII of 2008 on the Basic Requirements and Certain Restrictions of Commercial Advertising Activities

⁶ Act CL of 2016 on the Code of General Administrative Procedure

A significant legislative change in 2024 is that, starting 9 July 2024, the amount of advance child support will be adjusted for inflation, so that if the obligor fails to pay, the amount paid by the state will be automatically adjusted each year to the consumer price index of the previous year. When determining child support, courts apply adjustments to the consumer price index. Prior to the amendment, it was unclear whether inflation tracking would apply even if the state advanced the amount. The amendment makes it clear that the amount is inflation-indexed if the state makes an advance payment.

The right to development is linked to Article XVI of the Fundamental Law, which states that “*every child has the right to the protection and care necessary for their proper physical, mental, and moral development.*” In the years leading up to 2024, numerous legislative amendments were implemented with reference to the provisions of the Fundamental Law. These include Act LXXIX of 2021 on taking more severe action against paedophile offenders and amending certain acts for the protection of children. In Case C-769/22, *European Commission v Hungary*, the Commission initiated infringement proceedings before the Court of Justice of the European Union due to the adoption of this Act. The act prohibits persons under the age of 18 from accessing content that promotes or depicts gender identity variance, gender reassignment, or homosexuality. According to the Commission, the regulation infringes the free movement of services and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the Electronic Commerce Directive, the prohibition of discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, respect for private and family life, freedom of expression and information, and the right to human dignity. By introducing and making accessible a register of paedophiles, the state is violating the provisions of the GDPR. Furthermore, the fundamental principle of equal opportunities and human dignity declared in Article 2 of the TEU is also violated, because the legislation does not restrict access to homosexual and heterosexual content for minors to the same extent.

d. Taking the child’s perspective into account

Article 12 of the Convention deals with the participation of children. The first paragraph states in general terms that children capable of forming their own opinions have the right to express their views in all decisions affecting them. It is important to note that expressing opinions is not limited to words, but should be understood to include the entire range of nonverbal communication. The second paragraph expressly stipulates that the child must be heard in court and administrative proceedings if he/she is involved. Child participation does not only mean that children have the right to be heard in proceedings affecting them, but also that their views should be taken into account in accordance with their age and maturity.

The second paragraph of the article of the Convention and the general commentary attached to it suggest that child participation also includes the opportunity for minors to assert their rights. Although 2024 saw no legislative changes, a motion was brought before the Constitutional Court in which a minor initiated a retrospective review of the decree restricting mobile phone use in schools. The constitutional complaint was filed by the minor on his own behalf. As a condition for accepting the complaint, the court accepted parental consent, and thus a decision rejecting the case was made. The court was unable to reach agreement on the admissibility of the complaint, but a debate arose as to the legal grounds for asserting the fundamental rights of minors, and so the Constitutional Court did not include this in its decision.

e. The right of the child to be raised in his/her own family

Article 9 of the Convention stipulates the right of the child to be brought up in his/her own family, according to which no child shall be separated from his/her parents against their will. Paragraph (1) of Section 6 of the Gvt. also stipulates the right of children to be brought up in

their own families, stating that “*children have the right to be brought up in their own family environment, which ensures their physical, intellectual, emotional, and moral development, healthy upbringing, and well-being.*” The major legislative changes related to this fundamental principle in 2024 are described in Section F).

IV. D. Civil rights and freedoms (articles 7, 8, 13-17)

The Convention enumerates as civil rights and freedoms the right of the child to nationality, the right to protection of his/her moral integrity, as well as, in Articles 13-17, the right to freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, protection of privacy, and the right to access information.

a. Nationality

Article 7 establishes the right to nationality, stating that “[t]he child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.” States have a duty to ensure that regulations are in place that prevent minors from becoming stateless, i.e. from not having the citizenship of any country. No legislative changes affecting the citizenship of children were made in 2024.

b. Personal rights

Article 8 of the Convention provides for the protection of the child’s moral rights, including respect for his/her identity, in particular his/her name, nationality, and family relations. If the moral rights of a minor are violated, it is the duty of the state to ensure that the situation is remedied as quickly as possible and to provide the minor with appropriate protection and assistance.

The most important legislative change affecting moral rights is linked to the amendment of Act CVIII of 2001 on electronic commerce and on information society services, which establishes the right to have electronic information that violates a child’s moral rights removed. One of the most important changes is the notification requirement. The service provider must notify the customer concerned within one working day of the removal request submitted by the minor or their legal representative. The service provider shall also remove or disable access to the content in question, even if it is not possible to notify the user concerned. If the minor or his/her legal representative notifies the service provider of the initiation of an investigation into the infringement, the service provider shall block access to the information or remove it again. If the service provider fails to fulfil its obligations, the minor or his/her legal representative may contact the Child Protection Roundtable, which will investigate the report and use its findings in its activities.

Significant legislative changes have also been made in the area of processing children’s health data. School absences and non-attendance can be sent directly to public education and vocational training institutions as electronic documents. In this case, absence is validly justified. The amendment reduces the paperwork for parents and teachers, helps make sure children are actually in school, and makes sure children’s health data are processed in a consistent, predictable, and targeted way.

c. Protection of privacy

The right to privacy is set out in Article 16 of the Convention, which states that “[n]o child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.” Article VI of the Fundamental Law defines the right to privacy as a fundamental right to which everyone is entitled, which cannot be impeded by the freedom of expression or the exercise of the right of assembly. Therefore, children have the right to privacy; their rooms cannot be searched without sufficient reason, and their chat messages cannot be viewed.

Privacy protection has not undergone any significant legislative changes, but in September 2024, a student filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court regarding, among other things, a regulation prohibiting the use of mobile phones in schools, in which the petitioner also referred to a violation of privacy. According to the complainant, the regulation authorises teachers to search personal belongings on the basis of assumptions. The Constitutional Court did not consider the reference to the right to privacy to be well-founded, as the regulation only defines the group of persons whom the teacher may call upon to prove that they are not in possession of prohibited items, or whom they may notify of the fact that they are in possession of prohibited items.

d. Right to access to information

Article 17 of the Convention guarantees children's right to access information. Accordingly, minors have the right to access mass media from domestic and foreign sources, specifically material that are "*aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.*" The state has a duty to promote domestic and international cooperation in order to obtain informational materials, and to support the production and distribution of children's books.

One of the most important legislative changes related to this article is the amendment to Act C of 2003 on Electronic Communication. The amendment makes it the responsibility of the National Media and Communications Authority to inform the public about the dangers of abuse and harassment on the internet and other electronic communications platforms, as well as the possibilities for taking action against such abuse. The empowerment by law ensures that children are effectively and comprehensively informed about the dangers of the internet and the means of legal redress available to child victims of internet bullying, harassment and abuse.

V. E. Protection against violence

Article 19 of the Convention stipulates that children have the right to protection from all forms of violence. The Article prohibits all forms of violence and protection from it includes protection from sexual violence, mental and physical abuse, and neglect. States have a duty to establish a child protection system that can ensure effective action and prevention against violence.

2024 saw several legislative changes. Most importantly, the Fundamental Law stipulates that no presidential pardon may be granted in cases of crimes committed against children. In connection with this, criminal substantive law, procedural law, and enforcement law were amended. Accordingly, anyone who has committed an intentional crime against children or a crime against sexual freedom and sexual morality cannot be granted procedural or executive pardon, nor can they be exempted from the adverse legal consequences associated with their criminal record. Crimes against sexual freedom and morality, committed against minors, are not subject to a statute of limitations, unlike under the previous regulations, when the limitation period began at the age of 18. Convicted offenders cannot be released on parole for the aforementioned crimes.

A new offence has been added to the Criminal Code, namely non-compliance with child protection reporting obligations, which will be prosecuted by the public prosecutor's office. Previously, it was not a criminal offense if a person who came into contact with children, such as a teacher, caregiver, educator, prosecutor, or judge, failed to report circumstances indicating that a child was at risk. From 2024, failure to report will be punishable by imprisonment for up to two years.

A further tightening of the rules is the introduction of checks on the impeccable conduct of those working in child protection and mandatory psychological aptitude tests for all employees in all child protection institutions and reformatories, regardless of the operator. This includes a provision that, starting in 2024, camping trips for children will only be possible if the persons in charge hold a certificate of good conduct issued by the authorities. In addition, coaches working with children under the age of 18 must have no criminal record and are required to participate in annual training on how to treat children and communicate with them and their parents.

There has also been a change to the paedophile registry, as it will now include the details of those who have committed crimes against minors in the European Union or the United Kingdom against sexual freedom or morality.

With regard to the protection of children in the online space, a new regulation stipulates that, in order to prevent school bullying, all schools must enable the NMHH reporting system for cases of bullying, and schools are required to report cyberbullying. A significant change is that the NMHH must compile a blacklist within 120 days of the legislation being passed, listing the most visited pornographic websites, and internet service providers are required to pre-filter websites at the request of parents. Furthermore, internet service providers must ensure separate access to the internet for children and adults. The regulations contribute to the proper physical, intellectual, emotional, and moral development of children and ensure that parents can bring up their children in the manner they choose.

VI. F. Upbringing in one's own supportive family environment, alternative protection

Article 9 of the Convention establishes the fundamental principle that every child has the right to be brought up in his or her own family. Accordingly, 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. Such cases may include, for example, parents who abuse their child or neglect them to such an extent that it jeopardises their health or development.

If the interests of the child so require, he/she may be removed from the family environment, in which case he/she is entitled to special protection and assistance from the state. Article 20 of the Convention provides for such alternative protection. The protection is meant to make sure children can keep growing up in a good environment, even if it's not with their own family.

In Hungary, child protection is regulated by Act XXXI of 1997 on Child Protection and Custody Administration. According to the interpretation of the law, the purpose of child protection is to support the upbringing of children in their families, to prevent and eliminate risks, and to provide alternative protection. Accordingly, child protection encompasses both general protection and alternative protection. The Act lists among the fundamental principles of child protection the *paramount interest of the child* in remaining in the family, expediency, differentiation, together with the principle of minimum coercion, the prohibition of discrimination, and care tailored to needs, i.e., with foster care being given priority. Therefore, if a child cannot remain with their own family due to being at risk, they should be placed with foster parents if possible, as this is closer to a family environment.

In many respects, 2024 had a more concentrated impact on the child protection system and the conditions and framework of alternative protection. The 2024 amendment to the Act placed great emphasis on the aptitude testing of persons employed in child protection institutions, whereby the person exercising employer powers in child protection may initiate a check on the impeccable lifestyle of the employee or applicant. This check applies to employees working in a managerial or professional capacity in reformatories, institutions operating children's homes, children's homes and foster parent networks. Checks on impeccable conduct include criminal record checks, statements from previous employers, relatives and, if necessary, children's rights representatives, educational institutions and guardians, which indicate whether disciplinary proceedings have been brought against the employee; how they treat children and what their behaviour is like in relation to children.⁷ The provision led to approximately 6% of child protection staff voluntarily leaving their jobs.⁸

A significant amendment to the Gyvt. is that integrated or special nursery care for children with special educational needs or in need of early development is now mandatory. Previously, integrated or special care was not mandatory; special care was merely an option alongside other types of care.⁹

Another major change is the amendment to Act II of 2012 on minor offences, offence procedures and the registration system of offence, which introduces a new offence for violating the rules on reporting the admission of children. Reporting the admission of a child is included in the Gyvt. The reasoning for the Act states that children who run away from children's homes

⁷ Sections 10/C-10/I of Act XXXI of 1997 on Child Protection and Custody Administration. ⁷ Civil Coalition for Children's Rights:

Statement on the effects and consequences of the review of the child protection system.

⁹ Paragraph (3a) of Section 42 of Act XXXI of 1997 on Child Protection and Custody Administration.

are usually taken in by strangers who look after them, but often expect something in return for their care, which leads to the sexual exploitation of children. The new definition stipulates that anyone who takes in a child without an official decision or the permission of a child protection guardian and fails to report this to the competent authority within 24 hours is also punishable. The amendment guarantees the safety of children by taking action against unauthorised placement, thereby helping to reduce the risk of ill treatment and abuse.

A new amendment to the Gyvt. relates to the temporary placement of children.¹⁰ Accordingly, during the temporary placement of the child, the parent's right to care for and bring up the child shall be suspended, as shall the right to legal representation in matters specified by law, if the guardianship authority has determined that, based on the reason for the temporary placement, the parent cannot be expected to cooperate in the performance of his/her duties as legal representative. This regulation was necessary because previously legal representation was not automatically terminated, and there were cases where parents did not cooperate with the guardianship authority, which meant that the child's rights could not be effectively upheld.

The next legislative amendment relates to adoption. Under the amendment, the guardianship authority shall initiate proceedings ex officio to terminate parental custody and declare the child adoptable, and shall appoint a guardian if the child is left in a healthcare institution for six weeks after birth and neither the parent nor any other relative comes forward to claim the child.¹¹ Previously, no automatic procedure was in place for children left in the incubator. A waiver from the parent or their consent was required for the adoption. The amendment will help ensure that newborns are placed with adoptive families as soon as possible.

In order to protect children, Decree No. 15/1998 (30 April) of the Minister of Welfare on the professional duties and operating conditions of child welfare and child protection institutions and persons providing personal care was amended in 2024. Unlike the previous version, the decree defines the circumstances that pose a particular risk, thus clarifying the reasons for which immediate and automatic child protection proceedings must be initiated. The reasons are as follows: circumstances indicating sexual exploitation of a child, physical abuse of a child, serious neglect of a child, or attempted suicide by a child.¹² The regulation creates the possibility for effective, rapid and uniform action in the most serious cases.

¹⁰ Paragraph (4) of Section 46 of the Gyvt.

¹¹ Government Decree No. 192/2024 (8 July) on guardianship authorities and the amendment of Government Decree No. 149/1997 (10 September) on child protection and guardianship proceedings.

¹² Section 11/A.

VII. G. Children with disabilities

Article 23 of the Convention provides for the protection of children with disabilities and states that children with disabilities are entitled to special protection and assistance. The individual needs of children with disabilities must be taken into account, and support must be provided to them free of charge wherever possible. The Convention sets out as an important goal that these children should have equal access to education, health care, developmental education, preparation for work, and leisure activities. All in all, the key guiding principle is that children with disabilities should be able to develop their personalities to the fullest extent possible, both culturally and intellectually.

The Hungarian legal environment provides for the special protection of children with disabilities in a number of laws in the areas of education, health care, preparation for work and leisure activities.

Firstly, Paragraph (5) of Article XV of the Fundamental Law guarantees the protection of families, children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities through special measures.¹³ This is linked to the protection against discrimination guaranteed in Paragraph (2) of Article XV, which ensures fundamental rights for everyone regardless of disability. With regard to ensuring equal treatment, the Fundamental Rights Ombudsman has made it a priority in his practice to provide increased protection for the rights of persons belonging to vulnerable social groups. This protection naturally applies to people with disabilities as well, whose rights must be specially protected so that they are not subject to discrimination.

The relevant legislation affecting children with disabilities is Act XXVI of 1998 on the rights and equal opportunities of persons with disabilities. This Act stipulates that children living with disabilities are entitled to participate in early development, care, kindergarten education, as well as school education and instruction, in accordance with their age. The Act stipulates that, where possible, children living with disabilities should be treated and taught in an integrated manner, i.e. together with other children. Parents have the right to decide which kindergarten or school their child should go to, taking into account the opinion of the expert committee, which provides information about the child's individual needs. The goal is to enable children living with disabilities to live as full a life as possible and receive the support they need for their development.

The participation of children living with disabilities in education and other related issues are addressed in the National Public Education Act.

Act XXXI of 1997 on Child Protection and Custody Administration stipulates that *“children with disabilities or chronic illnesses have the right to special care that promotes their development and personal growth.”*¹⁴ The Act also covers alternative care for children living with disabilities.

The main provisions of Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits define the social assistance that can be provided to families with children living with disabilities, such as home care allowance and nursing allowance, as well as other social and rehabilitation institutional care and services to help such families in their daily lives.

A significant legislative amendment affected the latter Act, as the Constitutional Court ruled in one of its decisions that one of the rules concerning home care allowances for children was contrary to the Fundamental Law, and therefore that provision was quashed. In its Decision No. 22/2024 (23 December), the Constitutional Court ruled that the phrase *“the parent’s*

¹³ An important amendment to the Fundamental Law was adopted on 14 April 2025, introducing a conceptual change in relation to people with disabilities. Paragraph (5) of Article XV of the Fundamental Law originally used the term *“persons with disabilities”*, which was amended to *“persons living with disabilities”*.

¹⁴ Paragraph (3) of Section 6

entitlement to benefits has already been established with regard to the child, but” in Point a) of Paragraph (1) of Section 39 of the Act is incompatible with the Fundamental Law.

The Miskolc Court of Justice proposed the finding of incompatibility with the Fundamental Law in connection with a specific case, during the rejection of a request for home care. In this case, the aunt of a child living with a severe disability applied for the home care allowance because she was caring for the child. The authority rejected the application on the grounds that the child’s parents had never previously applied for this benefit during their lifetime, and under the Act, the aunt would only be eligible if they had done so. The applicant complained that this was contrary to the article of the Fundamental Law guaranteeing equality before the law.

The Constitutional Court had previously ruled that the wording and formulation of the legislation on social administration and social benefits was unconstitutional; nevertheless, it was reintroduced into the legislation. In its reasoning, the Constitutional Court criticised the unilateral distinction, since such relatives are in the same difficult situation as other carers, yet they were disadvantaged by the Act. The caregiver concerned is not responsible if the parents did not claim the home care allowance for their children during their lifetime, but, in the absence of such a claim, the caregiver cannot receive this allowance, which constitutes discrimination. According to the decision of the Constitutional Court, in the future, relatives who are not the parents of the child but who actually care for a child living with a severe disability may also be eligible for the home care allowance.

Furthermore, the Gyvt. contained an exception for cases where a child under the age of 12 was chronically ill or severely disabled. In such cases, the child did not have to be placed with foster parents, but could also be placed in an institution if the authorities considered that this was the best solution due to the child’s condition or that there was no other way to care for the child. Thus, the general rule favouring placement of children in a family environment over institutional placement was reversed when it came to children living with disabilities. This exception was repealed on 11 June 2024 pursuant to Act XXX of 2024 on the amendment of certain acts for the protection of children. From now on, children living with severe disabilities or chronic illnesses must also be placed with foster parents whenever possible, just like any other child, ensuring that children with disabilities have the right to grow up in a family environment. The legislative changes introduced represent a step forward in creating equal opportunities for children living with disabilities.

VIII. H. Health and well-being

With regard to health and wellbeing, Article 24 of the Convention states that every child has the right to the highest attainable standard of health and to receive the necessary medical care and developmental education.

Hungary has numerous acts and government decrees guaranteeing children's rights to health and healthcare. In a broader sense, however, other legislation can also be mentioned here, such as regulations concerning health service visitors, infant care, and the school medical system, which often appear in the context of the national public education act, social security frameworks, or mental health protection.

The second segment in this regard aims to protect and preserve the health of minors. This includes regulations that restrict activities harmful to children and young people, such as advertising activities, food industry rules contained in the decrees of the Ministry of Agriculture, restrictions on commercial activities, or provisions prohibiting or restricting access to certain products, such as beverages with high sugar or caffeine content, for young people. This also includes legislation aimed at preventing smoking, alcohol consumption and drug use.

The third element concerns children's standard of living, which is an interdisciplinary and complex area. The relevant legal regulations cover not only the immediate needs of the child, but also the wellbeing of his/her family. This includes the Gyvt. and provisions aimed at improving the standard of living of the child's family, such as state subsidies, childbirth incentive loans, measures to help young people get housing, and housing schemes.

Minor changes have been made at the legislative level concerning the protection of children's health data and the health conditions for camping for children.

The amendment to Act XLVII of 1997 on the processing and protection of health and related personal data strengthened the guarantees for the protection of children's health data in the case of doctor's notes for school absence when a student is absent from an educational institution due to illness. The Electronic Health Service Space (EESZT) system ensures that these health and other personal data are only accessible to the doctor, the healthcare provider, and the relevant educational institution. Both parents and students can access the doctor's note for school absence on the electronic education portal. The change also affects another important aspect of data protection. The legislation also specifies the duration of data storage, meaning that data may be stored at the school until the end of the school year, while the operator of the central education system may only process identification data until the doctor's note is forwarded. With this amendment, electronic doctor's notes will now be considered as valid and will be subject to data protection guarantees.¹⁵

Rules governing conditions for children's health and safety were introduced by an amendment to Act XI of 1991 on health authorities and administrative activities. From the point of view of protecting children's health, it is important that during multi-day camps, only programmes with adequate health conditions are allowed to take place, and that parents are provided with adequate information about these conditions. The amendment also stipulates the personal requirements for persons contributing to the camp, according to which persons convicted of serious violent or sexual crimes, especially against children, or drug-related crimes, are currently under criminal investigation, have been disqualified from employment, or are undergoing compulsory medical treatment. All camp instructors must present a certificate of good conduct to prove that none of the listed grounds for exclusion apply to them.

¹⁵ Paragraph (1)-(6) of Section 27/A

a. Healthcare services

With regard to healthcare services, Hungarian legislation introduced significant changes for children at the level of decrees in 2024.

A decree of the Minister of the Interior improved emergency and trauma care for children.¹⁶ The change also affects the educational requirements and funding frameworks for these two qualifications. Furthermore, Decree No. 20/2024 (17 April) of the Minister of the Interior increased funding for child care by introducing a fixed amount of support for emergency and trauma care for children.

b. Health of minors

One of the most significant legislative amendments aimed at protecting the health of underage persons is contained in Act XLVIII of 2008 on essential conditions of and certain limitations to business advertising activity, which introduced stricter rules on the advertising of alcoholic beverages. The amendment prohibits the advertising of alcoholic beverages on surfaces where children or young people are likely to come into contact with them. Such advertisements may not appear on the front cover of press publications or on the home pages of websites, and it is prohibited to promote such beverages in theatres or cinemas before 8 p.m., when minors are likely to be present. Similarly, the regulation also covers advertisements shown in programmes aimed at children. Alcohol advertising on products intended for play and on their packaging is also prohibited, so that it is not associated with items that are attractive to children. In addition, it is strictly prohibited to place advertisements within educational and healthcare institutions, as well as within a 200-meter radius of them, on outdoor advertising media, in shop windows, or in any place that is clearly visible from public areas. The amended legislation aims to restrict visual and media content that is easily accessible to underage people and could encourage them to consume alcohol.¹⁷ The amendment to the Act makes it clear that, under the general rules on advertising bans and restrictions, any advertising aimed at children or young people that presents a product or its use in a way that could harm or endanger life, health, or physical integrity is prohibited.¹⁸

In order to protect children's health, an amendment to the Consumer Protection Act came into force on 11 June 2025, prohibiting the sale of energy drinks to persons under the age of 18. The government decree specifies which energy drinks containing certain ingredients are subject to the sales ban. These amendments are intended to prevent the health risks associated with the consumption of energy drinks, which are becoming increasingly popular among young people.

Amendments have been made to Government Decree No. 39/2013 (14 February) on the manufacture, marketing and control of tobacco products, combined warnings and detailed rules on the application of health protection fines, introducing more detailed safety procedures for nicotine-containing products that imitate smoking and data reporting on these products to consumers.¹⁹ With particular regard to young people, single-use electronic cigarettes pose a

¹⁶ The amended laws: Decree No. 60/2003 (20 October) of the Ministry of Health, Social Welfare and Family Affairs on the minimum professional requirements for the provision of health services; Decree No. 9/1993 (2 April) of the Minister of Public Welfare on certain issues concerning the social security financing of specialist healthcare; Decree No. 22/2012 (14 September) of the Ministry of Human Capacities on the acquisition of higher education qualifications in healthcare

¹⁷ Paragraph (2) of Section 18 ¹⁷ Paragraph (5) of Section 8

¹⁹ According to Paragraph (1) of Section 18/C of the Government Decree, tobacco products may not contain the following: they may contain added vitamins or other additives that give the impression that the product has a

threat, as they are particularly attractive to young people.²⁰ Therefore, Hungary has taken proactive steps to impose legal restrictions on the sale of such tobacco products from 2022 onwards.²¹

The regulation and restriction of such tobacco products and beverages containing caffeine and alcohol should be appreciated in itself, but despite the legislative changes, there is still no significant progress. The 2024 amendment to the government decree is less significant in terms of protecting the health of underage people.

c. Standard of living

Legislative amendments aimed at improving children's living standards affect the Child Protection Act. These amendments are partly intended to provide disadvantaged children and children with special needs with more support, development opportunities and a safer environment, which will improve their quality of life and social opportunities in the long term. In this regard, the amendment also provides for teachers' leave: persons employed in teaching positions are entitled to 21 working days of basic leave per year, which also serves to improve the working conditions of professionals working in the education and training of children. Changes have been made to nursery care for children with special educational needs and those eligible for early development, which will now be implemented in accordance with the national basic programme for nursery schooling and care with a view to full or partial integration.

Minor amendments affecting government decrees cover the conditions for foster parenthood and substitute parental care²²; support for children of parents performing military service²³; and conditions for support relating to establishing a family and housing and improving housing security²⁴.

In addition to the legislative amendments, it should be noted that, according to data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, inflation remains high in Hungary and affects the everyday lives of families and thus children. In December 2024, consumer prices were on average 4.6% higher than a year earlier and rose by 0.5% compared to the previous month. Inflation for the whole year was 3.7%. If we focus on food prices, we can see that they rose by 5.4% over the 12-month period. In terms of staple foods, the price of flour rose by 36.2%; eggs by 21.9%; milk by 19.5%; butter and butter cream by 16.4%; edible oil by 13.7%; and fruit and vegetables by 17.3%.

beneficial physiological effect or is less harmful to health; they may not contain added caffeine, added taurine or other additives and stimulating compounds associated with the perception of energy and vitality; additives that facilitate inhalation and additives with CMR properties.

²⁰ See: <https://fokuszpont.dohanyzasvisszaszoritasa.hu/hu/node/85>

²¹ The sale of electronic cigarettes and electronic devices that imitate smoking is not illegal in itself, provided that they do not contain flavourings and the seller has a tobacco product retail licence and operates under a licence issued by the Authority for the Supervision of Regulated Activities (SZTFH). These products may therefore only be sold in national tobacco shops. The National Tax and Customs Administration (NAV) is stepping up its efforts to combat illegal products available from abroad in order to curb the illegal tobacco trade.

See: <https://sztfh.hu/tevekenysegek/dohanyugyi-felugyelet/tiltott-izesített-elektronikus-cigarettek/>;
https://nav.gov.hu/sajtoszoba/hirek/Figyelem_Tiltott_termek az_iskolaban_mit_kell_tudni_az_ELFBAR-rol_es_tarsairol_

²² Government Decree No. 513/2013 (29 December)

²³ Decrees No. 21/2024 and 23/2024 of the Minister of Defence

²⁴ Government Decree No. 403/2024 (18 December) introduced the option for employers to provide housing assistance, which indirectly improves the housing security of employees' children, especially in the case of parents who are just starting their careers or have lower incomes.

IX. J. Education, leisure, culture, recreation

a. Right to education

According to Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, “*States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and... States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention*”.

In 2024, the most important legislative change affecting the right to education was Government Decree No. 245/2024 (8 August) on the scope of prohibited and restricted items in educational institutions and detailed rules on the procedures applicable to such items. According to the decree, items with restricted use include mobile phones, laptops, and tablets. These items must be handed in at the beginning of classes and returned after classes. The items may be used during class if required by the nature of the lesson, but school rules govern the handing in and returning of the devices, as well as when they may be used during class. Among prohibited items, devices that pose a particular threat to public safety and products that cannot be sold to persons under the age of 18 shall be returned to the parents of minor students, and if it can be established beyond doubt that the owner of the prohibited item is a third party, it shall be returned to that third party or to the 18-year-old student themselves. If it appears that a student is in possession of a prohibited or restricted item, the teacher may first ask the student to hand over the item. If the student refuses to comply, the teacher may ask the student to prove that they are not in possession of the item. If there is information indicating that the student is in possession of a prohibited item that violates the Misdemeanours Act or the Criminal Code, the teacher shall first ask the student to prove that he/she is not in possession of the item and shall notify the institution’s maintainer, the police and the parents. The government extended the regulation to vocational training institutions as well; the restriction does not apply only to public education institutions. In September 2024, a student filed a constitutional complaint with the Constitutional Court regarding the decree, objecting that it violates students’ right to personal safety, right to privacy, and right to education, and that it discriminates against students because the ban does not apply to teachers and violates students’ right to property. The court did not consider the constitutional argument to be well-founded in relation to the first four fundamental rights, while it considered the restriction to be necessary and proportionate in relation to the right to property.

Banning mobile phone use in schools helps students concentrate in class. It improves young people’s mental health and reduces cases of cyberbullying.²⁵

An important change is the amendment to Act CXC of 2011 on national public education, which stipulates that teachers and employees directly assisting in pedagogical and educational activities in kindergarten education, school and dormitory pedagogical and educational work, and the provision of pedagogical specialist services, are persons performing public duties within the meaning of the Criminal Code.²⁶

In 2024, a legislative amendment affecting teachers will limit their use of mobile phones and introduce a new performance evaluation system, which will form the basis for salary increases and promotions. The restriction protects children’s moral rights and promotes the enforcement of students’ right to education.

b. Right to education

²⁵ KINCS: *National and international research, studies, and experiences on the harmful effects of children’s use of mobile phones at school*, 2024.

²⁶ Paragraph (1) of Section 62

Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also enshrines the right to culture, stating that “*States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity*”.

2024 saw the introduction of amendments that expand access to programmes organised by cultural institutions and enable those living in child protection institutions to attend theatre, music and dance events free of charge.

X. K. Special measures and protection of marginalised children

Marginalised children are minors whose group is difficult to define for certain socio-economic, social, or health reasons, and as a result, these young people often fall outside the scope of the legislator's attention. For example, children with disabilities or mental health problems, homeless minors, immigrant children, children in specialised child protection care, parents under the age of 18, and children whose parents are serving sentences in prison.

One of the most important changes is that inmates living in correctional facilities can receive visitors once every six months for 1-2 hours of informal conversation, which also applies to minor children.²⁷ Previous regulations only allowed visits with parents during group visiting hours, which took place under strictly controlled conditions. The legislative change affects all relatives, but it is particularly significant in terms of children's rights because it promotes the maintenance and deepening of parent-child relationships.

Minor citizens living in specialised child protection care are affected by the change which stipulates mandatory psychological aptitude testing for the heads of child protection institutions. Previously, no legislation required the heads of public or church-run institutions to undergo psychological aptitude tests.²⁸ The aim of the regulation is to ensure that persons who are suitable in every respect are appointed to head institutions and to screen out those whose behaviour or personality could pose a threat to the healthy mental, physical, intellectual, emotional and moral development of children.

The most important changes affecting immigrant and foreign children are those relating to taking the secondary school-leaving exam in Hungarian as a foreign language. This means that non-Hungarian citizens who have completed three of their four years of secondary education outside the Hungarian public education and vocational training system, or dual citizens who have completed their secondary education abroad, can take their final exams in Hungarian as a foreign language. Eligible students may take their secondary school-leaving examination in Hungarian as a foreign language instead of Hungarian language and literature. The regulation facilitates further education opportunities for dual citizens and helps foreign students succeed in Hungary.²⁹ The regulation does not introduce a new group of eligible persons, but clarifies that dual citizens also have the opportunity to sit an exam in Hungarian as a foreign language, provided that certain conditions are met.

²⁷ The Penal Enforcement Act was amended by Section 36 of Act LXIV of 2024 on the amendment of certain acts necessary for further effective action against online fraud and other acts.

²⁸ Government Decree No. 40/2024 (29 February) introduced psychological aptitude testing, which was then extended to church-run institutions by Government Decree No. 191/2024 (8 July).

²⁹ Government Decree No. 100/1997 (13 June) issuing the examination regulations for the secondary school-leaving examination, as amended by Government Decree No. 201/2024 (29 July).

XI. L. Focus on mental health in 2024

Among the priority professional programmes of the Association for Children's Rights are the Children's Rights Days, held annually in partnership with the Central European Academy, and the related Children's Rights Festival (GyerekJogFeszt). The focus of the 2024 series of events was children's mental health, and the programmes also focused on the 35th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 100th anniversary of the first international document on children's rights, the Geneva Declaration.

The Children's Rights Days international conference was held for the third time this year.

Slovakia received special attention at the conference as a priority partner country, particularly in the area of supporting children's mental health. Good practices coordinated by the Slovak Ombudsman for Children's Rights were presented, and the impact of digital technologies on mental health was also discussed. The programme was traditionally accompanied by an art exhibition of children's works, in which several educational institutions from Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Croatia, including kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, took part. Children expressed their feelings and thoughts about the importance of mental health and what helps them relax and unwind through drawings and writing.

The programme also included a roundtable discussion on children's rights, during which the children themselves spoke up and shared their opinions and insights with the general public, thereby reinforcing the importance of adopting a "children's rights perspective" in professional thinking. The patron of the conference was Tamás Sulyok, President of Hungary.³⁰

The international conference was preceded by GyerekJogFeszt, a more playful, community-oriented event for children, teachers, and parents. The aim of the programme is to present children's rights in an easily understandable way, with particular emphasis on the challenges of the digital world.

The event was on 4 October 2024 at the Béla Vanyek Sports Centre in Vác, and it was put together by the Vác Diocese Catholic Schools Authority (EKIF) and the Association for Children's Rights. At the conference, renowned experts gave presentations on the relationship between children and smart devices, and how adults can help promote conscious use of the digital world. The day ended with a roundtable discussion and the drafting of a 10+1-point children's rights manifesto summarising a child-centred approach to smart device use.³¹

Both Children's Rights Days and GyerekJogFeszt share the common goal of not only taking children's opinions into account, but also actively involving them in decisions that affect them. These events help adults and professionals to pay attention to the real needs of children and promote the treatment of children's rights not as an abstract legal concept, but as values that can be enforced on a daily basis.

³⁰ <https://centraleuropeanacademy.hu/en/rendezveny/gyermekjogi-napok-3/>

³¹ <https://vaciegyhazmegye.hu/hirek/6522/A-GYEREKEK-TUDATOS-OKOSESZKOZ-HASZNALATA-MITOSZ-GYEREKJOGFESZT-ES-KONFERENCIA-VACON.html>

Children's Right Pilot report – 2024 – 2. part

Child abuse has now become a global pandemic, affecting children on every continent, regardless of their social and economic situation.

According to the latest international figures, more than 1 billion children³², thus one in two young people aged 2–17 worldwide experiences some form of violence during their childhood. The severity of the problem is shown by the fact that nearly three quarters of young children aged 2–4 years are regularly subjected to physical punishment or psychological aggression at home. Furthermore, sexual violence is also shockingly common, with one in five girls and one in thirteen boys worldwide reporting having experienced sexual abuse as a child. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation:³³ a 2024 study found that 24% of children and adolescents (i.e., one in four young people) experienced some form of violence during the pandemic, especially in lower-income countries.

Child abuse is often hidden, as most cases happen within the family and behind closed doors. Victims often do not get help since less than half of them report it to anyone. Yet violence not only causes immediate physical and psychological injuries, it also has long-term consequence – it increases the risk of mental disorders, anxiety, depression, risky behaviours, and social exclusion.

This is why it is essential that child protection policies are constantly reviewed, updated and a culture of human dignity is reinforced. The safety and protection of children's rights and well-being can only be achieved through comprehensive, up-to-date and effective child protection legislation and institutional practice. Therefore, the aim of this report is to contribute to this process and help combat child abuse at both the national and international levels.

Starting with the Vatican, the heart of the Catholic Church, the pilot report will examine the effectiveness of various churches' focus on child protection in Hungary in 2024. The second part of this pilot report examines the response of church institutions to the pandemic of child abuse. Fortunately, we are in an era of action so good news can be provided by examining the different churches' procedures and practices more deeply.

The Catholic Church on the Path to Development

Over the past ten years, the Catholic Church's regulations and policies on child protection have changed significantly. Pope Francis was especially concerned over the topic of child protection. During his papacy he constantly sought to raise awareness of the special need to protect children and vulnerable adults within the Catholic Church as well.

In 2024 the Catholic Church has taken significant steps to strengthen child protection at both international and national level, including the publication of comprehensive child protection reports, the launch of training courses, the creation of new institutions and the promotion of social dialogue.

The Operation of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and Its Results in 2024

Since its creation in 2014, one of the Commission's main tasks has been to create *safe spaces* within the Church for victims, which are often not easily accessible. Furthermore, the Commission has also been tasked with providing the structural channels for disclosure and assistance. Hence the Commission's role is twofold: it is responsible for both prevention and the establishment of communities and a safe environment for victims/survivors.

³² <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>

³³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12056755/>

In November 2024, the European regional group of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors organised a conference in Rome. The primary aim of this event was to allow representatives from Europe to share experiences and best practices in preventing sexual abuse, supporting victims and promoting transparency. The conference was attended by more than 80 representatives from 25 countries, including bishops, clergy, lay professionals, lawyers and victims. Hungary was also represented there by a five-member delegation giving four presentations. The delegation comprised Benedek Dobszay (a Franciscan monk and leading advisor of Human Dignity Strategy), Judit Szentes (a social sister and child protection specialist at the Catholic Pedagogical Institute), Kinga Vadász (a social sister and canon lawyer), Pál Strommer (president of the Piarist Alumni Association) and Dr Márta Benyusz (president of the Association for Children's Rights).

In a letter to the conference participants, Pope Francis praised the unity and solidarity with the victims, and underlined the importance of compassion, fair trial and the central role of children in the Church's mission.

First Annual Report of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors

In October, the Commission announced the first comprehensive annual report.

The document says *"Safeguarding children from abuse is not a distraction from the Church's work of evangelisation, but rather an expression of it."* As Pope Francis put it *"The mending of the torn fabric of past experience is an act of redemption, the act of the suffering Servant who did not avoid the pain, but took upon Himself the guilt of us all."* (cf. Isaiah 53:1-14)

The first pilot report outlines the progress made in child protection protocols and procedures in Europe and worldwide, while acknowledging the remaining shortcomings such as delays in processing cases, insufficient resources for training, clericalism, lack of prevention of online abuse and inadequate training of clergy.

The report also identifies the key challenges for the future. The lack of reliable data and statistics on abuse hinders the development of evidence-based policies in many European regions. However, as Pope Francis said, there can be no doubt that *"it is time to repair the damage done to previous generations and to help those who are still suffering"*.

The document, written with the involvement of survivors and lay experts, is an essential step on the path to institutional change and a safer Church, and it sometimes contains difficult confessions. *"In the past, the Church mostly took action on sexual abuse of minors when it was forced to do so, so most measures were reactive. By now, we have learned the necessary lessons from this, and it can be said that today the Catholic Church has the wisdom, resources, and tragic experience necessary to be a world leader in recognizing, preventing, and healing the effects of abuse."*

The report makes recommendations for continuous improvement, but this requires calling on church leaders in different regions to be more accountable and transparent, as well as developing a proactive attitude and action plan aimed at preventing abuse and investigating and redressing cases that have already occurred. Both the conference and the report emphasised the importance of establishing a Europe-wide network of child protection specialist who can share policies, procedures, and strategies for raising awareness across countries. This would also require ongoing cooperation and the creation of small working groups, as this is the only way to sustain the development and mutual support between national churches in Europe.

The first annual report of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors is a tool to facilitate conversion for both the universal Church and local churches.

This conversion is also reinforced by the final document of the Vatican Synod of Bishops 2024, which stressed the protection of children and the importance of child protection training in church institutions.

The final document of the Synod says *"The Church needs to listen with special attention and sensitivity to the voices of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, power and conscience abuse by members of the clergy or persons with Church appointments. (...) It is necessary to continue this commitment, offering ongoing specific and adequate formation to those who work in contact with minors and vulnerable adults so that they can act competently and recognise the signals, often silent, of those experiencing difficulties and needing help. It is essential that victims are welcomed and supported, and this needs to be done sensitively."*

The Hungarian Catholic Church's Child Protection Measures and High Media Profile Criminal Cases

In 2024 the Hungarian Catholic Church faced particular challenges in the area of child protection. Several serious scandals shook church communities during the year, while the church leadership introduced significant institutionalisation and preventive measures to strengthen child protection.

Under Pope Francis' 2019 decree *Vos estis lux mundi*, dioceses and monastic orders are obliged to operate an online child and youth protection reporting system. It is also available in Hungary.

Cases of the Archdiocese of Kalocsa-Kecskemét

Over the past year, several priests in the Archdiocese of Kalocsa-Kecskemét have faced serious accusations of offences. In the case of parish priest R. Gábor, Pope Francis has already made a decision. In September 2023, R. Gábor was expelled from the priesthood – the most severe ecclesiastical punishment. He stands accused of multiple sexual offences involving abuse of power, for which prosecutors have requested a prison sentence of eight years.

In November, the Archdiocese of Kalocsa-Kecskemét initiated an investigation into another member of the clergy. Parish priest H. Zs. was reported for a crime involving a minor and was also suspended. Furthermore, on 7 November, the Archdiocese announced an investigation into a third parish priest, who was immediately suspended from his ministry.

The Case of the Parish Priest of Zugló

In December, the Catholic Church was rocked by another serious scandal concerning András Pajor, a parish priest in Zugló. Pajor was banned from all priestly activities after several allegations were made against him. This case particularly received a huge media attention because of András Pajor's previous public role.

The Church Authorities Have Officially Apologized to the Victims

On 4 December, the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference (HCBC) issued a comprehensive statement³⁴ in response to the sexual offences affecting the Hungarian Catholic Church. Church authorities have expressed their sympathy and sorrow for those who have suffered serious abuse at the hands of clergy members.

The statement emphasises that, while sexual offences against children are present in many sectors of society, the Church will continue to take decisive action against them and uphold higher standards than those of secular law.

The HCBC reaffirms its previous position that *"child abuse and ill-treatment is a serious crime and a criminal offence, wherever it occurs"*.

³⁴ https://www.magyarokurir.hu/hirek/a-magyar-katolikus-puspoki-konferencia-kozlemenye-143623?utm_source=chatgpt.com

This gesture was followed by a circular letter from Zsolt Marton, chairman of the HCBC Commission for the Family Pastoral. With a view to the Holy Year 2025, he says³⁵ *"Let us regard the Holy Year as an opportunity for families to redesign their lives in grace. As Bishop in charge of the Family Pastoral, it is with a sorrowful heart that I ask forgiveness from God, from children, young people and their families, from all those who have suffered abuse at the hands of the clergy members. ...We will do our utmost to ensure that situations of abuse do not recur in the future and, in full identification with the principle of zero tolerance proclaimed by the Holy Father, we will continue the work already begun, with a view to prevention."*

Afterwards, László Varga, Bishop of Kaposvár also apologised for the sins committed by members of the church and proclaimed a period of fasting and prayer, which people could join online. In addition, T. Cirill Hortobágyi (Archabbot of Pannonhalma) and László Felföldi (Bishop of Pécs) expressed their apologies.

Institutionalised Child Protection Measures within the Hungarian Catholic Church

Establishment of New Child Protection Offices

In January 2024, the Hungarian Jesuits have established a Child Protection Office, following the decision of Attila András SJ, Provincial. This office is dedicated to implementing the Children and Youth Code of Conduct (CYCC), which was adopted in 2019. The CYCC is based on the idea of making the dignity of those who bear the image of God visible.

In 2022, the International Jesuit Order conducted a global audit of child protection practices, which gave excellent feedback on the Hungarian Order's child protection practices. Since then, the Hungarian Jesuits have incorporated risk assessment into their practices. This considers factors such as the obstruction of immediate intervention, a lack of necessary training and unclear responsibilities.

Professional Trainings and Workshops

In May 2024, the Piarist Provincialate hosted a workshop on "Publicity and Child Protection" in Budapest as part of the Human Dignity Strategy. Around thirty professionals attended the event to discuss child protection case management practices.

The workshop focused on how to deal with cases of peer bullying and how to communicate with parents. Participants were given an insight into the work of a crisis team dealing with a child protection case in a "fishbowl conversation" and took part in an exercise simulating a parents' meeting.

Programmes of the Catholic Pedagogical Institute

In 2019, the Catholic Pedagogical Institute (KaPI) began preparing a child protection and organisational development programme focused on prevention for Catholic educational institutions, as part of an international cooperation project. The programme's goal was to make sure that all members of the community in Catholic schools and kindergartens are aware of child protection, that there is a functioning child protection team and that child protection work is based on a tailor-made strategy and protocol.

The programme was launched in 38 Catholic institutions in 2021, and the first experiences and results were presented at a joint professional day in autumn 2022. Based on feedback, the project has evolved to include new institutions every year and has already delivered improvements to nearly 80 institutions.

³⁵ <https://www.magyarKurir.hu/hirek/a-csaladok-remeny-forrasai-marton-zsolt-az-mkpk-csaladugyi-bizottsaga-elnokenek-korlevele>

In autumn 2023, the KaPI also accredited a 60-hour teacher training course, training 17 teachers for the 2023/2024 academic year. The training will be followed by mentoring of participants to help them better develop their own institution's child protection team, carry out a situation assessment and write their institution's child protection strategy and protocol. To date, a total of 46 child protection programmes covering a wide range of topics have been implemented.

Summary

The new cases and allegations that continue to emerge show that the Catholic Church still has a long way to go to restore full confidence. International experience and cooperation as well as partnerships with NGOs will be key to building an effective child protection system. In the future, particular attention should be paid to prevention, early detection and the provision of appropriate professional support for both victims and communities.

Results from the Association for Children's Rights' Questionnaire Survey

The second half of this annual pilot report on children's rights examined how educational institutions run by various churches in Hungary currently approach children's rights and child protection. The aim was to explore their attitudes towards children and their safety, and the extent to which their policies and decisions are influenced by the best interests of children and filtered through their vision and lens of children's rights.

Methodology:

Four church organisations, each responsible for maintaining a particular type of institution involved in child protection and/or education, participated in the research on a voluntary basis.

- Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog (Greek Catholic), hereinafter referred to as **AH**
- Diocese of Vác (Roman Catholic), hereinafter referred to as **DV**
- Province of Piarists, hereinafter referred to as **PP**
- Hungarian Baptist Aid, herein after referred to as **HBA**

As this was the first time such a report was written, the primary focus of the research was to identify organisations with which previous professional contacts had been established. Their cooperation is deeply appreciated.

The four organisations that responded to our questionnaire differ considerably in their structure, operational framework, denominational and maintenance background.

The Archdiocese of Hajdúdorog was elevated to archdiocesan status by Pope Francis in 2015, when he founded the Hungarian Greek Catholic Metropolis. Since that time, the AH has played a significant institutional role, running twenty child protection and educational institutions, three of which provide specialised child protection care, and an extensive foster care network. The majority of the educational institutions of the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog have been maintained by the institution in the last ten years. In contrast, the Piarist Gymnasium in Budapest, which is also examined in this paper, is the oldest institution of the Province of Piarists and has been in continuous operation since 1717.

The educational and training institutions of the Diocese of Váci are under the management and supervision of the High Authority of Diocesan Catholic Schools (EKIF). The EKIF runs 32 public education institutions in 4 counties, providing education for nearly 11,000 children.

In the case of the Baptist Church of Hungary, the Hungarian Baptist Aid is responsible for the maintenance of educational and training institutions. The reason for this is that the Hungarian Baptist Church is organised from the ground up. This means that the church itself does not practise maintaining authority over its institutions.

Therefore, in all four cases, the role of maintenance is played by different types of organisations: an archeparchy (i.e., the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog), the High Authority of Diocesan Catholic Schools in Vác, a monastic order, and a charitable institution. Although their organizational structures differ significantly, they share common goals in the area of child protection, namely the long-term creation and maintenance of a safe school environment. Achieving this requires appropriate regulations, dedicated professionals working in the area, and the provision of the necessary financial resources.

The present questionnaire focuses on the functioning of institutions, the enforcement of children's rights, and the protection of children's mental health. The questions also aim to establish what procedures are in place at each institution and how centralised the handling of child abuse cases is. Additionally, the practical implementation of the 2024 legislation on

education, training, and child protection was investigated, as was its application within these institutions.

Despite the wide range of topics covered, the questions have been crafted to identify the fundamental conditions necessary for an educational institution to function in a manner that is both safe and optimal from the perspective of children's right based on the perspective of Association for Children's Rights. In this way, these questions can also serve as a guide for institutions in enforcing children's rights.

Method of processing questions

The analysis of the completed questionnaires revealed a considerable variation in size and format. In one instance, the maintainer provided direct responses to the posed queries; in another instance, the child protection specialist did. In the case of the Hungarian Baptist Aid, the questionnaires were sent to all 35 institutions, and the responses were received in summarised form.

Association for Children's Rights' questionnaire on child protection and children's rights – 2024

General and child protection-related questions:

1. Which of your institutions provides care for minors or vulnerable adults? How many people in these categories do you care for? How many employees work in these institutions in total?
2. What kind of social and child protection specialists work in your schools? Do you employ any school psychologists?
3. Does each of your institutions have its own child protection protocol? If so, how long has it been in force?
4. How is the cooperation between state child protection authorities and your institutions?
5. Do you organise trainings on child protection for teachers and childcare workers?

Questions on children's rights:

6. Do your institutions offer any events or classes that focus on children's rights education? Who are the target groups for children's rights education?
7. How do your schools help to ensure that students' right to free participation is realized in practice?
8. Did you hold an event focusing on children's rights and child protection within the last year (2024)?

The impact of the 2024 legislation on child protection and children's rights within your institutions' lives:

9. How was the smartphone ban implemented in your schools? What is your experience of the impact and consequences of the legislation?
10. How are you trying to increase internet safety in the lives of children attending your institutions?

Questions on children's mental health issues:

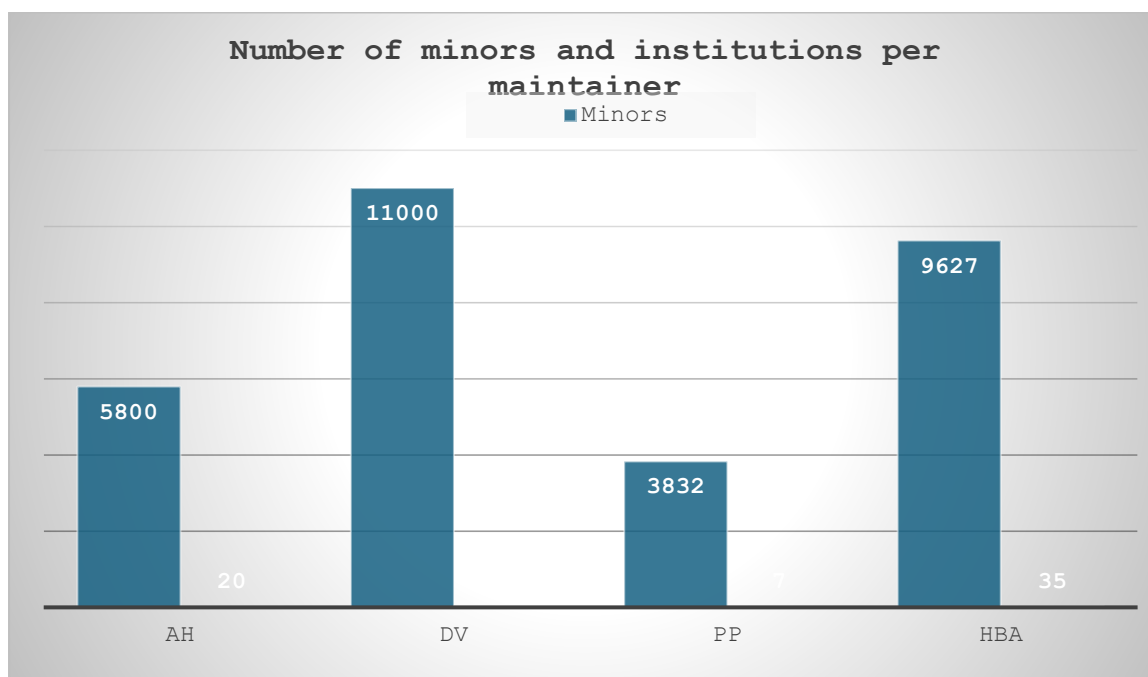
11. How are you trying to protect children's mental health in your institutions?
12. How do you help disadvantaged children?
13. What initiatives do you have to support families and their mental health?
14. What steps are you taking with regard to talent management? Do you have such programmes?
15. What activities are offered to children with special educational needs or other learning difficulties from kindergarten to secondary school? Do they participate in education in an integrated way?
16. If you have a foster home, how do you ensure follow-ups?

Actions in cases of child abuse:

17. If there is a child protection protocol, what types of abuse are covered?
18. Is the possibility of anonymous reporting in case of abuse guaranteed?
19. Is there an explicit internal procedure for investigating abuses, are the specific persons responsible named, and are there legal consequences?
20. What is the procedure in cases of proven abuse? What are the consequences?
21. Do victims receive support in dealing with abuse, maltreatment or sexual abuse, with a particular focus on children, parents and families, and where appropriate, the whole community (e.g., classroom, RE class, parish)?
22. Is assistance from external experts ensured?
23. What measures are being taken to ensure that vulnerable groups of children receive adequate protection and that the community is properly informed about how to treat them appropriately?

SUMMARISED INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES³⁶

1. How many minors attend your institutions?



Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog: approx. 5800 minors in 20 institutions

Diocese of Vác: 11 thousand minors in 32 public education institutions

Province of Piarists: 3832 minors in 7 institutions

Hungarian Baptist Aid: 9627 minors in 35 institutions

2. What kind of specialists work in your schools?

- **Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog (AH):** All the institutions of the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog employ child protection officers. Six institutions also have school psychologists.
- **Diocese of Vác (DV):** The Diocese of Vác has professional support in all its institutions. Six institutions have school psychologists, the majority of whom are on a part-time basis. The High Authority of Diocesan Catholic Schools' child welfare support service has provided a mobility service for almost 10 years to support the mental wellbeing and safety of children attending the institutions. This service is led by an experienced psychologist and employs 14 psychologists and therapists.
- **Province of Piarists (PP):** School psychologists work in five of the nine locations, and a child and youth protection officer works part-time in one other location.
- **Hungarian Baptist Aid (HBA):** Out of the 35 institutions 17 employ psychologists, and 19 employ social workers. The amount of time they work varies depending on the

³⁶ In the following, the institutional responses to the questionnaire are summarised and edited by the Association for Children's Rights.

size of the school, ranging from one day a week to full-time employment.

3. Do you have a child protection protocol?

- **AH:** 5 educational institutions of the Greek Catholic Church have established child protection protocols. In 2021, one of their schools participated in the pilot programme of the Catholic Pedagogical Institute (KaPI), where the first protocol was developed. Then, in 2023 and 2024, further 2-2 institutions joined the KaPI training and developed their own child protection protocols.
- **DV:** As the maintainer, the Diocese of Vác has a child protection protocol that regulates child protection at an institutional level. In addition, institutions that are members of the KaPI mentor network have their own child protection protocol.
- **PP:** The Province of Piarists has a uniform child protection protocol in practice. Since its foundation in 2019, the Provincial Council for Safe Schools has governed child protection protocols through its statute book and rules of operation. Each institution has set out in its organisational and operational rules that it will adhere to these protocols in all cases.
- **HBA:** Only six out of 35 institutions have a child protection protocol.

4. How is the cooperation between state child protection authorities and your institutions?

- **AH:** Their child protection institutions work in close cooperation with the state child protection authorities. This ongoing joint professional work stems, on the one hand, from a common goal (i.e., ensuring child welfare and children's rights) and, on the other hand, from the division of tasks laid down by the current legislation.
- **DV:** They rate the cooperation as "basically good", but stress that effectiveness depends on the person(s) who are actually handling the cases and procedures.
- **PP:** They maintain contact and cooperate with state child protection authorities at both institutional and provincial levels. They do this through consultations, reporting, and cooperation.
- **HBA:** The quality of cooperation is reported to range from acceptable to good to excellent. These qualities are found in almost equal proportions in the 35 institutions.

5. Do you organise trainings on child protection for teachers and childcare workers?

- **AH:** Their teachers and childcare workers participate in the Catholic Pedagogical Institute's (KaPI) child protection trainings. This training started in 2021 as part of a pilot programme in which one of their schools participated. Since then, their institutions have been continuously involved in the grant opportunities offered by KaPI, which has resulted in the preparation of important institutional documents such as situation analyses, strategies, and protocols.

- **DV:** They aim to provide information on the recent increase in peer abuse among students in all institutions. So far, they have visited one kindergarten and will visit all institutions and member schools next school year. Experienced psychologists will lead these visits.
- **PP:** The Province of Piarist has made child protection training a permanent part of the novice training. In addition, one module of the training course entitled “Basics of Piarist Pedagogy” designed for teachers is also devoted to child protection. This module is linked to the Bartimeus programme organised by the Monastic Office. Teachers and childcare workers actively participate in meetings of the Support Network (Segítő Háló), which are specifically designed to provide support to professionals.
- **HBA:** So far, only a few teachers have attended child protection training, and more than half of the institutions have not yet held such a programme at all.

6. Do your institutions offer any events or classes that focus on children's rights education? If so, who are the target groups?

- **AH:** They hold regular supervision sessions in their **foster care network**, where current issues on children's rights, changes in the law, and developments in child abuse protocol can be reviewed as well as questions related to children's rights can be answered.
- **In residential homes,** the house rules contain detailed information on children's rights and how to report issues and contact the advocacy forum. Furthermore, the contact details of the children's rights representatives are displayed on all residential homes' notice boards. The children's rights representative visits residential homes from time to time to educate children about their rights, and about remedies if these rights are violated. Some institutions hold a **children's assembly** every year or after every major issue, where teachers also talk about children's rights and how to report issues. The psychologists at their institutions talk to all the teenagers in their care about the difficulties and dangers associated with adolescence. This includes discussions about sexuality and related rights as well as safe internet use – both of which are unavoidable topics. There are also institutions where children's rights are explored in an experiential way as part of a series of thematic workshops for 12- to 16-year-olds, led by a professional instructor.
- **Their educational institutions** occasionally invite guest speakers (from the police, courts, parental relations in the event of acute school problems) to give lectures, class programs, and workshops on children's rights education. Several of their institutions provide the Family Life Education (FLE) programme as part of the school curriculum, during spiritual days, or as monthly lessons with the class teacher. While the target group is broad, the issue of children's rights is perhaps least present in kindergarten education. It manifests with reduced intensity in the lower primary school, whilst it is more pronounced in the upper primary school. In their experience, taking into account age-specific characteristics and the sociocultural environment, the most effective children's rights education takes place in secondary schools and, more specifically, in vocational schools. Unfortunately, in these cases the focus is no longer just on prevention.
- **DV:** The Family Life Education programme is available in 27 of their institutions, including awareness-raising on children's rights. Furthermore, it includes training for student councils, which is implemented as a programme run by the school's maintainer.

- **PP:** The topic of children's rights is addressed in preventive sessions held in dormitories as part of group activities. Moreover, student councils that are active in institutions provide representation and a platform for communication to discuss children's rights issues.
- **HBA:** The issue is addressed in classroom lessons and on student council days. In many schools, the student council assembly provides a weekly opportunity to learn about and practise children's rights. In some cases, citizenship education classes cover children's rights as well. At one of the secondary schools, the rights and responsibilities of students are explained to class teachers at the start of the school year as part of the house rules. This information is also provided at the first student council meeting. "We encourage the respectful expression of opinions and suggestions, and we consider children to be partners in matters that affect them," says the head of one institution. Several Baptist-run schools also held wake-up call activities organized by UNICEF. Issues concerning children's rights are primarily focused on secondary and upper primary school students.

7. How do your schools help to ensure that students' right to free participation is realized in practice??

- **AH:** Each of our institutions has a student council, comprising representatives from every class, with the support of at least one teacher. The most important task of these student councils is to express opinions on issues that affect students and to represent their side. They have the right to make suggestions to the school management on any matter (e.g., meals, requirements and level of satisfaction, etc.). The student councils' other tasks include advocacy, organising events and promoting the school (influencing student opinion).
- **DV:** Free participation is based on the activities of the student councils. Moreover, a handbook and a methodological guide have recently been written, and the board now meets regularly with student representatives. In January 2026, the High Authority of Diocesan Catholic Schools' student council will be formed and asked to provide feedback on the organisation's strategy.
- **PP:** The schools are active in student councils and also run prevention sessions. Furthermore, they have hosted digital child protection sessions run by the National Media and Infocommunications Authority. One of their schools took part in international mental health projects, while three students from another institution participated in peer support training organised by the Human Dignity Strategy during the 2023/24 academic year.
- **HBA:** The institutions promote students' right to free participation by running student councils. *"In order to assert their rights under the law and the school's internal regulations, students can turn to the school management, their class teacher, the other teachers or the student council, either orally or in writing, directly or through their elected representatives,"* says one of the heads of the institutions. Thematic programmes on conflict management and abuse prevention are organised occasionally. Moreover, school mediation opportunities encourage students to actively engage in resolving their own issues.

8. What kind of events on children's rights did you hold in the 2024 academic year?

- **AH:** In their schools where a child protection protocol has been established an annual child protection work plan has been drawn up and child protection-focused work is carried out. Prevention is the focus of events throughout the year, with the aim of creating a family-like, safe, and loving school environment in all of their institutions. Naturally, other organisations concentrate on child protection activities too, if not at the school level, then at least for certain target groups.
- **DV:** In October 2024, Children's Rights Day was held with the participation of more than 300 students. At the same time, a children's rights conference was held with renowned speakers, who examined children's rights, pedagogical, educational, and psychological implications of using smart devices. The conference was attended by students aged 16-18 as both speakers and participants.
- **PP:** Two committees worked intensively on issues related to children's rights. The Provincial Council for Safe Schools compiled a summary report on its entire period of operation. Meanwhile, the Nox Praecessit committee reviewed investigations concerning sexual abuse involving monks listed in the order's archives, and prepared a report on the process, lessons learned and any remaining tasks. Although these two reports were only submitted to the Provincial Superior at the beginning of 2025, most of the work was carried out in 2024. The provincial order established the Child Protection Secretariat in order to institutionalize and uniformly manage the processes of prevention, intervention (by the Provincial Council for Safe Schools), and rehabilitation.
- **HBA:** Several of their schools have been hosting UNICEF-organised wake-up call sessions. They had no other events closely related to children's rights in 2024. In one of their institutions, a lawyer delivered presentations in the classroom to both parents and children about the legal background and consequences of cyberbullying. In other institutions, invited speakers discussed topics such as verbal abuse, cyberbullying, adolescent mental and physical development, self-acceptance, and eating disorders. In addition, they had schools where a representative of the regional Child Protection Centre gave presentations and workshops on a regular basis.

9. How was the smartphone ban implemented in schools? What is your experience of the impact and consequences of the legislation?

- **AH:** The directors had already prepared and incorporated the legislative changes into the policy as early as August. The law was more readily accepted by students in primary schools, as mobile phone use had not been permitted there. The situation was more challenging in secondary schools. It was perhaps in vocational schools that teachers encountered the most resistance. School management and teachers encountered some difficulties with the technical aspects as well. These issues included the problem of storage, security, and liability. Despite this, there was a quick and positive transition, particularly with regard to the interpersonal relationships among students. During breaks, they enjoyed chatting, playing games and table football matches.
- **DV:** All institutions have restricted the use of smart devices in their house rules, requiring students to hand them in at the beginning of the day and only allowing students to retrieve them if they need to make an urgent call or if teachers want to use phones for

educational purposes during class. The experience has been positive – students' social life has improved and their concentration has increased. In addition to the ban, a digital fasting challenge was organised during Lent, with 120 students taking part from six classes of four schools. The participants' attention span, emotional intelligence, social skills, anger management, and digital addiction were measured at the beginning and end of the challenge, which was later published to interested parents, teachers, students, and professionals.

- **PP:** At first, phones were collected in each classroom, but after a few months, all students in secondary schools were given lockers for this purpose. There are several classes where students use their phones as tools. In these cases, they are allowed to carry their phones with them. Since the use of mobile phones has always been prohibited during other activities and lessons, students accepted the ban with understanding. The institutions are clearly in favour of the ban, as students spend their breaks in age-appropriate activities and their social contacts are positively affected by the regulation. Attempts to use a prohibited telephone are sporadic.
- **HBA:** Some of their schools have storage boxes for each student, where they can place their devices when they enter and retrieve them when they leave. More than half of their schools introduced restrictions on phone use long before the 2019 legislation came into effect. In these schools, phones and other smart devices were banned during lessons and could only be used with the school director's permission. According to one school director, the inconvenience of using smart devices means that teachers are less likely to use them with children. Due to the stricter regulations, there has been an increase in the number of disciplines issued for unauthorised mobile phone use. Students in these schools have also become more socially active, chatting and playing cards and games during breaks. As their peers are not active on social media during school hours, they are not preoccupied with social media events in class and are not afraid of missing out. Moreover, there has also been a radical reduction in students' irresponsible behaviour on social networking sites, where there used to be problems with the unauthorised use of photos and videos. Additionally, students' social competencies have improved significantly, and some reports indicate improvements in discipline and attention in class.

10. How are you trying to increase internet safety in the lives of children attending your institutions?

- **AH:** The emphasis is on developing good habits and prevention. They are working hard to raise awareness in their primary schools among parents. Many parents do not recognise their responsibility and the dangers posed by mobile phones, nor do they realise the important role they play in supervising and restricting their children's use of them. According to the school maintainer, teachers and parents should be actively involved in shaping children's online habits. In Greek Catholic secondary schools, parents are no longer seen as direct partners, the focus shifts to the students. There is a significant emphasis on safeguarding personal data, raising cybersecurity awareness, and addressing cyberbullying. In their child protection institutions and in residential homes, children receive information through up-to-date courses. Their foster parent advisers visit families to raise awareness of the dangers of this area and advise both foster parents and children in foster care on how to use the internet safely. One of their

child protection institutions ran a series of thematic programmes in 2024 to raise awareness of the dangers of the internet for all ages. They plan the same programmes for 2025.

- **DV:** The management encourages and supports the education of parents, students and teachers, regularly inviting renowned experts. These educational programmes have now reached almost all of their institutions. Almost all of their institutions are in regular contact with the local police child protection specialist, who frequently holds information sessions on the dangers of the internet and other child safety issues.
- **PP:** External speakers are often invited, but small group discussions and personal accompaniment can also take place if necessary. They also hold prevention sessions, such as watching the film *Caught in the Net* and discussing what they have seen. With the support of the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), sessions are held in schools and at the Magic Valley Media Literacy Education Centre. Regular lectures on the subject are also held as part of the 'School for Parents' programme.
- **HBA:** The topic is discussed with students either in form class, or in digital culture lessons and awareness-raising sessions on the dangers of the digital space. They try to inform parents about these dangers. Within the institutional networks, strict firewall rules limit the possibility of accessing undesirable sites. One of their schools received a specialist speaker from the police who gave a presentation on the risks and dangers of the internet. At one of their institutions, teachers and students were informed about the contents of Péter Barcsánszky's lecture, "Security-conscious use of digital devices – protecting our children", which was delivered as part of the training course organised by the Szeged Pedagogical Education Centre.

11. How are you trying to protect children's mental health in your institutions?

- **AH:** In their residential homes, they regularly organise recreational activities to promote mental health. In summer, camps are organised for children in foster care and in residential homes. Psychologists help them to maintain mental health by providing therapy, personal development, counselling and crisis support. For Greek Catholics, the role of institutional **spiritual leaders** is also very important in this area. Spiritual leaders try to spend as much time as possible in residential homes where they are present as support professionals. Reaching foster parents is more difficult, as they are scattered in different settlements, so the best way to reach them is through events and programmes. Psychologists in the institutions ensure that foster children receive the care they need, supporting their mental and psychological health according to their needs and psychological state (including neurology and child psychiatry). In the spirit of experiential education, the organisation of a variety of pre-planned leisure activities is of great importance. This helps to build trust with the children. In all their schools, a spiritual director and spiritual leader help to create an atmosphere of trust and love, and to foster personal relationships. Around half of their institutions have a school psychologist, and all have a child protection officer and a social worker. They think that the professional cooperation between these professionals is exemplary and effective in several of their institutions. Psychologists working for the maintainer meet monthly and support each other's work. Recently, they have initiated parent clubs, organise programmes for groups or whole classes, and provide individual support for those in difficulty.

- **DV:** professionals from the aforementioned mobility service help children with drama, art and fairy tale therapy, as well as personal counselling, with significant results in terms of maintaining or improving their mental health.
- **PP:** They help children by involving school psychologists and a school social worker and organising spiritual exercises, pilgrimages and morning discussion groups. An important element is the system of individual accompaniment and self-awareness sessions. Teachers' wellbeing is also taken into account, as mentally well teachers are more accepting, attentive and sensitive to the children in their care. Teachers can also consult the school psychologist and mental health professional.
- **HBA:** They work with school pastors, mental health professionals, sports mental coaches and sports coaches to promote the wellbeing of their students, and sometimes a nurse or social worker is involved in a preventive and educational role. These professionals help students to learn techniques to help them deal with stress, anxiety, disappointment and build social relationships. Self-awareness development is often offered in form and Bible study classes. If the student needs it, there is an opportunity to talk to a school pastor or mental health worker, taking a restorative approach. Elsewhere, a school doctor, a school psychologist and a special needs teacher are available to students and parents if needed. In one of their institutions, parents of 4th graders were given assertive communication training to reduce aggression between children. They have schools where case conferences are held with colleagues teaching the class when necessary, and a social worker visits twice a week.

12. What do you do for disadvantaged children?

- **AH:** In their child protection institutions, they care for children with multiple disadvantages. They comply with legal requirements and go the extra mile to make up for the children's disadvantage. Their educational institutions are also particularly affected. Their dedicated teachers and principals support students and their families daily. They do all this on top of the provision of free state-funded meals, school supply packages and meals during school holidays, school milk and school fruit. They aim to find and organise as many camping opportunities as possible from year to year, which requires a lot of background work. The integration of children with special needs, their developmental and therapeutic care is ensured in addition to differentiated class work. They strive to improve efficiency through coordination carried out by the maintainer, sharing of good practices and internal training. The maintainer helps and supports disadvantaged students and professional work by authorising small classes and kindergarten groups, taking into account individual situations. They are also placing a particular emphasis on talent management. Next year, they plan to use a test designed by psychologists specifically to assess talent.
- **DV:** Every year, the maintainer runs several support campaigns to help those in need, both on its own and in cooperation with Catholic Caritas: they collect non-perishable food items, clothing and shoe donations. They will launch their glasses programme next year, as an increasing number of families are unable to afford to buy glasses for their children.
- **PP:** The Province maintains three institutions with the explicit aim of helping disadvantaged children: In Sátoraljaújhely, it runs a school and a dormitory for children from difficult backgrounds, mostly from Roma families, and in Vác, it operates the

"Lookout Centre", which helps with career guidance. The primary focus of these institutions is to help children catch up. In the other institutions, a development teacher assists students as needed, and the school, the parents' associations and the school's foundation can provide meal allowance and financial support, as well as support for students' trips and occasional trips abroad. The system of individual guidance has also been developed.

- **HBA:** In most of their institutions, there are opportunities for catching up by providing free or reduced-price meals, help with learning, mental health support, community programmes, talent management and career guidance. At the beginning of and throughout the school year, teachers continuously seek to identify disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged students, and their assessment and evaluation system (measuring subject knowledge, attention, motivation, check-up) ensures that learning disadvantages are identified. They also help the most disadvantaged students by providing school supplies. Their foundation can also provide financial support to students in need to help cover the cost of a class trip. There have been several cases where members of the child protection referral system have been asked to help make compulsory education a reality, in an effort to reduce drop-outs. In recent years, their teachers have been striving to provide experiential lessons, which has led to a significant increase in children's school attendance. The youth protection officer maintains contact with the Child Welfare Service run by the maintainer, as well as with other persons, institutions and authorities performing tasks related to the child protection system. They are in regular contact with parents and try to maintain good relations with them, thus increasing trust in teachers and the school. Hungarian Baptist Aid staff are also on hand to help with running sessions and organising events.

13. What initiatives do you have to support families and their mental health?

- **AH:** In their educational institutions, they organise family days, spiritual programmes and pilgrimages at eparchy level and in schools. Special emphasis is placed on strengthening the relationship between the parish and the institutions, and on conscious preparation for the holidays (sharing the Lenten season before Christmas and Easter, passing on Greek Catholic traditions). These are part of the annual work plan and are implemented with conscious planning and with the approval of the maintainer. In its role as a spiritual care provider, the Christian Mental Health Centre (Kemence) offers great support to families, helping them to function harmoniously and, indirectly, ensuring the proper spiritual development of their children.
- **DV:** The aforementioned team of psychologists runs a parent counselling programme in the institutions called 'Parents' Nest'. Parents can also get involved in the programmes of the Diocesan Family Pastoral Care Group. The Family Life Education programme mentioned earlier is also important, with its sex education programmes (Cycle Show, Secret Mission) taking place outside of school, organised by families.
- **PP:** An external expert gives presentations at parent-teacher conferences and family days. The "Parents' School" includes the Pannonhalma Benedictine Secondary School Parents' Association and the support activity of parents of the Pannonhalma St. Benedict Primary School. They aim to maintain a relationship with the school and make use of their opportunities and contacts for the school's benefit.

- **HBA:** They are running community programmes, art events, parents' club, and providing personal consultations on educational issues, dilemmas and life situations. They organise information sessions on schooling, career choices and talent management, and hold tea parties for parents with invited speakers. The staff member responsible for child and youth protection helps students and parents to solve problematic situations by keeping in regular contact with the student's guardian, if necessary, with the competent child welfare office, family support service, local government, or notary. In several of their schools, parents are welcome to attend school celebrations and shows. Once a month, parents can attend an open worship service.

14. What steps are you taking with regard to talent management?

- **AH:** In the area of child protection, finding and nurturing talent is a priority. If they see the potential for a child to excel in learning, sport, music or other areas, they will try to help. This often means financial support, as the additional costs of extracurricular activities, such as renting musical instruments or buying sports equipment, can be a burden for families in residential homes or foster care. The truth is that for many of their young people, just getting to school regularly is a challenge. The completion and evaluation of the Talent Portal and Ability and Talent Measurement tests, and the identification of talent areas, are basic tasks of their institutions. On the basis of these, suggestions are made to foster parents about areas for development. With regard to children living in residential homes, the institution takes measures for their development within its own jurisdiction. For each child in residential care, teachers draw up an individual development plan, where progress is evaluated from time to time. In the field of education, none of their institutions provide talent management within a professional framework but do this work on their own initiative. (E.g. Accredited Excellent Talent Centre (Nyíracád) Accredited Talent Centre (Nyíradony), Registered Talent Centre (Hajdúdorog), three of them offer basic art education in different departments. Debrecen, where two choirs have a decades-long history, is a priority area *for musical talent development*. The Rainbow Children's Choir in the primary school, and the upper grade primary school and youth choir, the internationally renowned Lautitia choir family, have achieved numerous national and international successes: world and European championships, special prizes, grand prizes and special conducting awards are the hallmarks of their work.
- **DV:** Experts of the Hungarian Association of Talent Support Organisations (MATEHETSZ) held an excellent conference on this topic for heads of institutions. Within the institutions, some teachers work with exceptionally gifted children. Generally speaking, the person-centred pedagogy of the organic pedagogical approach promoted by the maintainer (following Rita Pécsi) is an excellent way to develop children's creativity and talent. "But we still have room for improvement in the field of talent management in the strict sense," says the representative of the maintainer.
- **PP:** The National Talent programme is running in Kecskemét. The Öveges Student Lab offers occasional and regular volunteer talent management sessions for both their own students and students from the city, including upper primary school and secondary school students. The schools offer individual and group talent management, with complex application programmes in personal development, science, fine arts and digitalisation. Several schools have media workshops run by alumni, with the active participation of students. Preparation for academic competitions in lower primary school is provided by specialised workshops, individual and group programmes. There

are music courses and choirs. Szeged also has a specialised art school and a sports section.

- **HBA:** Several of their institutions pay particular attention to talent management, which permeates their entire training programme. They offer an increased number of music lessons, basic art classes, specialised courses, preparation for competitions and a variety of extracurricular and development activities (e.g. Chess Palace, sports coaching) to ensure that every student finds the best way to develop his or her potential. In order to identify and develop talents, students' strengths are regularly mapped and supported through differentiated classroom work and extra-curricular talent management activities. Small group English language courses at advanced level have been introduced in some of their schools for students with the best language skills. They have institutions with a specific talent management approach, offering numerous talent management clubs and groups (e.g., choir, drama, IT, robotics, mathematics, natural sciences, arts, board games), as well as sports training and individual mentoring. Their students are regularly prepared for competitions, grants and correspondence competitions, and their success is recognised at Talent Day, where the most outstanding students and their parents are rewarded. The talent management programme is a priority in the annual work plan.

15. What activities are offered to children with special educational needs or other learning difficulties from nursery to secondary school? Do they participate in education in an integrated way?

- **AH:** In the case of their residential homes, learning development teachers provide afternoon sessions for children with learning difficulties, within the statutory professional staffing levels. Most of them are integrated into education, but a small percentage are in special education. The primary task of the institution is always to identify the learning disability, with the involvement of the specialised education service. Based on their guidance help is provided to children both within children's homes and in foster families. In the field of education, a special working group coordinates the care for children/students with special needs at the level of the maintainer. The school provides the services required by the expert opinion for students with special educational needs and students with behavioural, learning and integration difficulties. Children screened during the compulsory screening receive therapeutic physical education and speech therapy, with continuous follow-up. A school psychologist is also helping with this work, coordinated by the aforementioned working group. Some of their municipalities have had an afternoon school for several years, where they provide special attention and coordinated pedagogical work to students in need.
- **DV:** Children with special educational needs are integrated in education, as the Diocese of Vác does not have a school for children with special needs. They support the employment of learning development teachers and special needs teachers in their institutions, even when there is no public funding.
- **PP:** Students with special educational needs are integrated into education. Developmental sessions are held for them under the guidance of special needs teachers, where necessary, followed by periodic case conferences. The classes concerned are sensitised and parents are consulted.
- **HBA:** Not all their institutions have children with special educational needs or behavioural, learning and integration difficulties, but where they do, they provide them

with special attention: tutoring, differentiated activities in class. In some of their schools, students' development is supported by special needs teachers, speech and language therapists and learning development teachers who use differentiated methods to support students in and out of class.

16. If you have a foster home, how do you ensure follow-up?

- **AH:** Of the surveyed maintainers, only the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog has a foster home. They can only follow up children leaving their residential homes if the young adult requests follow-up care. When it comes to starting an independent life, follow-up is also a possibility, because the same residential care worker who looked after the young adult while living at the home is usually assigned to the task. They can not only help the young adult with the task at hand, but also provide life advice. For the majority of children who leave the foster care network, follow-up is actually achieved because they remain in contact with their foster parents and can rely on their advice and help for the rest of their lives. Some foster parents' family events are attended by all the children who have left joined by their relatives, sometimes up to twenty or thirty people.

17. If there is a child protection protocol, what types of abuse are covered?

- **AH:** There are several pillars in the system of the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog to protect the best interests of children. The sectoral methodology is applied in their child protection institutions. As a condition of employment in child protection, from 1 July 2024, an impeccable conduct of life test and psychological aptitude test has to be carried out before employment. Existing staff in the archeparchy has been screened. The Youth and Child Protection Committee of the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog became operational. The 5-member committee receives and investigates reports of alleged or real harm to children. Two important documents have been produced in connection with this: *"Rules for the Protection of Children and Youth of the Metropolitan Church of Hajdúdorog for Pastors and Staff of Educational, Training and Vocational Institutions"* and *"Procedures for Sexual Abuse Committed by Clergy or by Believers in Church Office or Service and General Principles for the Protection of Children"*. These two documents are made known and accepted by all ecclesiastical and lay employees, as knowledge of them and their use as grounds for extraordinary dismissal in proven cases is included in employment contracts as a condition of employment. In 2023, the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog launched the *"I Trust You"* programme, which aims to train and sensitize church persons, spiritual leaders and lay employees on the prevention of child abuse and child sexual abuse. In child protection, child abuse cases are investigated according to the so-called sectoral methodology. The sectoral methodology covers all types of abuse or suspected abuse, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and neglect, or suspicion of these, whether the alleged abuser is a peer, professional or other adult. The regulatory document *"Rules of the Metropolitan Church of Hajdúdorog for the Protection of Children and Youth for Pastors and Staff of Educational, Training and Vocational Institutions"* defines as prohibited behaviour ill-treatment, any form of humiliation, peer abuse, all forms of cyberbullying, physical abuse, sexual abuse, use and supply of drugs and alcohol. Forms of abuse in the policies of educational institutions: physical abuse, sexual abuse of children, neglect and negligent treatment, emotional abuse, commercial or other exploitation of children.
- **DV:** They have a protocol that covers all forms of abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, and neglect).

- **PP:** They have a protocol. Any physical, verbal, mental, spiritual or sexual abuse, boundary crossing, affecting a child, a teacher or a staff member working in the institutional system.
- **HBA:** Verbal, emotional/mental and physical abuse, exclusion inside and outside school; exploitation/economic abuse, abuse on online platforms. Domestic neglect or endangering behaviour. They do not have a protocol for dealing with bullying. If they are informed of it, the teacher or class teacher will report it immediately to the principal, or the students can report it themselves. Several of their schools have a designated person responsible for child protection in the school's Organisational and Operational Regulations, who also involves the social worker in the process. In other institutions, either teachers or guardians who detect physical abuse or psychological harassment report it immediately to child welfare services.

18. Is the possibility of anonymous reporting in case of abuse guaranteed?

- **AH:** Yes. A reporting form is available on the website of the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog. The sectoral methodology of the child protection system also states that anonymous reporting can be made in institutions.
- **DV:** Yes, there is a clearly visible menu item at the top of their website which directs you to the reporting interface suitable for anonymous reporting.
- **PP:** Yes, it is. Unfortunately, among the anonymous reports received so far, there were some with little concrete information to start a fact-finding process. Anonymity prevented follow-up questions.
- **HBA:** It is provided in almost all their institutions, but it was not specified how.

19. Is there an explicit internal procedure for investigating abuses, are the specific persons responsible named, and are there legal consequences?

- **AH:** The document *"Procedures for Sexual Abuse Committed by Clergy or by Believers in Church Office or Service and General Principles for the Protection of Children"* defines the tasks to be performed in relation to the handling of reported cases and the application of legal consequences. The sectoral methodology used in child protection also sets out the procedures to be followed. In schools with a high number of children in foster care or residential care, or from disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged backgrounds, where problems arise daily and challenge teachers and heads of institutions, there are internal procedures included in the institutional child protection protocol. There are institutions where these procedures are still being developed, as preventive work is important in the less affected institutions as well.
- **DV:** They have detailed regulations covering everything in question.
- **PP:** This is governed by the rules of procedure of the Provincial Council for Safe Schools.
- **HBA:** The relevant provisions of the Complaints Handling Policy apply. Their smaller schools do not have an explicit, defined internal procedure, "they discuss their problems in a live conversation". Some of their schools have an internal abuse reporting policy, but about half of their schools do not have an established procedure.

19. What is the procedure in cases of proven abuse and what are the consequences?

- **AH:** The “*Procedures for Sexual Abuse Committed by Clergy or by Believers in Church Office or Service and General Principles for the Protection of Children*” defines the tasks to be performed in relation to the handling of reported cases and the application of legal consequences. The procedure starts with a report, which can be made orally, in writing or electronically. A preliminary investigation is then carried out to enable the person ordering the investigation to decide whether criminal proceedings should be opened. The duration of the preliminary investigation may not exceed three months without serious cause. At the end of the preliminary investigation, regardless of its outcome, the competent magistrate must send a certified copy of the relevant file to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith as soon as possible in the case of a punishable to be reported to the Dicastery (SST 16). After that, further instructions from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith should be awaited. *Ecclesiastical legal consequences:* If a cleric is found guilty of a sexual offence under canon law against a minor, he is subject to ecclesiastical penalties, the most severe of which is dismissal from clerical status (CIC Can. 1425 § 1, 2). If an accusation of sexual or erotic conduct against minors is made against a lay employee of any ecclesiastical institution, that person is suspended from any activity that could endanger minors until the matter is fully investigated and decided.
- **DV:** Depending on the nature of the abuse, there may be consequences in terms of labour law, administrative law, or canon law. The rules of procedure require an immediate investigation. If this is inconclusive, a further investigation must be carried out. The person must be suspended from work if there are reasonable grounds for suspicion, and if there is a suspicion of a criminal offence, a report must be made to the authorities, including in the case of a minor offender.
- **PP:** Based on the severity and consequences of the proven abuse, the Safe School Provincial Council will recommend the applicable consequences. In the case of a very minor violation, the punishment may be a verbal reprimand or warning; in more serious cases, disciplinary proceedings may be initiated, which may result in termination of employment. If the abuse is suspected to be a violation of ecclesiastical or secular law, the person in charge will notify the authorities and file a complaint.
- **HBA:** If the institution has a complaints policy, depending on the seriousness of the case, a reprimand from the employer, disciplinary proceedings or a complaint to the authorities may be made. If there is no complaints policy, the principal, as the employer, shall investigate the case, file a complaint or report the unlawful or suspected unlawful act or abuse to the competent authority (e.g. the police) and inform the maintainer. In most of their institutions, there have been no examples of such reporting or abuse, but if there were in the future, the relevant legal protocol would apply.

20. Do victims receive support in dealing with abuse, maltreatment or sexual abuse, with a particular focus on children, parents and families, and where appropriate, the whole community (e.g., classroom, RE class, parish)?

- **AH:** Psychologists work in their child protection institutions, providing psychological assistance when necessary and required. In addition, the spiritual leaders (priests) assigned to the institutions contribute to the mental well-being of both residents and the staff. The “*Procedures for Sexual Abuse Committed by Clergy or by Believers in Church Office or Service and General Principles for the Protection of Children*” states the following: “39. *The ecclesiastical authorities shall treat with respect and dignity those who claim to have suffered harm and their families; and offer them in particular:* a) *openness, attention and accompaniment, including by special assistance;* b) *spiritual*

assistance; c) medical, therapeutic and psychological assistance (cf. VELM Art. 5) or financial assistance, according to the particular case."

- **DV:** Psychological support has been provided in the past. No request for financial compensation has been received so far, but this could be provided by the maintainer if necessary.
- **PP:** The primary focus is on the victims, who can also seek outside professional help if needed, at the expense of the Province, but the affected parties also receive help in processing the trauma. Several employees of the Province have received training in restorative methodology and are involving support professionals working in schools (mental health professionals, school psychologists, etc.).
- **HBA:** If such a situation were to arise, the school psychologist, management, teachers, child protection staff and school social worker would support the victim. The school counsellor and classroom community could also be involved if necessary. In some schools, professionals with a degree in psychology can help with trauma processing as educational counsellors in individual, small group, and classroom settings.

21. Is assistance from external experts ensured?

All four maintainers provide the opportunity and resources to bring in external expertise where necessary.

22. What measures are taken to ensure that vulnerable groups of children receive adequate protection and that the community is properly informed about how to treat them appropriately?

- **AH:** In order to prevent victimization, it is important that the children in care themselves are aware of their rights, the protection they are entitled to, and who they can turn to in case of problems. For this reason, children are regularly provided with information on this topic in an organised way within the institutions, including through the involvement of children's rights representatives and police authorities. Their institutions take every opportunity to be represented at events in their communities, to raise awareness of their activities as widely as possible, and thereby—by consciously sensitizing the community—to draw attention to the vulnerability and defencelessness of the children in their care. In addition to the above, the protection of children is also served by the sectoral methodology, which is mandatory not only in cases of actual abuse but also in cases of suspected abuse, thus providing scope for preventive measures. In their schools, they organise lectures and training sessions for students, parents and teachers, and sensitisation is also carried out at family days, parents' forums and parents' meetings. The "I Trust You" programme, as explained above, also has the declared aim of protecting the best interests and rights of children.
- **DV:** In addition to those mentioned above, programmes to prevent bullying, such as solution-focused training, the creation of peer support groups for victims and sensitisation lectures by police professionals, are held regularly.
- **PP:** Taking into account children's personal rights and data protection, teachers receive information about the necessary accommodations for students with special educational needs. In other cases, if necessary, the employees concerned will be informed about the children's circumstances to the extent necessary for their work. Sensitivity training

sessions are held during form class and various other classes, with guest speakers invited to participate.

- **HBA:** Preventive education: information, education, sensitivity training, disciplinary measures as set out in the House Rules. They talk to students a lot about how to behave towards each other, and about the dangers of the internet and drug use. If a problem is detected with a child, it is immediately reported to the parent, the family support specialist or the school psychologist. Support is sought through the relevant child welfare service and the school social worker. Anti-bullying prevention presentations are held for classes and parent groups by the school psychologist. In many of their institutions, there are no prevention programmes.

Final summary of the questionnaire survey results

The Association for Children's Rights pilot questionnaire survey examined the child protection and child rights practices of four church organisations with different denominational and maintenance structures for the year 2024. The aim of the research was not to rank or rate, but to find out to what extent and by what organisational means the child's best interests are being promoted by the maintainers in the day-to-day running of the institutions.

The results clearly show that child protection and children's rights in church-run institutions **are not a matter of denominational affiliation, but of organisational maturity, institutionalisation and leadership commitment**. All the organisations surveyed declare the safety and well-being of children to be important, but the level of implementation in practice varies considerably.

The most marked differences were in the existence, consistency and actual application of child protection protocols. In case of those maintainers, who have a unified, centrally regulated and cross-institutional child protection system, child protection is not an isolated task, but rather an integral part of organisational culture. Conversely, in networks of institutions where protocols are incomplete or vary between institutions, child protection is more dependent on individual commitment and local resources, which increases the risks.

In terms of human resources, all maintainers employ support professionals, but the distribution of capacity in psychology, social work and child protection is uneven. The research shows that the presence of professionals alone is not enough: effective child protection can only be achieved if the work of professionals is embedded in clear procedures, the maintainer's structure of responsibility, and regular professional cooperation.

Children's rights awareness and education is present in all the organisations surveyed, but mostly **in a project-like or ad hoc way**. In institutions where children's rights awareness is embedded in student councils, prevention activities and pedagogical practice, children are more actively involved and feel safer.

Overall, the management of the legislative changes introduced in 2024 - in particular the restriction on smartphone use - has been successful. The feedback showed that the policy had a positive impact on students' attention, social interaction and reduced conflict in the online space. The differences arose mainly in the quality of preparation, communication and accompanying education.

Mental health support is a priority for all maintainers, but the availability and complexity of services vary. Models that do not only respond to crisis situations, but support children, families and educators with a long-term, preventive approach have proved particularly valuable.

Overall, the pilot research shows that the biggest challenge facing church leaders is not a lack of will, but **the full institutionalisation, consolidation and sustainable operation of** child protection. The experiences confirm the need to ensure that child protection and children's rights are not an additional element but a strategic priority in the future of the church's education and training systems.

This pilot report is an important starting point on the way towards a more comprehensive, systematic data collection and self-reflection, which is essential to develop an institutional approach that truly focuses on children's safety and dignity.

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