

CHILD GUARANTEE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN 2030

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INTRODUCTION

Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee ('Council Recommendation') aims to combat and prevent social exclusion by guaranteeing access for children in need to key services, thereby contributing to upholding the rights of the child by combating child poverty and fostering equal opportunities. The Council Recommendation accordingly sets out proposals for the Member States concerning the following services: early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day; medical care; healthy nutrition and adequate housing. The Council Recommendation applies to all children in need below the age of 18 who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion¹.

In order to implement the Council Recommendation, the Council of the European Union ('Council') has proposed that the Member States:

1. appoint a national coordinator;
2. involve the relevant stakeholders in order to identify the children in need and the barriers preventing them from accessing services;
3. draw up a national action plan for submission to the European Commission ('Commission') by 15 March 2022;
4. develop effective outreach measures for children in need and their families;
5. involve the relevant stakeholders in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the action plan;
6. report every two years to the Commission on the progress in implementing this Recommendation, in line with the national action plan.

With regard to the issues raised in the Council Recommendation, and in line with the strategic guidelines previously adopted by the Government, Hungary has prepared this national action plan guaranteeing the rights of the child until 2030 ('Child Guarantee National Action Plan'). As part of this process, the Government reviewed the existing policy measures in connection with the Council Recommendation, which are set out in point IV.1. This shows that Hungary has implemented most of the provisions of the Recommendation. In the course of the review, the Government identified opportunities to further improve the existing measures. Specific provisions for putting these into action for the period up to 2025 (2027 in the case of EU funds) and lines of intervention for the subsequent period are outlined in Annex 1 to Government Decision (... ..) of .../2023 adopting the Child Guarantee National Action Plan 2030. On this basis, in 2025 the Government will monitor the implementation of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan and may, where necessary and consistent with the lines of intervention, determine any new measures to be taken.

The Government's objective with the Child Guarantee National Action Plan is to improve children's wellbeing and reduce poverty by ensuring high-quality, inclusive public services which are accessible to every child, with particular emphasis on early childhood care and education, schooling, health care, a healthy diet and adequate housing.

¹ People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (ARPE) are all those who are in danger either of falling into poverty, suffering serious material and social deprivation or are in low work intensity households.

I. APPOINTMENT OF A NATIONAL COORDINATOR

In accordance with the Council Recommendation, Hungary's national coordinator will be appointed by the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for many of the areas covered by the Council Recommendation, such as public education (including kindergarten education), health care (including healthy nutrition), child protection provision and social matters, including disability, and the issue of social inclusion and Roma inclusion, thereby ensuring the integration of the Council Recommendation into policy. The Ministry of the Interior works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, which is responsible for vocational education, family matters, including early childhood care and education, and the adoption system, both in the development of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan and in its implementation and monitoring. It also cooperates in the relevant fields with the Ministry of Economic Development, which is responsible for employment policy; the Energy Ministry, which is responsible for energy policy; and the Transport and Construction Ministry, which is responsible for transport.

II. DETERMINING THE TARGET GROUP; OUTLOOK

Of the target groups falling under the personal scope of the Council Recommendation², the Child Guarantee National Action Plan focuses on the following:

1. Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROE), including children who have become homeless or are experiencing severe housing deprivation, Roma children and children living in precarious family situations (together: ‘children in poverty’).

In addition, AROPE identifies sub-groups of children:

2. children with disabilities,
3. children with mental health issues,
4. children in alternative, especially institutional, care, and
5. vulnerable children from third countries.

Brief presentation of the situation of the above-mentioned target groups.

1 Children in poverty³

As also detailed in the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy 2030, the proportion of people living in poverty or social exclusion (at risk of income poverty or severe material deprivation, or in a low work intensity household) increased significantly in Hungary from 29.9% in 2010 to 34.8% in 2013. This figure subsequently decreased significantly: in 2020, 18.2% of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In recent years changes to the composite indicator have been driven mainly by changes in the proportion of people at risk of serious material deprivation and those living in low work intensity households, whilst there has been little change to the number of people in relative income poverty, which has remained relatively low.

The highest proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Hungary remains in North Hungary, South Transdanubia and the North Great Plain, although these regions also saw the biggest improvement:

- in North Hungary the figure was 25.7% in 2019 (28.1% in 2020) but 43.5% in 2012;
- in South Transdanubia it was 24.7% in 2019 (24.9% in 2020) but 45.1% in 2012, and
- in the North Great Plain it was 24.1% in 2019 (25.0% in 2020) but 37.3% in 2012.

If we look at the other regions of Hungary, we see that

- in Central Transdanubia it was 13.2% in 2019 (10.1% in 2020) but 27.6% in 2012;
- in the South Great Plain it was 16.5% in 2019 (19.0% in 2020) but 33.6% in 2012;
- in Budapest it was 11.2% in 2019 (13.6% in 2020) but 32.4% in 2012; and

² Pursuant to point 5 of the Recommendation, it is recommended that Member States identify children in need and within this group take into account, wherever appropriate in designing their national integrated measures, the specific disadvantages experienced, in particular, by: (a) homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation; (b) children with disabilities; (c) children with mental health issues; (d) children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin, particularly Roma; (e) children in alternative, especially institutional, care; (f) children in precarious family situations.

³ A detailed analysis can be found in Chapters A.2 and B.1 of the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy 2030.

- in West Transdanubia it was 17.8% in 2019 (12.4% in 2020) but 23.7% in 2012⁴.

The characterisation of children’s social situation cannot be separated from their more immediate environment if they are brought up predominantly in families. The proportion of families with children at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased from 35.3% in 2010 to 17.6% in 2020, which is now below the same figure for childless households: in 2010, 27.4% and in 2020, 18.6% of the latter group were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The improvement is particularly significant in the case of large families, where the figure was 50.0% in 2010 and 23.7% in 2020. There was also an improvement in the proportion both of people affected by quasi-unemployment (12.8% of working-age people aged 0-59 in 2010 and 5.0% in 2020) and of the long-term unemployed (5.4% in 2010 but 1.3% in 2021). The figures for single-parent families experiencing social exclusion, accounting for almost a quarter of children, improved considerably, with the AROPE indicator falling from 57.4% in 2010 to just under two thirds, 37.3%, in 2020.

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office (‘HCSO’) has been examining the poverty trend in the Roma population since 2013. The proportion of the Roma population at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 66.6% in 2020, which was considerably lower than the figure of 89.86% in 2013. However, this figure is still three times the national average of 18.2%. Of the three subindicators, the largest proportion of the Roma population, 46.3%, was at risk of severe material deprivation in 2020. Of the other two subindicators, while the proportion of the Roma population in relative income poverty fell, it was still nearly three times the figure for the country overall: 36.4% in the case of the Roma in 2020, as against 12.7% for the country as a whole. This was, however, a considerable improvement over the 4.5-fold lagging behind recorded in 2013, when relative income poverty affected 67.9% of the Roma population and 15.0% of the population as a whole. In 2020, quasi-unemployment affected 20.3% of all Roma households, which represents a five-fold lagging behind when compared with the national average (3.7%) but is also an improvement over the 2013 figure of 45.3%. The employment rate of 15-64-year-olds rose by 13 percentage points from 60.1% in 2013 to 73.1% in 2021. However, the employment rate among the Roma is low: in 2013, 26.1% of 15-64-year-old Roma were in work, as opposed to 45.1% in 2020. The proportion of Roma women in intellectual work is low (6.9% in 2019, 44.2% for non-Roma women), while the share of people in employment doing simple unskilled work is 51.1% for Roma women and 9% for non-Roma women.

Hungary’s measures aimed at poverty reduction pay particular attention to children eligible for the regular child protection allowance and, correspondingly, those who are disadvantaged and highly disadvantaged, which also include – based on the definition given in the legislation – children who are homeless, experiencing severe housing deprivation and living in precarious family situations, among the target groups set out in the Council Recommendation.

Eligibility for the regular child protection allowance (‘the allowance’) is determined on the basis of the conditions set out in Section 19 of Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and the administration of guardianship (‘the Child Protection Act’) with regard to the

⁴ We would point out that in 2012, Budapest was still part of the Central Hungarian Region.

family income situation⁵. The aim of determining eligibility for the allowance is to demonstrate, based on their social situation, children's eligibility to receive free or discounted school meals and, if they meet the conditions set out in the law, school meals during the holidays, financial support and other benefits as laid down in separate legislation. This includes, among other things, early-life support for young people, exemption from boarding school accommodation fees, free institutional crèche facilities, benefits for vulnerable consumers (concerning gas, electricity and water consumption) and benefits for children and school pupils in need of special attention under Act CXC of 2011 on national public education. The legislation on the state of emergency has introduced a change to the income conditions for eligibility for the allowance, with an increase in the eligibility thresholds calculated in proportion to the minimum old-age pension as determined under the regulations in force at the time⁶.

In defining the term 'disadvantaged and highly disadvantaged child', Section 67/A of the Child Protection Act takes into account the income situation (subject to eligibility for the allowance), the parent's educational attainment and employment situation, and the housing conditions. Foster children and young adults with school pupil or student status receiving follow-up care are classified as being disadvantaged and highly disadvantaged. Pursuant to Section 78(1) of the Child Protection Act, the guardianship authority takes a child into care if their development is endangered by family circumstances and it has not been possible to put a stop to the danger by means of primary care services or taking the child into protection, or if these measures are unlikely to be successful, and also if appropriate care for the child cannot be ensured in the family and adoption of the child is not possible.

According to official statistical sources, the number of beneficiaries from the allowance below the age of 25 was highest in 2010, at nearly 600 000; by 2018 this had dropped to below 300 000. The number of people classified as highly disadvantaged or disadvantaged has also fallen, although there has been a shift: 70% of people eligible for the allowance are classified as disadvantaged or highly disadvantaged, as compared with barely 50% in 2014, the first full year of the regulatory system. This suggests that in 2018, nearly 210 000 of those affected were indeed people living in extreme poverty. In addition, not only the number of children in need of care but also the proportion of their number in the age group in question has also fallen appreciably in recent years.

Based on the information available, the fall in the number of recipients of the allowance can be attributed to a number of factors: in addition to higher monthly salaries, gradually making benefits in kind linked to support (such as free school meals and coursebook provision) a subjective right. Furthermore, since the children are not eligible for the allowance, many are also not covered by the procedure for classification as disadvantaged or highly disadvantaged, while it can be assumed that no long-term change has taken place in the housing situation, home circumstances, parents' educational attainment and primary labour market situation, which were investigated as a condition of the classification procedure.

⁵ The guardianship authority deems a child to be eligible for the regular child protection allowance if the total monthly per capita income of the family caring for the child does not exceed 180% of the social projection base amount or, in the case of a single parent / chronically ill or severely disabled child, a child continuing in education having reached the age of majority or in all other cases, 165% of the social projection base amount. In 2023 the monthly social projection base amount is HUF 28 500.

⁶ Government Decree No 344/2022 of 9 September 2022 on deviations from certain rules on the income conditions for eligibility for the regular child protection allowance during the state of emergency

For the reasons set out above, more work is needed to identify and determine the number of children whose situation has not fundamentally changed but who for various reasons do not receive care. The need for more accurate data is also clear from the fact that, as income levels improve, sociocultural and lifestyle (and therefore quality-of-life) disadvantages remain which must continue to be tackled if social inclusion measures are to meet with long-term success.

The data show that the most common cause of disadvantage in the case of disadvantaged children is the low level of educational attainment of the parents. This was true in 85% of cases in 2019. In the case of highly disadvantaged children, parents' low level of educational attainment most often goes hand in hand with an inadequate living environment (this is true of some 41 000 children), while almost as many (nearly 39 000) are in families affected by low parental employment. There were almost 6 100 highly disadvantaged children who were affected by all three factors in Hungary in 2019. Nearly 8 000 children were identified as being highly disadvantaged because of their placement in special child protection care. There is a thirty-fold difference in the rates of disadvantaged and highly disadvantaged children between minors resident in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and those in Győr-Moson-Sopron counties. With this in mind, a number of measures have been put in place aimed at reducing these territorial differences, as can be seen from Chapter III(4).

Every local authority administering over 20 000 people is required to operate a children's shelter. Children who have temporarily been left without care or supervision or whose care has been jeopardised by their family's life difficulties or by illness may be placed in a children's shelter. Children may be placed in such a home at the request or with the agreement of their parents for a maximum of 6 months, which may be extended until the end of their schooling if necessary. Between 12 and 40 children can be cared for in a home providing full-time care.

Families with children where the family is in a crisis situation after becoming homeless are provided with help in the form of family shelters operated under the primary child welfare care scheme. The main aim of family shelters is to help exercise the right of children not to be separated from their parents and families solely if they are financially vulnerable. The shelter solution ensures that children and their parents are placed together. Such homes accept parents and children who have been made homeless as a result of life problems or other kinds of social and family crisis and are seeking protection, mothers who have been abused or are pregnant, and mothers with their children who have been discharged from maternity facilities. In addition to safe housing, staff in the home help by providing children with, among other things, development programmes and out-of-school programmes to promote inclusion, as well as social programmes. They also offer counselling on life, labour market, legal and psychological matters. All of which serves to strengthen the family and reduce the negative impact of psychological harm. Where necessary, they also assist with placing and supporting former residents once they have left the institution. Occupation of family shelters is consistently high: 98%. According to data for family shelters based on the information in providers' records in August 2022, 4 201 places were available in 116 institutions.

According to the HCSO's data, a total of 6 617 people (2 319 parents, including 1 737 women, and 4 116 children) were placed in family shelters in 2021. During that year there were 243 people (96 parents and 147 children) living in off-site accommodation. Of the 652 people living in children's shelters, 89 were parents and 559 were children. Help was requested by parents in nearly half the cases involving family shelters and children's shelters,

while in slightly more than half the cases, this was done by another institution, in a large proportion of these cases by the family and child welfare service. Placement in off-site accommodation was requested by parents in all cases, while placement in children's shelters was requested by the children themselves on 18 occasions. Placement in care is the result of a wide range of problems. The leading causes in all three forms of care are parents' life problems; an inadequate housing situation or homelessness caused by parents' housing problems; family conflicts, or abuse. In the case of abuse, the gender balance shows that women account for slightly below half the number of cases of physical abuse, around half the number of cases of psychological abuse and over half the number of cases of sexual abuse. Some 5.8% of specialist posts authorised for institutions were not filled in 2021.

Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme Plus call for proposals No 3.3.2-21 Local health and social infrastructure development states its targets as increasing the number of external places and family shelters and improving the infrastructure of existing family shelters. This will improve accessibility and also increase the options for leaving family shelters.

Point II.3.10 of Government Decision No 1228/2022 of 14 April 2022 on the action plan for the implementation of the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy 2021-2023 in the period 2022-2023 highlights the need to expand the capacity of assistance services that respond to forms of exploitation, with particular emphasis on increasing the capacity of family shelters by ensuring access to external places. Infrastructure development must be put in place with funding from the domestic budget by 31 December 2023, the indicator for which will be the number of newly created places.

2. Children with disabilities (also AROPE)

According to the 2016 microcensus, 408 021 people – 4.3% of the population – declared themselves to be persons with disabilities. By contrast, expert estimates based on international studies show that on average, 10% of the population have some kind of disability, so that the actual number in Hungary might be closer to 1 million. This is also underpinned by data from the microcensus, according to which over 2.3 million people in Hungary are chronically ill or have impaired health. Given that a significant proportion of chronically ill people also have a disability, we may be talking about a social group comprising around a million people. Since the majority of persons with disabilities are not born with a disability, their demographic composition is characterised by a high number of elderly people: 42% are in the over-65 age group, while just 31% are under 50. 58% of chronically ill people are women, who indicated both health problems and illness, and disabilities, in higher proportions than men. In terms of settlement types, one third of the sample group live in a municipality and one third live in a rural town, while only the remaining third live in a town with county rank or in the capital. So persons with disabilities typically live in smaller rural settlements.

On the basis of data from the 2016 microcensus, 19% of persons with disabilities left school before completing their 8th year, and a further one third completed only the 8th year. 17% have a profession, 19% have a secondary school leaving certificate and 9% have a higher education qualification. These figures are below the figures for the total population, so that bringing the educational attainment level of persons with disabilities up to that of the population as a whole remains a key priority. The road for persons with disabilities to obtaining a qualification which will guarantee them a livelihood generally requires considerably more effort – as a result of their condition – than for their able-bodied peers. It is

therefore important that policies aimed at achieving the above-mentioned goals treat, in a comprehensive way, the individual stages of early intervention, upbringing, education, training and lifelong learning as an interconnected process and plan the necessary developments accordingly. School socialisation is a determining factor in terms of further education, subsequent employment and work, becoming independent and thus, ultimately, social integration. Achieving these goals therefore requires attention to be paid to establishing the conditions for inclusive education, which, alongside the development of a knowledge-based society, is one of the most effective ways to shape a personal approach based on personal experience.

Crèche education has for decades helped foster integration in Hungary, and in accordance with the provisions of Act CXC of 2011 on national public education, crèche facilities can also be provided for children determined by an expert committee as having special educational needs and children entitled to early intervention and care. All forms of crèche facilities (crèche, mini crèche, family crèche, workplace crèche) provide crèche care for children with special educational needs and those entitled to early intervention and care, who may also be children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Children with special educational needs can join a crèche, in either a mixed or a special group, up to 31 August of the year in which they reach the age of 6. Children with special educational needs and children entitled to early intervention and care can be educated and cared for as part of a mixed or a special group in a crèche. As a result of government measures implementing the National Disability Programme (double multiplier, introduction of a special needs allowance, etc.), there has been a steady increase in recent years in the number of children with special educational needs in crèche facilities (aside from the break caused by the pandemic). According to HCSO data for 2021, the total number of children with special educational needs in crèches, mini crèches and family crèches was 869, which was also an increase on the number in 2020 as a proportion of children registered. As of 31 May 2021, 3.2% of children registered at crèches had special educational needs or were entitled to early intervention. In 2021, 2.6% of children registered were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This shows that the proportion of members of both vulnerable groups (between which there might be some overlap, although no relevant data are available) in crèches is small, despite the numerous fee reductions and incentives. This is partly because taking up the option of crèche care is not obligatory for parents⁷ (although it can be obtained for children in need if, with the consent of the parents, their admission to a crèche is initiated by the health visitor, the general practitioner or paediatrician, the family and child welfare service or the guardianship authority). The services of the Sure Start Children's Centres (which do not form part of the daycare system for children) are also available to help young children in need to catch up. Young children with special educational needs or who are entitled to early intervention and are disadvantaged or highly disadvantaged become entitled to statutory fee reductions and treatment as a result of both their situations when accessing crèche care.

Constant developments in crèche capacity are taking place as a result of the comprehensive crèche development programme. In order to ensure equal access to services, a mandatory feature of calls for tenders featuring the construction of new buildings and / or parts of buildings is always comprehensive accessibility for all disability groups. The sharp increase

⁷ There is no obligation to use crèche facilities in Hungary, unlike kindergarten education and compulsory schooling for school-age children (mothers benefiting from family support care for children up to the age of 3 can stay at home with their child). The eligibility criterion arises essentially from the need for a work-life balance and stems from the Child Protection Act.

in the number of crèche places is contributing to a great improvement in access to early childhood daycare for children with special educational needs and children entitled to early intervention. As a further supportive measure, children who are chronically ill or have a disability and children living in families where children who are chronically ill or have a disability are being raised are, if they take school meals, entitled to free school meals on condition they meet the statutory requirements. (In 2021, this group made up 7.5% of those receiving free meals.)

Under Act CXC of 2011 on national public education, a child or school pupil with special educational needs is one requiring special treatment who, based on the opinion of the expert committee, has a motor, sensory (sight, hearing), intellectual or speech disability; who has multiple disabilities in cases where a number of disabilities are present; or who is on the autism spectrum or suffers from another psychological development disorder (a serious learning, attention or behavioural disorder).

According to the most recent data, published on 1 October 2021, there were 83 472 children and school pupils with special educational needs in public educational establishments. 55 597 pupils with special educational needs receive integrated care, so that the proportion of integrated care rose to 67% by 2021 (or to 69% if we regard pupils with serious and multiple disabilities as a separate group); in 2010 the figure was 59%. The proportion of integrated education is increasing every year, and this is matched by a continuous increase in the number of inclusive institutions. According to the latest comprehensive data publication (October 2021), 4 312 institutions are caring for children and pupils with special educational needs (out of the total of 5 402, i.e. 80% of institutions); in 2015 the number was just 4 050 (and 3 239 in 2010). This area has therefore also experienced a very significant increase. 96% of the institutions caring for the 4 312 children and pupils with special educational needs provide inclusive education. At the same time, more work needs to be done to further develop inclusive schools, for example in terms of provision for children on the autism spectrum and eliminating territorial differences. Boosting cooperation between specialists is particularly important, and a high level of cooperation between parents and teachers and between mainstream teachers and special needs teachers is vital in ensuring success.

In the 2021/2022 academic year, 16 393 pupils with special educational needs were taught in vocational education and training institutions (vocational schools).

For cases stipulated in the legislation, special needs teachers and conductive educators suitable for the types and degrees of special educational needs must be employed for teaching children and pupils with special educational needs. This can be done either by such a person being employed by a particular educational establishment or by their being provided through a network of peripatetic special needs teachers and conductive educators. The following table shows the numbers of specialists employed in the 2021/2022 academic year:

Description	Conductive educators	Speech and language therapists	Special needs teachers	Total
Total	451	1 700	7 848	9 999
working with integrated special needs children and pupils	68	194	1 595	1 857
employees of special needs and conductive education institutions	87	120	3 739	3 946

employees in primary arts education	0	0	0	0
boarding school staff	2	0	17	19
employees working in early intervention	60	1	323	384
pedagogical service employee	191	1 276	1 316	2 783
peripatetic special needs teachers and conductive educators	43	109	858	1 010

The work of parents and teachers and of the educational establishments is aided by the specialised pedagogical services.

The demarcation and management of special educational needs ('SEN') and of integration, learning or behavioural difficulties is of particular importance. SEN is a name used to describe a group of disabilities (and disabilities of the severity and nature of 'disorders') current in public education, whereas 'integration, learning or behavioural difficulties' is a category which is specific to Hungary and not known in international practice. It refers to problems still on the spectrum of what can be considered 'normal' and representing a variant thereof, offering a less severe or a better prognosis than disabilities / SEN status, i.e. covering a range of temporary phenomena.

'Integration, learning or behavioural difficulties' therefore covers a group which presents problems but also belongs to the 'healthy' category; there is an extremely wide range of possible reasons for under-performance, from lesser ability (though within the 'normal' category) to the temporary impact of current life circumstances or a trauma. Pupils with integration, learning or behavioural difficulties are able to perform in accordance with mainstream requirements, albeit less proficiently. Compared with SEN, 'integration, learning or behavioural difficulties' is not a permanent condition, offers a good prognosis and can be substantially improved or rendered problem-free. In addition, it is a purely symptomatic approach, unlike the operationalised, well-defined collective concepts of SEN with a specific causal background.

Section 8(3) of Act CXC of 2011 on national public education lays down that the timeframe of kindergarten education financed under Annex 6 to Act CXC of 2011 on national public education includes the timeframe for employing staff to work with children with integration, learning or behavioural difficulties, while Section 27(5) of Act CXC of 2011 on national public education lays down that primary and secondary schools must organise, at the expense of the difference between the number of pupils' compulsory weekly hours and the authorised weekly timeframe for classes, differentiated development activities for 1-3 individuals aimed at unlocking ability and helping disadvantaged pupils to catch up in the case of pupils diagnosed with integration, learning or behavioural difficulties, as well as for effectively preparing pupils starting in the first to fourth grades.

Helping pupils with integration, learning or behavioural difficulties to develop is, then, feasible in groups of no more than three individuals. The weekly number of hours and areas for development activities is determined by the opinion of the expert committee. As part of the educational provision aimed at the development of pupils with integration, learning or behavioural difficulties, remedial work is done by teachers qualified in accordance with the educational level and the subject, while skills development is covered by special education teachers.

Hungary pays particular attention to providing a wide range of state-of-the-art teaching and development tools to teachers of pupils with special educational needs. The list of public education coursebooks includes some 300 teaching tools developed exclusively for pupils with special educational needs. Some special teaching tools are not on the list but can, like those which do appear in the list, be ordered for pupils under the free coursebook provision scheme.

In 2019 the ‘Kilátó Piarista Pályaorientációs és Munkaerőpiaci Fejlesztő, Módszertani Központ’ (Piarist Outlook Career Guidance and Labour Market Development Methodological Centre) opened in the town of Vác. The Centre offers courses in career planning, research, development and service-development aimed at the creation, development and provision of tailor-made support for pupils with special educational needs, normally developed pupils and young adults whose career planning has stalled which is integrated into the education system and targets specific types and degrees of special educational needs from the start of primary education through to adult employment. It also designs special content, methodology, courses and research enabling pupils with special educational needs and normally developed students jointly to undertake career planning in an integrated way. The Centre provides assistance and support to pupils between the ages of 12 and 18 with special educational needs requiring special attention and to young people of the same age requiring special personal attention in career management. The target group also includes young people between the ages of 16 and 30 who are neither studying nor working. The Centre’s services are used by over 3 000 people each year, attending courses in person and/or online.

With regard to special child protection care provision for children in need of special care – principally those with disabilities or chronic illness – it is worth stating that, in order to guarantee the child’s right to be brought up in a family, the Child Protection Act laid down, on its entry into force on 1 January 2014, that all children below the age of 12 in special child protection care must be placed with foster parents and not in an institution, except where placement in an institution would better serve the needs of the child due to their chronic illness, serious disability, need to be placed with a large number of siblings, or for another reason. The measures have also greatly improved the chances of disabled, chronically ill children to be placed with foster parents, with a figure of 61.2% recorded by the HCSO on 31 December 2021, as compared to 58.85% in 2010.

The priority project ‘Developing human social resources’ (EFOP [Human Resources Development Operational Programme]-3.8.2-16 and VEKOP [Competitive Central-Hungary Operational Programme]-7.5.1-16) makes provision for free participation in foster parent training organised under the central foster parent teaching programme and in special foster parent training based on the same programme. The programme also pays particular attention to care and education for children with disabilities classified under the Child Protection Act as being in need of special care, and a special upskilling course entitled ‘Healthcare and general care tasks for children and young adults with an illness or a disability’ is being developed as part of the project which will be accessible to foster parents as well as specialists in special child protection care and social care.

3. Children with mental health issues (also AROPE)

According to the WHO, mental health is a state of well-being that enables people to realise their abilities, cope with the stresses of everyday life and contribute in a constructive way to the life of their community. Under the WHO definition, mental disorders can generally be

attributed to irregular thoughts, judgement, emotions, behaviour or relationships, or a combination of these. They include anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress syndrome, eating disorders, disturbed behaviour and dissociative disorder, and neurodevelopmental disorder.

According to the latest available data from the 2011 Semmelweis Plan⁸, international and domestic epidemiological studies show that the average prevalence of mental illness among 4-17-year-olds is 15.8% or epidemic-level. WHO data from 2021 put the proportion of 10-19-year-olds who experience mental health issues at 14%.

Under the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) international research study⁹ in which Hungary is involved, a survey is conducted every 4 years on a representative sample of pupils in the 5th, 7th, 9th and 11th grades. Data from the latest survey, in 2018, show that Hungarian teenagers' subjective assessment of their health was less favourable than was suggested by the 2014 data, with one pupil in four deeming their state of health to be poor. Three out of ten pupils reported various mood problems and feelings of depression. A large number experienced various physical and mental symptoms (tiredness, irritability, bad moods, worrying), particularly among girls.

Among the kinds of health-endangering behaviour, the figures for drug use were similar to those from the previous study: one in eight adolescents smoked at least weekly, four out of ten had consumed alcohol in the month preceding the survey, and one in four secondary school pupils had tried some kind of drug at some point their life. Nevertheless, the time-series data display a positive trend when compared with the other Member States. In a similar vein, some drug use data linked to addictions also show an improvement for this age group, such as in the area of drug-taking and smoking¹⁰. Between 1995 and 2011 there was a steady increase in the number of 16-year-old school pupils trying banned substances, whereas it decreased from 19.9% in 2011 to 13.9% in 2019. The number of young people in Hungary experimenting with drugs is below the EU average.

Particular attention must be paid to having a comprehensive approach to dependency in the prevention and management of addictions. Dependency manifests in a number of ways which, may be linked to chemical substances or behaviour. For example, according to a 2016 study on gambling (Paksi–Magi–Demetrovics 2016), the lifetime prevalence value for gambling among pupils between the ages of 7 and 14 in Hungary is 58%. This is in spite of a statutory ban. The study identified a low risk of a problem developing in 9.6% of the sample and a medium risk in 5.9% of cases. The proportion of gamblers with a clear-cut problem was 2.1%.

The number of suicides among children and young people in Hungary has been stagnating for decades. According to the database of the National Public Health Centre (*Nemzeti Népegészségügyi Központ* – NEKIR), 20 young people in Hungary below the age of 18

⁸ Resuscitated Health Care Recovering Hungary. Semmelweis Plan for the Rescue of Health Care. 2011. Nemzeti Erőforrás Minisztérium (Ministry of National Resources), 11.5.2011.

⁹ Adolescent lifestyle in Hungary A national report, compiled by Ágnes Németh and Dóra Várnai, was drawn up on the 2018 survey of international research on Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) in collaboration with the World Health Organisation.

¹⁰ Zs. Elekes, P. Arnold, N. Bencsik Health-damaging behaviour of school pupils: a 25-year perspective. Results for Hungary of the 2019 ESPAD study. Available at: <http://devianciakutatas.hu/docs/2020/ESPAD.magyar.pdf>

committed suicide in 2018. According to data from the Hungarian National Health Insurance Fund (NEAK) on inpatient care, around 1 500 under-18-year-olds attempted suicide each year between 2010 and 2019. (In terms of the gender ratio, successful suicides were more common among men in all age groups). According to a study conducted in Hungary in 2021¹¹, there was a significant reduction in deaths by suicide among the 10-19 age group between 2000 and 2019.

In comparison to the data from the HCSO, NEKIR and Eurostat, the number of deaths in inpatient care coded as suicides is between 1 and 6, which is low. We can conclude from this that youth suicide in health care is underdiagnosed and that the actual figures for death by suicide (and attempted suicide) are higher. The best way of preventing youth suicide would be to provide, as widely as possible, general health education focused on mental health and specific practical skills, where possible involving public education, the support professions and informal contact networks.

4. Children in alternative (especially institutional) care

As early as 1997, Hungary set itself the task of eliminating large, crowded children's homes, and in 2014 began placing primarily children who had been removed from their families with foster parents, on a compulsory basis in the case of children below the age of 12. As a result of the measures taken to achieve this, the proportion of children placed with foster parents has increased markedly: as of 31 December 2021, 69.1% of the total of 23 327 children and young adults in special child protection care were placed with foster parents, as compared with 57.3% on 31 December 2010. According to HCSO data, the proportion of children below the age of 12 placed with foster parents was 87.4% on 31 December 2021, as compared with 75.9% on 31 December 2021. Maintaining, increasing and funding the number of places available with foster parents is one of our priority policy goals.

Developing and maintaining relationships between children forced to live away from their families and their parents and significant relatives is a challenge, as is increasing the number of home care places and – if home care is not possible and if conditions are suitable – of adoptions, and helping children who have reached the age of majority to start their lives as independent people and become successful adults. The impact of the measures was that between 2010 and 2019, the number of adoptions rose by 43%, from 735 to 1 052, before falling to 917 as a result of the COVID pandemic and then rising again to 995 in 2021. The increase was in large part due to adoptions of children in special child protection care, the numbers of which increased by 54%, from 444 in 2010 to 682 in 2019. In 2021 the figure was 645.

1-3% of children adopted between 2010 and 2021 had disabilities or chronic illness. While 7 of the 735 children adopted in 2010 had a disability or chronic illness, the figure in 2020 was 24 of the 917 children adopted in that year. With regard to the period mentioned above, the number of children with disabilities or chronic illness who were adopted was highest in 2021 (28), or 2.81% of the adoptions carried out that year.

Where family reunification and adoption is not possible, helping children in special child protection care to prepare for life as independent adults means assisting them with becoming successful adults, which requires providing opportunities for career planning, skills management, health protection and leisure activities.

¹¹ A. Németh, P. Döme, G. Drótos, Z. Rihmer (2021) Statistical analysis of successfully completed suicides in Hungary in the period 2000 to 2019. *Orvosi Hetilap (Medical journal)*. 162(32): 1283-1296. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1556/650.2021.32174>

Children – primarily girls – removed from their parents are particularly vulnerable to abuse, trafficking and child prostitution in a manner and to the extent linked to their possible disability, substance abuse, the abuse they previously suffered or the circumstances for which they were taken into care, with the possibility of abused children themselves becoming abusers. A significant risk factor in the case of children leaving special care without permission is that they may commit crimes: in 2020, there were 3 407 children who ran away from care, 242 of whom committed crimes, generally involving property. In order that children’s rights may be enforced, therefore, attention must be paid to protecting them from child abuse and becoming victims of human trafficking, and helping children who have become victims. In addition to specific programmes for children in special child protection care, there is also a need for professional activities aimed at preventing and dealing with problems.

Some 1% of children in child protection have serious psychiatric conditions, treatment of which is challenging for normally resourced care systems. Meeting their needs and preventing or mitigating their deterioration is possible primarily in specialised children’s homes with appropriate safety conditions and adequate therapy facilities, but developing and expanding the range of services of such institutions is a major undertaking.

Point II.3.2 of Government Decision No 1228/2022 of 14 April 2022 on the action plan to be implemented in the period 2022-2023 as part of the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy 2020-2023 sets out a model for therapeutic institutional care for children who are raised in their families and are victims of human trafficking. Earlier reports by organisations involved in the escape and care of victims of human trafficking stated that children living with their families sometimes fall victim to abuse and that taking such children into care is not always justified as it restricts the parents’ rights of custody. A new kind of protected placement needs to be created for children living with their families which provides specialist therapy and active assistance and support for families to ensure that the children are not removed from their families and taken into care. This would help reduce the number of children becoming victims a second time and would, by reinforcing family functions, ensure the proper functioning of the retentive and cohesive power of the family. According to the plans, therapeutic children’s care will be available in a children’s shelter nominated by the minister which is already in operation under Phase II of the Swiss-Hungarian Cooperation Programme.

Similarly, we aim to produce a feasibility study and subsequently to implement a pilot programme for therapeutic institutional care – as a newly-developed kind of service – in a ‘protected children’s home’ for children who have been placed in special child protection care having fallen victim to human trafficking. Improvements to infrastructure and increasing the number of places would facilitate the extension of the legal concept of a general protection measure and the development of a new, specific kind of service with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of its implementation, thereby enabling a larger number of children suspected of falling victim to human trafficking to be reached and cared for. The development of protected children’s homes planned for 2023 will take place under the Swiss-Hungarian Cooperation Programme, with the production of the feasibility study being funded from national resources.

Under the Child Protection Act, children who are receiving temporary care and residential care are also entitled to receive day care. From 2017, priority should also be given to children taken into protection when they enter a crèche. In addition, children in temporary care who are placed temporarily with foster parents or in a children’s home or taken into care or

protection are also exempt from payment of fees in crèches. The proportion of children in care who attend a crèche is minimal.

A revised concept of the replacement strategy and the amendment to Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Services ('the Social Act') introduced changes from 2019 for minors with special and differing needs placed in institutions. While the 2011 replacement strategy deals with persons with disabilities in a uniform way, with no differentiation according to age, the re-revised 2019 concept placed greater emphasis on the issue of replacing specific target groups with differing needs, including minors in residential institutions.

In the revised concept –, Government Decision No 1295/2019 of 27 May 2019 on the long-term concept for the 2019-2036 period for the replacement of social institutional care places for persons with disabilities places greater emphasis on sustainability, the complexity of the service ring and the issue of replacing specific target groups with differing needs. Replacing places for minors living in institutions therefore also appears in the document.

As of 1 January 2019, the conditions for the care of minors in subsidised housing have been reinforced by an amendment to the Social Act laying down mandatory service components. From 2019, the service components of supervision and meal provision for minors in subsidised housing must in all cases entail exclusively in-person supervision.

In addition to adults, the concept also places the target group of minors in special child protection care at the focal point of replacement. On this basis, they can benefit from subsidised housing either as relatives or in their own right. An important part of the concept is arranging for the placement in subsidised housing within the meaning of the Social Act, in addition to foster care, of children removed from their families through official measures who receive special child protection care in care institutions.

A priority policy goal in connection with child protection is support for raising children in families, and where a child can no longer be raised in their own family, placement in a family environment (with foster parents). A priority goal is therefore improving the quality of foster parent care and increasing the possibilities for placements and services. Particular attention must be paid to protecting the mental health of children removed from their families, including home care assistance for their families and support for starting their lives as independent people and becoming successful adults. Of particular significance for children living both in their families and in the child protection system is protecting them from all kinds of abuse, including from the dangers of human trafficking and child prostitution.

5. Vulnerable children from third countries

In the case of 'children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin'¹² falling within the scope of the Council Recommendation, priority must be given to the situation of children fleeing Ukraine who have arrived in Hungary since 24 February 2022.

¹² According to point 3(b) of the Recommendation, 'children with a migrant background' means third country national children, irrespective of their migration status, and children with the nationality of a Member State who have a third country migrant background through at least one of their foreign-born parents.

On 7 March 2022, the Government adopted a decree on the rules covering persons recognised as entitled to temporary protection, on the basis of which Hungary grants temporary protection as asylum-seekers to Ukrainian nationals resident in Ukraine prior to 24 February 2022 and to stateless persons or third-country nationals, and their family members, who are not Ukrainian and who had been granted international protection or the equivalent national protection in Ukraine. Hungarian citizens permanently resident in Ukraine who arrived from Ukraine on or after 24 February 2022 must be given all benefits and advantages granted to persons entitled to temporary protection, unless they receive more favourable treatment by virtue of their Hungarian nationality.

In terms of schooling, non-Hungarian citizens residing in Hungary who fulfil the relevant criteria may be entitled to early childhood education, boarding school places, educational services and – if they are in Hungary while of compulsory school age – school education under the same conditions as Hungarian citizens for as long as they are of compulsory school age or until the completion of their studies if these were embarked on prior to reaching the age of 18. Children arriving from Ukraine are entitled freely to exercise their right to choose a kindergarten or school. Under emergency legislation, persons enjoying temporary protection taking care of a minor shall, if they submit a request to that effect, be entitled to crèche care under the same conditions as Hungarian citizens and to benefit from the services of the Safe Start Children’s Centres and, if they submit a request to that effect, to receive free meals at school and during the school holidays for 6 months. (On expiry of the 6-month period, a child under the care of the applicant may be entitled to free meals with no verification of compliance with the conditions set out in the Child Protection Act if the applicant declares that the total monthly per capita income of the family caring for the child does not exceed 130% of the mandatory minimum net wage.) Under Act CXC of 2011 on national public education, refugees and asylum-seekers may exercise their rights as set out in the law from the moment they submit their application for recognition as such. Children recognised by the Hungarian authorities as refugees, under subsidiary protection or stateless are entitled to benefit from crèche care under the same conditions as Hungarian citizens. They were very few in number in 2021, according to HCSO OSAP data. Based on a Ministry of Culture and Innovation survey of institutions (crèches, mini crèches), a total of some 40 children from families forced to flee Ukraine have entered crèches in Hungary since 24 February 2022.

In addition to primary education, we provide children arriving from Ukraine with 5 hours of individual mentoring in the afternoons with the aim of teaching them Hungarian or, if they can already speak Hungarian, of ironing out any knowledge disparity. The State provides HUF 130 000 per child to public education and vocational education institutions which accept students as extra support for remedial work, mentoring and language teaching. In September 2022, teaching for 4 000 children / pupils began within the public educational establishment system¹³. Around 40 pupils who have fled from Ukraine are being taught and trained in vocational educational establishments.

We have made special arrangements for pupils preparing for the secondary-school-leaving examination whereby those who so wish have the opportunity to sit the examination in Hungary subject to the same conditions as Hungarian pupils and free of charge. Pursuant to Government Decree No 115/2022 of 22 March 2022 laying down extraordinary rules for admitting to the secondary-school leaving examination pupils entitled to temporary

¹³ Education Authority data services

protection, such pupils will, until 20 April 2022, be entitled to register in the Hungarian secondary-school-leaving examination system if they were attending their final year in secondary school in the 2021/2022 academic year and they have provided evidence for this in the form of a school certificate or another document issued and attested (possibly by electronic means) by their Ukrainian school. According to the Education Authority, 55 pupils availed themselves of this opportunity and registered for the secondary-school-leaving examination. The subjects chosen by the applicants were as follows: Hungarian language and literature; Hungarian as a foreign language; Mathematics; History; English language; Biology; Chemistry; Physics; Geography; Information technology; Ukrainian language; Russian language; the Reformed religion. There was a total of 233 examinations.

We provide higher education scholarship programmes, help desks and information contact numbers to help refugees fleeing the war.

People arriving from Ukraine can benefit from primary health care available in the place where they are staying. They are entitled to free health care for 30 days on presentation of their passport or other identity document, and if they are registered or have applied for protected status, they are entitled to free medical care – i.e. the full range of health care – under the same conditions as Hungarian citizens. We have set aside significant resources to enable the provision of care to all those who need it, from primary care to the treatment of the most serious illnesses, and we have made provision in both primary care and specialist in- and out-patient care.

On the basis of Special Instruction No 9/2022 of 11 March 2022 on health care for persons arriving from Ukraine issued by the Ministry of Human Resources, if the patient and the medical professional treating them cannot communicate with each other in a functional way, an interpreting service can be requested at short notice by calling 1812.

In addition, mother and baby health, immunisation, child and adolescent health, mental health and psychosocial support services, among others, are available at temporary treatment centres and reception centres. Health visitor care on a one-off basis: pregnancy care; enhanced newborn, premature, underweight baby care; infant and child care, psychosomatic development monitoring (0-16 years); health visitor screening; age-related mandatory vaccination and provision of key information on a healthy lifestyle geared to the child's development. Children in need of medical care can be taken to the Heim Pál National Paediatric Institute at any time, day or night. If needed, a Ukrainian interpreter is available to facilitate communication. The Institute has high-quality hospital facilities and provides fast and specialist care free of charge for children aged between 0 and 18 years: patient care, referrals, counselling, COVID-19 vaccinations, missing and continued compulsory vaccinations for children, etc. Children and young people receive mandatory vaccinations, organised by the local health visitor service, at their local GP practice. The question of which vaccinations are required for children arriving from Ukraine must be determined on an individual basis. The vaccinations are administered by the local GP practice.

Unaccompanied minors (who have so far arrived in Hungary in very small numbers) are taken into child protection care and are entitled to the same kinds and standard of care as Hungarian children removed from their families, including after-care and follow-up care for those who have reached majority, if they so request. The housing services provide full-time care and take account of any individual linguistic and religious or cultural differences (e.g. nutrition, clothing).

Hungarian Government cooperation under the UNICEF emergency programme is currently being developed to facilitate the social integration of children fleeing the war in Ukraine and provide them with remedial education and psychosocial assistance to help them overcome the traumas they have experienced, as well as mental health care.

III. ENABLING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Council recommends that, while considering the best interests of the child is of primary importance, the Member States construct an integrated and enabling policy framework to address the social exclusion of children which is focused on breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage and reducing the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Hungary's legislative environment providing the enabling policy framework

For decades, legislation in Hungary has, in line with the relevant international conventions, guaranteed the requisite laws and obligations for children's physical, mental and moral development.

1.1. Key Hungarian legislation concerning children

- the Fundamental Law of Hungary
- Act LXIV of 1991 promulgating the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in New York on 20 November 1989, and its Optional Protocols
 - Act CLXI of 2009 strengthening and promulgating the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
 - Act CLX of 2009 strengthening and promulgating the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict
- Act III of 1993 on social administration and social services
- Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and the administration of guardianship
- Act LXXXIII of 1997 on benefits provided under compulsory health insurance
- Act XXVI of 1998 on the rights and equal opportunities of persons with disabilities
- Act LXXXIV of 1998 on family support
- Act CXXV of 2003 on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities
- Act LXXX of 2005 promulgating the Convention on Protection of Children in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, signed at The Hague on 29 May 1993
- Act XCII of 2007 promulgating the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol
- Act CXXV of 2009 on Hungarian Sign Language and the use of Hungarian Sign Language
- Act CXC of 2011 on national public education
- Act CCXI of 2011 on the protection of families
- Act V of 2013 on the Civil Code
- Act LXXIV of 2021 amending certain acts to improve living conditions for single-parent families
- Government Decree No 149/1997 of 10 September 1997 on guardianship authorities and child protection and guardianship procedures
- Government Decree No 235/1997 of 17 December 1997 on personal data processed by guardianship authorities, regional child protection services, child welfare services and bodies and persons providing personal care

- Government Decree No 217/1997 of 1 December 1997 on the implementation of Act LXXXIII of 1997 on benefits provided under compulsory health insurance
- Government Decree No 223/1998 of 30 December 1998 on the implementation of Act LXXXIII of 1998 on family support,
- Government Decree No 152/2005 of 2 August 2005 on the *Útravaló* Scholarship Programme
- Government Decree No 331/2006 of 23 December 2006 on the performance of the duties and powers of child protection and guardianship and on the organisation and competence of the guardianship authority
- Government Decree No 328/2011 of 29 December 2011 on reimbursement for primary child welfare care and special child protection care services and the evidence that can be used to claim such reimbursement
- Government Decree No 369/2013 of 24 October 2013 on the official records and monitoring of social, child welfare and child protection services, institutions and networks
- Government Decree No 513/2013 of 29 December 2013 on certain aspects of employment as foster parents and proxy parents
- Government Decree No 415/2015 of 23 December 2015 on the register of users of social, child welfare and child protection services and the national reporting system
- Decree No 15/1998 of 30 April 1998 of the Ministry for Public Welfare on professional obligations and conditions in child welfare organisations and child care services and persons involved in these activities
- Decree No 29/2003 of 20 May 2003 of the Minister for Health, Social Affairs and Family Affairs on the professional and examination requirements for the training of proxy parent, foster parent and childminder managers and on pre-adoption counselling and preparatory training
- Government Decree No 229/2012 of 28 August 2012 on the implementation of the National Public Education Act
- Decree No 20/2012 of 31 August 2012 of the Minister for Human Resources on the operation of educational establishments and the use of names by public educational establishments
- Decree No 15/2013 of 26 February 2013 of the Minister for Human Resources on the operation of specialised pedagogical establishments
- Government Decree No 381/2016 of 2 December 2016 on the Integrated Legal Protection Service
- Decree No 40/2018 of 4 December 2018 of the Minister for Human Resources on the professional tasks and operating conditions of services aimed at enhancing children's opportunities
- Decree No 3/2022 of 28 December 2022 of the Minister for Administration and Justice on pre-adoption counselling and training for foster parents
- Decree No 4/2019 of 7 June 2019 of the Minister for the Interior on Study Scholarships for the Roma national minority

1.2. Description of certain rules of the Hungarian legal system

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed in New York on 20 November 1989, was promulgated by Act LXIV of 1991.

Article XVI of the Fundamental Law of Hungary provides for the rights of the child and also lays down that

- Hungary shall guarantee fundamental rights to everyone without discrimination and in particular without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or any other status. [Article XV(2)]
- By means of separate measures, Hungary shall help to achieve equality of opportunity and social inclusion. [Article XV(4)]
- By means of separate measures, Hungary shall protect families, children, women, the elderly and those living with disabilities. [Article XV(5)]

The Child Protection Act lays down the rights of the child (Section 6) and their protection (Section 11-11/B). The law has established the institution of a children's rights advocate in order effectively to protect the rights of the child. The interests of children in child welfare and child protection institutions and of their families are, under the provisions of the Child Protection Act, represented by children's governing councils and interest representation forums within the institution. If the situation cannot be resolved, those concerned can take their case to the operator or the children's rights advocate.

The legal framework is also an important part of Act V of 2013 on the Civil Code ('the Civil Code'), which came into force on 15 March 2014 and two areas of which include a reference to children's rights and interests: in Book Two in connection with rules on the capacity to act, and in Book Four, in the provisions on family law. These could be summarised as follows:

Book Two of the Civil Code, entitled 'The Individual as Legal Entity', provides for the rules on the capacity to act of minors and in that context, the standards applicable to juridical acts made by minors. The Civil Code defines a minor as a person who has neither yet turned 18 nor become emancipated through marriage. By operation of law, minors below the age of 14 lack capacity to act; their legal representative should make juridical acts on their behalf. Minors who have turned 14 and do not lack capacity to act are deemed to have limited capacity to act. In principle, the validity of juridical acts by minors with limited capacity to act is subject to the consent of their legal representative. Sections 2:12(4), 2:14(3) and 4:148 of the Civil Code, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted on 20 November 1989, provide for taking into account the views of minors capable of forming their own views.

Book Four of the Civil Code, on Family Law, speaks – in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child – of protecting the interests of the child as a basic principle: '*In legal relationships concerning the family, the interests and rights of the child shall be granted increased protection.*' The law states, as a basic principle, that a child has the right to be brought up in its own family, and that if a child cannot be brought up in its own family, it shall be ensured that it grows up in a family and maintains its former family relationships where possible.

Beyond the basic norm, the interests of the child have priority in virtually every area of family legislation. Accordingly, the law expressly provides for the child's opinion to be sought, in particular concerning the rules on parental responsibility, guardianship and adoption, and for their position to be taken into account in the case of a child over the age of 14.

The rules on parental responsibility should be noted, in connection with which – in relation to Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – the Civil Code also states that parents must inform their children of decisions which affect them and ensure that children who are capable of forming their own views can express their opinion in the decision-making process and take decisions jointly with their parents in cases determined by law. Parents must give due weight to a child’s opinion, bearing in mind the child’s age and maturity. A child therefore has a say in decisions affecting them even if they are being brought up by both parents together. However, the child’s opinion is also significant if their parents separate or no longer wish jointly to exercise parental responsibility.

The Civil Code lays down that, in an action to settle parental responsibility, the court must also hear the child, directly or through an expert, in the course of its proceedings in duly justified cases or if the child so requests. If the child is over 14 years old, a decision on the child’s parental custody and placement may be taken only with their consent, unless their choice would jeopardise their development. Furthermore, the Civil Code states, in connection with determining contact with the child, that a child who is capable of forming their own views must be heard by the guardianship authority or the court before a decision is taken.

Of relevance in this context is the amendment to the Civil Code introduced by Act LVII of 2021 which entered into force on 1 August 2022 and which states that in every action to determine the exercising of parental responsibility, the court must ensure that a child who is capable of forming their own views is given the opportunity to make a statement. To this end, the court must inform the child of the opportunity to make a statement. This addition bolsters the child’s right to be heard and ensures that a child who is capable of forming their own views is given a real and actual opportunity to express their opinion.

The amendment is in accordance with Council Regulation (EU) No 2019/1111 on jurisdiction, the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility, and on international child abduction, applicable as of 1 August 2022, which forbids the recognition and implementation in another Member State of a judgment reached in one Member State if the court failed to ensure that a child who is capable of forming their own views was given the opportunity to make a statement.

Act XCII of 2007 promulgating the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol regulates the rights of children with disabilities in every area of life. Article 7 sets out separately the measures which have a bearing on children with disabilities. Section 13 of Act XXVI of 1998 on the rights and equal opportunities of disabled persons ensures the equal opportunities of children with disabilities in the field of education and training.

1.3. Strategies, programmes, action plans

A number of national strategies and programmes and action plans to implement these have been produced in recent years which contribute to implementing the Child Guarantee National Action Plan, thereby already delivering on a significant part of the Council Recommendation:

- Parliamentary Resolution No 47/2007 of 31 May 2007 on the ‘Make Things Better for Children!’ National Strategy 2007-2032
- Government Decision No 1053/2008 of 4 August 2008 on the establishment of the ‘Make Things Better for Children!’ National Strategy Evaluation Committee

- Decree No 20/2012 of 31 August 2012 of the Minister for Human Resources on the operation of educational establishments and the use of names by public educational establishments
- Parliamentary Resolution No 15/2015 of 7 April 2015 on the National Disability Programme (2015-2025)
- Government Decision No 1488/2016 of 2 September 2016 on the creation of a Secure Internet Service for Children, awareness and value-creation in internet use, and the Hungarian Digital Child Protection Strategy
- Government Decision No 1888/2016 of 29 December 2016 on government measures to implement the National Sustainable Development Framework Strategy
- Government Decision No 1722/2018 of 18 December 2018 on national health programmes and related policy programmes for the timeframe 2019-2022 (including the National Mental Health Programme and the National Child Health Programme)
- Government Decision No 1110/2019 of 12 March 2019 on government measures forming part of the family protection action plan
- Government Decision No 1295/2019 of 27 May 2019 on the long-term concept for the 2019-2036 period for the replacement of social institutional care places for persons with disabilities (New Replacement Concept 2019-2036)
- Government Decision No 1168/2019 of 28 March 2019 on the adoption of the ‘Vocational education 4.0 – Medium-term policy strategy for the renewal of vocational education and training and the response of the vocational education and training system to the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution’ strategy
- Government Decision No 1187/2020 of 28 April 2020 on the Action Plan for implementation of the National Disability Programme until 2022
- Government Decision No 1551/2020 of 25 August 2020 adopting the 2021-2030 public education strategy drawn up for the European Union
- Government Decision No 1605/2021 of 18 August 2021 on the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy 2030
- Government Decision No 1619/2021 of 3 September 2021 on the government action plan for implementing the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy 2030 for the years 2021-2024
- the January 2021 ‘Healthy Hungary 2021-2027’ Health Sector Strategy
- Government Decree No 115/2022 of 22 March 2022 laying down extraordinary rules for admitting to the secondary-school leaving exam pupils entitled to temporary protection
- Government Decision No 1228/2022 of 14 April 2022 on the 2020-2023 National Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the 2020-2023 Action Plan for its implementation

The Child Guarantee National Action Plan reinforces the content of these strategies and action plans, government measures, programmes and projects but does not envisage repeating them. The Child Guarantee National Action Plan focuses on the deficiencies which have been uncovered in the meantime and new measures designed to make further progress possible.

2. Cooperation among the policy areas concerned at national, regional and local level to provide comprehensive support for children in need

2.1. Policy cooperation system for specific target groups

a. Children in poverty

Cooperation among the specialist fields concerned is ensured by a number of consultative forums operating at national, regional and local level. The following consultative mechanisms¹⁴ are involved in matters concerning the social inclusion of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion:

- at national level: Interministerial Committee for Social Inclusion and Gypsy Affairs; Roma Coordination Council; Roma thematic working party of the Human Rights Working Party; Economic Forum for Inclusion.
- at regional and local level: County Inclusion Forums; National Roma Platform; district round tables; municipal equal opportunity programme forums.

There is also the ‘Make Things Better for Children!’ Evaluation Committee, which deals exclusively with issues concerning children. This was set up by the Government on the basis of Parliamentary Resolution No 47/2007 of 31 May 2007 on the ‘Make Things Better for Children!’ National Strategy 2007-2032 as the body which issues opinions, makes recommendations and monitors the implementation of the National Strategy, evaluates its results and promotes its transparency. In addition to government representatives, the members of the Evaluation Committee are representatives of civil society organisations and churches working in the field of children’s and social affairs. The job of the Evaluation Committee is to design the follow-up system needed to ensure the accountability and verifiability of the implementation of the National Strategy. It also has the task of actively cooperating in the implementation of the ‘Make Things Better for Children!’ National Strategy 2007-2032 by issuing opinions and making recommendations, and of delivering its opinion on current issues affecting the situation of children. Its principle instrument is openness: keeping the broadest spectrum of society informed of the implementation of the Strategy.

b. Children with disabilities (also AROPE)

Various bodies of the Hungarian Government aim to improve the social involvement of persons with disabilities and channel their needs into decision-making procedures:

One kind of active partner cooperation between decision-making bodies and civil society organisations is the National Disability Council. The conditions governing the operation of the National Disability Council are set out in Government Decision No 1330/2013 of 13 June 2013 on the National Disability Council, which lays down that it shall make recommendations, issue opinions and provide advice to the Government and the minister. The Decision gives the National Disability Council scope to enable organisations representing persons with disabilities – including in particular, civil and interest-representation bodies – to communicate their opinions and recommendations to decision-makers before decisions on disability policy are taken. In addition, the National Disability Council helps to draw up the

¹⁴ More detailed information on these forums can be found in a separate chapter (B.8) of the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy 2030.

National Disability Programme aimed at creating equality of opportunities for persons with disabilities and drawing up the associated Action Plans.

The Working Party on Human Rights was set up in 2012, the main tasks of which are monitoring the success of human rights in Hungary and consulting civil society organisations, representative associations, professional organisations and constitutional bodies, as well as promoting professional communication on the enjoyment of human rights in Hungary. The working party operates a Round Table on Human Rights aimed at holding consultations with civil society organisations monitoring the successful implementation of human rights in Hungary, interest-representation and professional organisations, and at drawing up recommendations in relation to the tasks and activities of the working party. Members of the Round Table on Human Rights meet in Thematic Working Parties to discuss current human rights issues and formulate recommendations for decision-makers. The membership of the Thematic Working Party on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities comprises 18 civil society organisations and two permanent expert invitees. The Chair of the Thematic Working Party is the state secretary for welfare policy in the Ministry of the Interior.

A key task of the Interministerial Disability Commission is to harmonise tasks impacting the lives of persons with disabilities, and to design and implement the tasks contained in the National Disability Programme and the action plans supporting implementation.

The conditions governing the operation of the Interministerial Disability Commission are laid down in Government Decision No 1432/2015 of 30 June 2015 establishing the Interministerial Disability Commission. The body also carries out the government coordination mechanism tasks set out in Article 33(1) of Act XCII of 2007 promulgating the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

On the basis of the national core crèche education programme, the service function of institutions providing crèche care makes them the suitable vehicle for implementation of the early childhood intervention approach. To this end, one important task of early childhood educators is recognising and flagging up any developmental retardation and providing help at an early stage. This is done with the involvement of parents, in compliance with competence limits, and by taking the requisite measures in line with a family-centred approach, with the help of other specialists.

c. Children with mental health issues (also AROPE)

Section 128 of Decree No 20/2012 of 31 August 2012 of the Minister for Human Resources on the operation of educational establishments and the use of names by public educational establishments lays down that public educational establishments must design their tasks related to comprehensive health development in a way which is coordinated, traceable, measurable and assessable in the context of a health development programme forming part of local education programmes. The Hungarian School Sports Association has been asked to implement the 'Comprehensive health development, mental health promotion and addiction reduction programmes for schools' programme. The programmes support the mental health development of children / pupils and the teachers working with them while contributing, by increasing teachers' knowledge of methodology, to children's school health development, including tasks related to preventing addiction.

With regard to vocational schools, pupils' comprehensive health development is also prominent in Government Decree No 12/2020 of 7 February 2020 implementing the law on vocational education.

The ‘Someone to turn to’ programme aims to prevent conflict and violence in schools (the cause of which may sometimes be linked to substance abuse by those involved), including cyber-bullying; dealing with the consequences of violence; and supporting teachers in coping with the concomitant psychological burden. Online mental health consultation is available with specially-trained professionals. If violence occurs in an institution which requires on-site intervention, the expert team will provide assistance in person at the request of the institution.

In the public education system, children and pupils can also benefit from psychological services in educational and specialised establishments. The primary aim of the school psychology put into practice in educational establishments is to facilitate children’s / pupils’ personal development and protect their mental health, and to assist the effectiveness of teaching through the organisation of screening, examinations, training courses and individual and group consultations. Part of the job of school psychologists is to organise psychology-based tasks in educational establishments related to health development, educational work, support for sexuality education, and the resolution of interpersonal conflicts and violence encountered in educational establishments.

Kindergarten and school psychology coordination is carried out by specialised pedagogical establishments on the basis of Decree No 15/2013 of 26 February 2013 of the Minister for Human Resources on the operation of specialised pedagogical establishments. The specialised pedagogical services assist with increasing the scope of provision. Where there is no school or kindergarten psychologist in educational establishments (schools, kindergartens) in the specialised pedagogical establishment territorial jurisdiction of the county (or the capital), the specialised pedagogical establishment may, at the written request of the director of the educational establishment, provide support until the post is filled.

Furthermore, the specialised pedagogical services also provide psychological help in the form of educational counselling which is essentially psychotherapeutic and extends beyond the competences of psychologists employed in educational establishments.

Between 2010 and 2022, the number of psychologists working in public education doubled, from 998 to 1 922.

Kindergarten and school social workers present in public educational establishments have the job of preventing children from exposure to danger. Their task is to develop the skills needed to complete compulsory schooling, assist the child’s family with matters concerning the child’s kindergarten and school life, and resolve conflicts between the child and their parents where there are parenting problems. Group and communal help is available to achieve these aims, in addition to individual assistance.

The challenges faced by this target group are tackled using the resources of the areas most commonly affected: health and public education. The steps which must be taken to develop institutional cooperation among the specialist fields – e.g. standardising the definitions used in those fields – may be the subject of further investigation.

d. Children in alternative (especially institutional) care

The situation of minors in special child protection care and youth detention centres also impacts the responsibilities of sectors beyond child protection sectoral management (social inclusion, public education, health, child and youth policy, policing, justice, etc.), with which cooperation in terms of joint measures is continuous. A comprehensive, detailed statistical system operates in special child protection care, although some measures are monitored not

by a separate monitoring system but under the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy, the National Disability Programme and the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy.

2.2. Involving children in decisions which affect them

In Hungary, Act LXIV of 1991 promulgated the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in New York on 20 November 1989, of which Article 12 lays down that children who are capable of forming their own views must be guaranteed the right freely to express their opinion on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. In order to achieve this, children must be given the opportunity in particular to be heard in any judicial or public administration procedure which affects them, either directly or through their representative or a suitable body, in accordance with the procedural rules laid down in Hungarian legislation. Accordingly, Sections 2:12(4), 2:14(3) and 4:148 of the Civil Code provide for the opinion of a minor who is capable of forming their own views to be taken into account and obliges parents to involve their children in decisions which affect those children and to provide them with appropriate information.

In the public education system, student societies and councils give children the opportunity to express their opinions. In accordance with Section 48 of Act CXC of 2011 on national public education, pupils and students in boarding schools may establish student societies under their institutions' rules of procedure where they exercise decision-making powers in planning and organising their communal life and electing their representatives, and where they have the right to be represented in the student council. In addition, students and student societies may establish student councils to represent the students' interests. These must be consulted in matters as determined by law. Furthermore, under Section 73 of the Act, 'student boards' may be set up to assist the teaching in the school and promote cooperation among all those involved. Student council representatives are also members of such boards.

The supreme coordination forum bringing together students and the Minister for Education is the National Student Council¹⁵. Its members are mandated to undertake their tasks by the National Student Parliament, established on the basis of delegation from county student parliaments. The National Student Council contributes to issuing opinions on decisions relating to students' rights: it can express an opinion, make a recommendation, take a view and help prepare sittings of the National Student Parliament¹⁶, which operates as the coordination forum for students in public educational establishments.

Section 69 of Act LXXX of 2019 on vocational training provides for students in vocational training institutions to have the opportunity to establish student councils.

Involving those in the child protection system who are concerned at local level ensures that, based on the provisions of the Child Protection Act, interest-representation forums exist in special child protection care institutions and youth detention centres. In addition, those in such institutions may establish children's councils which can express opinions on the institution's operation and all matters concerning the children, which the head of the institution is obliged to take into account.

¹⁵ https://www.oktatas.hu/koznevelés/országos_diaktanács/odt_tagok

¹⁶ <https://www.oktatas.hu/koznevelés/diakparlamentek>

3. Measures to ensure an adequate level of income for parents or carers

In recent years, the Government's family support measures and measures aimed at helping families and parents with children to find employment have been inextricably linked to promoting employment. The Workplace Protection Action Plan promoted employment among parents with young children, reducing payroll costs for employers of workers in the most vulnerable groups, including parents with young children. Measures aimed at labour market integration can contribute significantly to improving the socio-economic situation of families, helping to improve the situation of socially and economically disadvantaged parents and access for their children to high-quality services.

3.1. Helping disadvantaged persons to access the labour market

The employment strategy for 2014-2020 gave priority to helping disadvantaged unemployed and inactive people to enter the labour market. While providing support for entering the labour market was the aim in the case of all job-seekers, the emphasis was on those leaving the workfare scheme, people with low educational attainment, women with young children and older workers. Measures supporting labour market integration also contributed to enabling access to employment for parents with children. Wage-related subsidies, labour market training, various labour market services and additional travel and housing allowances helped to improve their employability and access to employment under the 'Road to the labour market' programme (GINOP [Economic Development and Innovation Operation programme] 5.1.1-15¹⁷ and VEKOP [Competitive Central-Hungary Operational Programme] 8.1.1-15), which also helped some people to set up in self-entrepreneurship. The support was provided primarily by district authorities, with NGOs also involved in service provision. NGOs also played an active role in supporting labour market integration for disadvantaged and in many cases long-term unemployed people on a transitional employment basis. Social enterprises also play a significant role in promoting employment for disadvantaged people. The number of people receiving support as a result of the measures (over 300 000) and their durable presence on the labour market is testimony to the effectiveness of these programmes; however, ongoing technological, demographic and structural changes and the need to support job-seekers point to a need for enhanced support for job-seekers and certain more vulnerable groups and to ensure that active labour market instruments are in operation in the future. Calls for proposals in GINOP-5.1.2-15, 5.1.3-16 and 5.1.7-17 to promote and support social enterprises have helped in this, with a total of 546 social enterprises receiving support. Support for social enterprises in the 2021-2027 programming period is available under EFOP Plus and TOP Plus.

Workplace training for disadvantaged persons – principally Roma women – is provided under the 'Better opportunities for women – training and employment' (EFOP-1.1.2.) programme, which also helps provides them with employment in the social and public education system. The programme was launched on 1 November 2016 and will be wound up on 28 February 2023. So far, 1 220 people have received training under the 'Better opportunities' programme which, co-funded by the EU, supports the training of Roma women and their employment in the social and child welfare / child protection system. Everyone who has completed the training has obtained an employment contract and a job. 81% of course attendees found employment in the primary labour market. During the period under assessment, the Directorate-General for Social Opportunity, which is implementing the project, provided

¹⁷ The GINOP-5.1.1-15 programme is planned to continue in the 2021-2027 programming period.

training not only for participants in the project but also for members of the target group of the standard programme implemented under the EFOP-1.1.3 call for proposals. A total of 1 267 people have gained the National Qualification Register ‘Social carer and nurse’ qualification (EFOP-1.1.2 and EFOP-1.1.3). The training provided by the Directorate-General for Social Opportunity and the employment in institutions envisaged by the project, as well as further employment, has enabled unfilled specialist posts in the social security system to be taken up by Roma people, who have become specialists with the help and support of the project and the heads of institutions and their staff. The jobs: nursery assistant, child and youth supervisor, social carer and nurse.

In addition to the employment programmes, boosting the qualifications of disadvantaged persons is crucial in assisting them with access to the labour market. The priority training project for people with low qualifications and workfare scheme employees (GINOP-6.1.1-15) is aimed at disadvantaged persons of working age, including workfare scheme employees in particular, and is focused on beneficiary districts. The number of places on training programmes based on labour market demand aimed at increasing employment prospects is increasing, particularly in order to improve the labour market situation of people with a low level of educational attainment and workfare scheme employees. The programme provides an opportunity for mentoring for members of the target group involved and the chance for adults who took part in previous labour market training programmes and skills development to participate in specialist training courses. By September 2022, a total of 108 552 workfare scheme employees had taken part in training courses, of whom 101 310 had completed them successfully, obtaining a certificate or attestation. The fundamental objective of the ‘Actively for knowledge’ priority project (EFOP-3.7.1-17) is to fund training courses supporting the completion of primary school principally for disadvantaged persons aged from 18 to 55 with low or no educational attainment, including Roma, who are disadvantaged in labour market terms, and to fund courses aimed at reducing functional illiteracy and laying the foundation for vocational training, as well as developing basic skills and competences. By September 2022, a total of 1 098 courses had been launched which were attended by 18 695 people, 16 453 of whom completed them successfully. In addition, 3 896 people gained work experience under the programme.

The ‘Improving access to digital spaces and developing the digital competences of disadvantaged groups’ programme was set up under the Swiss-Hungarian Cooperation Programme and aims to improve the digital literacy of disadvantaged groups, including the Roma, thereby helping to improve the employability of the adult working-age population, promote adult education to increase social inclusion, and improve access to employment opportunities. All of this contributes to improving people’s capacity to act and to their becoming active citizens. The geographical focus of the programme is economically disadvantaged regions (implementation must be 70% in disadvantaged municipalities). The amount of funding is CHF 9 952 million, and the programme will provide digital training to nearly 6 000 disadvantaged adults.

3.2. Work-life balance

Work-life balance and support for women with young children to enter the labour market has been and is being given ever greater emphasis with the aim of exploiting existing labour market potential as fully as possible. This has been supported by a range of measures, from the GYED Extra package and the Family Protection Action Plan – such as the abolition, from when the child is 6 months old, of restrictions on employment in addition to childcare fees

and childcare allowances, and an increase in the number of crèche places, in order to promote the return to work of parents with young children – to the provision of part-time employment opportunities and support for placing children in crèche care. Increasing part-time work opportunities – which, starting from 1 January 2020, can be applied for until the child is 4 years old under the Labour Code, with employers obliged to enable part-time employment where requested – is of vital importance to increasing employment among parents with young children. The legislative conditions have been put in place; however, the employment culture in Hungary needs to change in this regard: employers should be prepared to cooperate as partners, and stress must be placed on flexible forms of employment.

As of 1 September 2020, amendments to the Labour Code and other acts have enabled parents intending to adopt a child to absent themselves from work for 10 days in order to meet the child to be adopted in person during the adoption preparation period. This applies to both adoptive parents and greatly simplifies the adoption procedure, thereby aligning with job retention.

From 1 January 2023, working fathers will be entitled to 10 working days of paternal leave for the birth or adoption of a child. (Previously, the Labour Code laid down an entitlement for fathers to 5 working days of leave for the birth of one child and 7 working days for the birth of twins.) At the request of the father, the 10-working-day paternal leave must be granted at the appropriate time and in no more than two parts, no later than the end of the second month following the birth or adoption of the child. The father is entitled to the full amount of absence pay for the first 5 days, and 40% of the absence pay starting from the 6th working day.

In order to ensure better a financial situation for families who undertake to have children, from 1 July 2021 the amount of maternity pay has increased from 70% to 100% of eligible gross income. This measure means that there is no decrease in the income earned by mothers who had been insured prior to having a child during their 24 weeks of maternity leave; in fact, they may receive allowances totalling more than their earlier net income. In addition to extending the legal conditions governing part-time work, a number of schemes in the GINOP Employment priority programme have helped and continue to help parents with young children to find work. Dedicated programmes (GINOP 5.3.1, 5.3.2) have enabled us to support an increase in flexible employment, as a result of which, undertakings screened by professional bodies have been able to apply for funding to implement their restructuring plans. The programme has helped 543 undertakings to implement organisational, staffing and other measures aimed at promoting flexible employment. The objective of the project to promote training and support placement for parents with young children (GINOP 5.3.13-20) is to help those parents with young children requiring tailored assistance and support – in addition to crèche care and flexible employment – to re-enter the labour market. The programme provides them with the opportunity and motivation to take part in training courses aimed at helping them to change job or continue in their previous employment by giving them up-to-date information and developing their competences while receiving the childcare allowance. The target group of the programme is parents with young children living outside the central region of Hungary who have turned 18 and who were receiving maternity pay or childcare benefits at the time of submission of their application for support. A priority target group consists of parents with young children with low educational attainment or who have no vocational skills. Parents with young children in the priority target group may be eligible for a training scholarship if they continue their earlier primary or secondary school studies or take part in vocational training. The amount of the scholarship is HUF 100 000 per month in the case of high-intensity courses, covering, inter alia, the cost of travelling to the course location and childminding fees. (For low-intensity courses a training allowance of between HUF 40 000 and HUF 200 000 per month is payable). Mentoring activities are in place under

the programme to facilitate the successful completion of courses. Parents with young children who are in the target group have the opportunity to take part in subsidised IT or foreign language courses organised specially for the target group. By mid-March 2023, 1 400 people had received scholarships and nearly 1 000 had completed courses under the priority project. The final deadline for the physical completion of courses is 31 October 2023. (Scholarship applications may be submitted until 20 May 2022. Applications for the subsidised IT and language courses may still be submitted.)

The Support for parents with young children returning to the labour market project (GINOP 5.3.11), with applications closing on 31 March 2023, aims to help parents with young children who can use only those kinds of crèche services which are typically available for a higher fee (e.g. family crèches) as a result of the capacities of the crèche system. The scheme enables parents returning to the labour market to receive direct financial support covering personal reimbursement for crèche care until the child reaches the age of 3 years (or until the start of kindergarten care), thereby reducing the cost of entering or returning to the labour market. It also aims to improve access to child daycare services, reduce the cost of placement and thus help parents with young children to return to the labour market. The support covers the additional cost of entering the labour market for parents with young children. It can be seen as special employment subsidy helping individuals to bear the additional cost of child daycare services. Where the conditions set out in the call for applications are met, the allowance may be claimed for reimbursement of family crèche / work crèche, non-municipal crèche/mini crèche or child daycare service fees by 31 March 2023. The Hungarian State Treasury provides non-reimbursable support up to a maximum total of HUF 40 000 per month. Where the fee for care is less than HUF 40 000 per month, the amount of the support is the same as the monthly cost of the care; however, if it is more than HUF 40 000, parents are required to pay the difference.

By mid-March 2023, the programme had helped a total of 9 375 parents to access the labour market.

3.3. Youth Guarantee

In 2015 the Government undertook to provide targeted assistance to all young people below the age of 25 who were not studying or in work to find employment. This took the form of the Youth Guarantee, which helps young people who are not studying or in work to access the knowledge they need to find work, gain work experience or prepare for the labour market. Early intervention enables the Youth Guarantee to reduce the length of time spent unemployed. In recent years the Youth Guarantee has played a key role in boosting young people's labour market participation and increasing their employment and reducing unemployment among their numbers while contributing directly to their entry into the primary labour market rather than joining workfare schemes. Over 360 000 young people have been helped by the system so far, with the labour market situation of more than 198 000 helped through assistance with pay, training and housing.

The Youth Guarantee, implemented under the GINOP, does not specifically target improving the employment situation of young people with disabilities; however, it can offer them support in terms of access to the open labour market. The task of the staff of the state employment body implementing the programme – in particular the youth advisers – is to seek out and contact young people in the target group and to maintain contact with and share data with the education and social sector. The Youth Guarantee can usefully be supplemented by measures and programmes of (relevant) organisations employing or otherwise helping young

people which can provide assistance in terms of areas not covered by the state employment body and the programmes which it implements.

Youth unemployment has, however, increased as a result of the pandemic. Improving the labour market situation of young people effectively requires extending the Youth Guarantee and adapting it to fulfil the needs of a changing labour market. Accordingly, in the next EU programming period we will extend the target group to the 15-29 age group, providing them with tailored help in the form of services, trainee programme and employment opportunities, assistance with training courses and entrepreneurship, and support for mobility and housing. To operate effectively, the Youth Guarantee also requires the active participation of other specialist fields – focused particularly on prevention – in deterring early school leaving and in career orientation, developing a national database and establishing an early warning system. It should also be stressed that the Child Guarantee National Action Plan and the Youth Guarantee need to function as interdependent systems: the Child Guarantee National Action Plan provides assistance to children which is focused on child support, creating equal opportunities and prevention, while the Youth Guarantee helps young people leaving the school system to enter or re-enter the world of work.

3.4. Advance payment of child maintenance

Act LXXIV of 2021 amending certain acts to improve living conditions for single-parent families introduced changes to the advance payment of child maintenance which significantly promote access to child maintenance for parents taking care of children. The amendment to the Child Protection Act introduced by Act LXXIV of 2021 brought a conceptual change to the procedure for advance payment of child maintenance, ensuring advance payment by the state of child maintenance for all families where the maintenance debtor fails voluntarily to satisfy the requirements of the court's final decision establishing the maintenance, the creditor initiates enforcement proceedings for the recovery of the maintenance and the bailiff in the enforcement procedure establishes that child support is irrecoverable. The Act broadens the range of beneficiaries, with children who were previously excluded from maintenance provision now able to access the maintenance due to them as determined by judicial means. The Act also significantly increased the ceiling for advance payment of child maintenance.

4. Measures taking into account the territorial dimension of poverty

Inclusion policy applies territorial targeting with a range of initiatives focused primarily, but not exclusively, on the most disadvantaged areas (the North Great Plain, North Hungary, and South Transdanubia regions), while also taking account of the fact that there are disadvantaged areas, segregated areas, and areas at risk of segregation where vulnerable target groups live in other regions as well¹⁸.

The legislative environment and measures for identifying disadvantaged areas, municipalities and parts of municipalities are as follows:

Act XXI of 1996 on regional development and regional planning lays down that the task of regional development is, among other things, to promote the upward convergence and development of disadvantaged areas, in pursuit of which – as authorised under the Act – the

¹⁸ The territorial dimension of poverty is the subject of a separate chapter (B.5) of the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy 2030.

Government adopted Government Decree No 290/2014 of 26 November 2014 on the classification of beneficiary districts and Government Decree No 105/2015 of 23 April 2015 on the classification of disadvantaged municipalities and the criteria for classification. For both districts and municipalities, a complex indicator made up of four indicator groups (social and demographic, housing and living conditions, local economy and labour market, and infrastructure and environment) and laid down in the Government Decree defines their classification on the basis of their level of territorial development. With regard to the Child Guarantee National Action Plan, it is particularly important that the following appear in the social and demographic indicators:

- the proportion of the permanent population in the 0-24 age group receiving regular child protection allowance, and
- the number of places provided by crèche and child daycare services per 10 000 members of the permanent population in the 0-2 age group.

In addition, we consider integrated settlement development strategies to be a priority instrument from the point of view of territorial aspects. The preparation of such strategies as a medium-term development programme for the concurrent implementation of local environmental, social and economic objectives is required under Act LXXVIII of 1997 on the development and protection of the built environment. The detailed rules for developing such strategies are contained in Government Decree No 314/2012 of 8 November 2012 on the concept of settlement development, the integrated settlement development strategy and instruments for settlement planning, and certain legal instruments of settlement planning. Accordingly, where an HCSO study has identified a segregated area or an area at risk of segregation (taking into account the indicator set out in Annex 10 to the Government Decree¹⁹), an anti-segregation programme must be designed for the area concerned as part of the integrated settlement development strategy.

The obligation to design local equal opportunities programmes should also be mentioned. On the basis of Section 31 of Act CXXV of 2003 on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities, municipalities in villages and towns and in districts in the capital adopt local equal opportunities programmes every 5 years. These must include an analysis of the educational, housing, employment, health and social situation of disadvantaged social groups – in particular women, people living in extreme poverty, Roma, persons with disabilities, children and the elderly – as well as an action plan based on the analysis of the situation which must define the measures needed to tackle the problems identified in the analysis in a comprehensive manner. Municipalities may receive support from national and EU funds only if they have local equal opportunities programmes in place. In addition, Government Decree No 321/2011 of 27 December 2011 lays down detailed rules for designing local equal opportunities programmes and equal opportunities mentors assisting the municipalities' work.

A good example of taking the territorial dimension into account is the comprehensive programme which was launched in 2019 with the gradual involvement of the 300 most disadvantaged settlements²⁰ and which is centred on the children and their families living there. The target group of the long-term 'Catching-up settlements' programme (*Felzárkózó települések* – FETE) corresponds to the group of children living in poverty, which is also

¹⁹ The indicator: the proportion of people in the active population (aged 15-59) who have completed only primary school and have no income from employment. The thresholds for the segregation indicator are laid down in the Government Decree by type of settlement.

²⁰ Settlements listed in Annex 3 to Government Decision No 1057/2021 of 19 February 2021

targeted by the Child Guarantee National Action Plan. Children below the age of 3 years in FETE settlements attend a crèche only in the rarest cases, owing to the lack of such facilities; and if they do exist, parents are uncertain as to the developmental activities they provide for 0-3-year-olds. The aim of the FETE programme is primarily to provide regular development opportunities to children below the age of 3 years who do not attend school and to their parents, thereby supporting children's pre-kindergarten development and expanding their parents' capabilities. These services are also accessible for children with disabilities and their families (with particular regard, for example, to facilitating access to specialised health care, telemedicine services and screening at different levels of housing intervention; activities in the areas of music, art, mobile playgrounds and sport naturally also appeal to and involve children with special needs). The overall aim of the programme is to leave no child behind, and this also applies to children with disabilities and their families.

This is also the mission of the 'Child in Focus' project (EFOP 1.4.5-20-2020-00001) which operates in 117 catching-up settlements (177 starting from 2023). As part of the EU's programme to help the youngest children catch up, which was launched in January 2021, 20 civil society organisations are undertaking intensive, comprehensive social work in situ to ensure that children aged 0-3 years living in the most challenged settlements receive everything they need to achieve well-balanced development. Interlocking services provided at 'Presence points' in settlements taking part in the programme supplement the primary care services and contribute to the social inclusion of the inhabitants.

The development of the 'Catching-up settlements' programme will be funded in the coming years by EFOP Plus and RRF resources.

The government decisions serving as the basis for the FETE programme are as follows:

- Government Decision No 1404/2019 of 5 July 2019 setting up the long-term 'Catching-up settlements' programme
- Government Decision No 1426/2019 of 26 July 2019 on determining tasks related to the New Roma Strategy (2019-2030).
- Government Decision No 1186/2020 of 28 April 2020 on further measures to continue the 'Catching-up settlements' and the economic recovery programmes
- Government Decision No 1057/2021 of 19 February 2021 expanding the development programme needed to reduce the economic imbalance between certain areas of Hungary, and expanding the long-term 'Catching-up settlements' programme

Components of the FETE programme²¹:

- (a) early childhood development – the first 1 000 days
- (b) in-person social work; crisis management
- (c) eliminating life-threatening housing; social housing programme
- (d) healthcare interventions
- (e) debt management
- (f) crime and drug prevention
- (g) community programmes: sport, music, playbus (mobile playground)
- (h) educational development
- (i) workplace socialisation; economic development
- (j) energy

²¹ A detailed description of the FETE programme can be found on the <https://fete.hu/> website.

FETE programme funding:

	Name of fund	Amount of funding (HUF bn)	Duration
1.	Domestic fund – Ministry of the Interior	4	2020-2021
2.	Domestic fund – Ministry of the Interior	6	2021-2022
2.	EU fund – EFOP-1.4.5-20	20.85	2021-2023
3.	EU fund – EFOP Plus	80.3	2024-2029
4.	EU fund – RRF	94.56	2021-2026

The ‘Comprehensive Anti-Slum Programmes’ are also targeted at combating territorial handicaps. These aim to help disadvantaged, seriously impoverished people living in a segregated living environment to catch up and integrate. Implementation of a comprehensive programme is undertaken through human (ESF) and infrastructural (ERDF) interventions. Activities under such a programme include:

- the provision of human assistance with the support of in-person social work;
- support for housing projects through the launch and reinforcement of desegregation procedures, creating new social housing and supporting housing mobility; residential building development; eliminating life-threatening housing units which are unfit for habitation in order to resolve the problem of segregation; reducing underdevelopment; creating a habitable living environment by managing problems caused by an environment which is detrimental to health; improving access to services (establishing service centres and service points).

During the 2014-2020 EU programming period, the programme was implemented in nearly 100 settlements ‘without the legal status of towns’, with interventions impacting over 30 000 disadvantaged people.

5. Measures to design, implement and monitor high-quality services in a coordinated, integrated way

The healthy development and welfare of children in Hungary is ensured by a number of primary care services from various sectors – both interlocking and complementary – providing financial, in-kind and personal assistance, as well as by special child protection care services. The basic aim of services set up to increase children’s opportunities is to enable the generations of Hungarians who will be born and grow up in the coming years to benefit from the social, child-protection, health, psychosocial and mental-health support necessary for healthy development and existential fulfilment. Ensuring their inclusion depends essentially on intervention taking place when they are as young as possible by adopting a comprehensive approach, involving their parents and developing their competences.

In order to achieve this, support for families is provided by specialists working in various areas, in particular the social field – including social inclusion, family policy and child protection – and in health care and public education. In the field of health care, the health visitor service has been in operation independently for some 100 years, monitoring the health of expectant mothers during pregnancy, preventing and identifying illnesses at an early stage and aiding health promotion, and then providing childcare support for children until they enter school. As part of the child protection warning system, the health visitor’s tasks include flagging up any factors posing a risk to children to general practitioners, paediatricians and the family and child welfare service. The family and child welfare service performs

organisational, service-related and care tasks – in conjunction with child welfare and education institutions and services – related to primary child welfare care in the field of child protection. Primary child welfare care aims to promote children’s physical, intellectual, emotional and moral development and their welfare and upbringing in the family, and to prevent their exposure to danger and their being removed from their families. With regard to special child protection care, close cooperation with in- and outpatient health care – primarily in the fields of child psychiatry and addictology – is a priority in the case of children with special and additional needs (children with special needs who have a psychiatric diagnosis). At the same time, healthcare services have a key role to play in the care of children with special care needs living in child protection care (including children with long-term illnesses and children with disabilities). An important factor in caring for children with multiple disabilities is maintaining and improving their state of health.

In addition to the provision of primary care in these policy areas, the Sure Start Children’s Centres and *Tanodas* (special study centres) were set up to provide supplementary services to help socioculturally disadvantaged children and their families to catch up, and they act as an opportunity-enhancing service to aid children’s social inclusion.

Crèches – also a part of primary child welfare care – and kindergartens also play an important role in young children’s education and care. While attendance at these is voluntary and they are in principle subject to payment of a fee (although operators may decide otherwise), families in need are statutorily exempted from payment of the fee, and preference is given to children defined by the legislation as being in need. The legislation in force contains the relevant guarantees for using and operating crèche care, particularly the rules on authorisation and monitoring (quality framework). The revised basic crèche care programme contains the professional fundamentals of inclusive care and education.

Attendance at kindergarten is obligatory and free of charge for all children from the age of 3 years up to starting school. The measure, introduced in September 2015, has a particularly beneficial effect on the development of disadvantaged children, since kindergarten education also facilitates their later successful integration into school and entry into adult life.

In Hungary, 95.8% of 4-5-year-old children receive early childhood education and care, a figure which is slightly above the EU average (95.2%) and which also complies with the reference values of the ‘Education and training 2020’ framework. The target of the EU’s ‘Education and training 2020’ programme is for 95% of children who are between the age of 4 years and the compulsory school age to attend kindergarten. Hungary attained this figure in 2017. In the 2021-2022 school year, 318 422 children attended kindergarten, of whom 17 435 were disadvantaged and 16 995 highly disadvantaged.

A large number of specialists help ensure children’s progression through school and compensate for any deficits: school social assistants, special needs teachers, conductive educators, special needs assistants and psychologists. 2016 saw the establishment of the early warning and educational system, which aims to prevent early school leaving, and educational / specialist support is available through the Educational Teaching Centres for schools particularly at risk from pupils dropping out. Special educational needs are identified by expert committees drawn from specialised educational services by means of a comprehensive special needs / psychological medical examination.

The interlocking catch-up programmes constitute a kind of stepping stone to social change:

				Employment	
				'Better opportunities' programme.. Roma women in social care.	Family Garden programme (domestic funding)
				Roma mentors / mentor network	
				Adult education	
				'Actively for knowledge' – to acquire a primary school leaving certificate	
				Higher education	
				Roma colleges	'Road to a degree' scholarships (domestic funding)
				'Their future in your hands' – designing hands-on courses for students on teacher training programmes	
				Secondary school	
		Tanoda study centres – afternoon study programme	Bari shej – afternoon study programme for Roma girls	Útravaló scholarship programme (domestic funding)	'Together as brothers and sisters' – school-to-school awareness-raising programme
		Gandhi Grammar School – nationality-based teaching and culture			
		Primary school			
		Tanoda study centres – afternoon study programme	'Caring boarding' – catch-up primary school boarding programme	Bari shej – afternoon study programme for Roma girls	
		Kindergarten			
		Opportunity- creating kindergarten programme			
Children aged 0-3 years	'Great little place' programme				
Sure Start Children's Centres					
Districts promoting children's opportunities					
Comprehensive anti-slum programme – housing development					
Catch-up Coordination Centre – support network (TEF)					

The basic aim is the continuous development of these systems, improving access to high-quality public services, service provision which is adapted to individual needs, and providing the necessary support for children being brought up in families. The interlocking catch-up programmes lay the foundations for designing, implementing and monitoring individual transition plans (with support for the transition from school to the world of work) and for integration into lifelong learning. Both objectives aim to ensure effective support for social mobility.

Developments planned for social services:

- a) support for longer and weekend opening of primary social services and family and child welfare services / centres, and to that end, better alignment of service availability times with families' lifestyles;
- b) in order to prevent the placement of children in special child protection care, increasing the focus on parents, supporting the resolution of family dysfunctions in order to manage and reduce family crises, and designing or introducing, and operating, innovative activities, employment, services and programmes;
- c) implementing programmes aimed at developing parental competences and educating parents, and supporting preventative community-based initiatives;
- d) developing primary social service and primary child welfare care infrastructure leading to implementation of the following:
 - the development of support services providing transport for young children with disabilities,
 - the development of infrastructure for family shelters in order to prevent families from becoming homeless, the design of new services, an increase in the number of places and the creation of external places to support independent living;

- e) strengthening primary child welfare service provision, including an on-call contact-maintenance service, and improving the necessary substantive conditions for maintaining contact.

Infrastructure development, capacity-increasing projects and energy modernisation in the area of public education, as well as the acquisition of high-quality, secure instruments, all go to support improving the effectiveness of kindergarten education and the comprehensive personality development of kindergarten children. Hungary's public education strategy aims to create opportunities as early as possible in children's lives by ensuring equal access to high-quality early childhood care and education institutions. A pedagogical / professional inspection (educational supervision) system was introduced in Hungary in September 2013 to evaluate teacher preparation and ensure a high standard of teaching. The aim of education governance is to ensure the provision of uniform professional services of the same standard throughout Hungary. Pedagogical / professional inspection aims to support the professional development of education and care institutions by means of 5-yearly evaluations of teachers, school heads and the schools themselves and of the findings and experiences of the evaluations.

It should also be pointed out that a large number of comprehensive programmes have been launched in recent years which are carried out by means of close cooperation among the various specialist fields, two examples of which are the comprehensive anti-slum programme mentioned above, and the 'Catching-up settlements' programme.

Cultural institutions are also of crucial importance in children's development. Under Act CXL of 1997 on museums, public libraries and public education, every settlement must have a public educational establishment or community centre and must provide a library service (this can be achieved in a number of ways). This means that essential cultural activities are available in settlements where other institutions (e.g. schools) do not exist. Cultural institutions contribute to developing children's knowledge primarily through informal extracurricular study and leisure programmes (e.g. study groups, camps) and play an important role in the nurturing of talent. This is all financed by EU funding (e.g. EFOP-3.3.2 Cultural institutions for successful public education) and domestic funding (e.g. the Lázár Ervin Programme). Cultural institutions ensure access to equal opportunities, as the funding means that most services provided to children are free of charge.

6. Measures in areas not covered by the Council Recommendation but supporting its implementation

6.1. Measures in the field of transport to ensure access to services

The Council Recommendation calls on the Member States to guarantee effective and free access to high-quality early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities and at least one healthy meal each school day to children in need, and recommends that they provide transport to early childhood education and care establishments and to schools where necessary. In the context of the section of the Council Recommendation and its objectives referred to, the measures related to transport which should be applied to children in need as defined in the Recommendation are as follows:

(a) Public transport travel discounts

Hungary supports access to public transport services for children and students with disabilities and in institutional care by providing for special fare discounts. Public transport travel discounts are regulated by Government Decree No 85/2007 of 25 April 2007 on public transport travel discounts. The relevant discounts (for the benefit of children in need and children in precarious family situations as defined in the Council Recommendation) set out in Government Decree No 85/2007 of 25 April 2007 are as follows:

- (a) travel discounts based on disability or chronic illness,
- (b) travel discounts for families receiving the increased amount of family allowance,
- (c) travel discounts granted on the grounds of a legal relationship with a public educational establishment providing public education services, early intervention or development preparation (a child or school pupil with special educational needs),
- (d) travel discounts granted on the grounds of living in a social institution or visiting said institution on a regular or an ad-hoc basis,
- (e) travel discounts for children placed with foster parents,
- (f) travel discounts for large families, and
- (g) travel discounts granted on the grounds of age or student status.

The direct beneficiaries of the above travel discounts are children, among others, but it must be stressed that, under the conditions set out in the legislation, children who are eligible under the various categories and in need according to the wording of the Council Recommendation can, and do, generally receive such reductions together with accompanying persons and that, depending on the legal basis, the reductions also apply to the accompanying person.

Many other public transport travel discounts are available in addition to the above for which the target group as defined in the Council Recommendation is the beneficiary, such as free travel for museum visits on the basis of Government Decision No 1502/2017 of 11 August 2017 on visits to national museums and certain national monuments and memorials, and travel discounts based on transport providers' commercial policy.

Travel discounts granted to children in need as defined in the Council Recommendation under the legislation or commercial policy are, based on the wording of the Council Recommendation, effectively accessible and most of them are effectively accessible free of charge for those concerned.

(b) Measures linked to the war in Ukraine

The Government declared a state of emergency on the basis of Government Decree No 180/2022 of 24 May 2022 on the declaration of a state of emergency and certain emergency rules with regard to the armed conflict and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine with a view to preventing and managing their consequences in Hungary. Transport providers introduced a number of measures to help those in need. In order to accommodate travellers' needs, MÁV-START Zrt. operated six special trains per day between Záhony and Budapest to transport people arriving with the influx of migrants following the outbreak of the war, the number dropping to three per day by the start of April and the special train service coming to an end in mid-April. Instead of the special trains, the company helped people to reach the capital by adding special carriages to trains travelling from Záhony to Budapest. Separate carriages for refugees were available on scheduled trains, in addition to the special trains.

‘Solidarity tickets’ issued free of charge by the railway service providers, i.e. MÁV-START Zrt. and GYSEV Zrt., enable eligible passengers to travel free of charge.

(c) Procedure for drawing up the public transport timetable

According to Section 27(5)(b) of Act XLI of 2012 on passenger transport services, when designing the quantitative and qualitative content of national, regional and suburban public passenger transport services (including basic service provision), consideration must be given to journeys to work and to educational and care institutions.

A key factor in drawing up timetables is enabling travel to the care and educational establishments specified in the Council Recommendation, and at local meetings the institutions and operators concerned may signal a need for possible changes to be made. This can also be done in the course of the year, and every request from citizens for a timetable change is examined and, where justified, an in-year change to the timetable is made. On the basis of the above, it can be seen that the effective access specified in the Council Recommendation is in place and that the legal criterion laid down in the Council Recommendation is a statutory criterion as part of the essential services laid down in Act XLI of 2012.

(d) Road safety education

In addition to travel discounts and timetable planning taking account of the target group described in the Council Recommendation, educating children in road safety is a priority area. In this context, mention should be made of the Road Safety Action Programme (KKBAP 2023-2025), a strategic programme which describes and schedules tasks and applicable means and measures to improve road safety and achieve strategic objectives over a 3-year period. The overall objective of the road safety strategic programme, in line with the government’s efforts, is to determine the tasks to be undertaken under the programme and ensure the mutual consistency of state-delegated tasks carried out by the transport and traffic police authorities in order to improve the safety of road transport systems and mobility services in Hungary.

In the case of measures taken in the area of transport with regard to the Council Recommendation, the objective is to ensure the continuous safeguarding of what is set out above; to provide the travel discounts; and to consider passenger requests when drawing up the timetable each year (including in the course of the year), making changes where necessary.

6.2. Responses to the challenges posed by digitalisation

One of the key issues in the digital transition is making use of the internet in a way which is safe, aware and value-creating, particularly for young people. One of the major challenges of our time is responding in a relevant way to the fast-changing opportunities and risks facing all of us concerning the digital media environment, online communication and publicity.

Hungary’s Digital Child Protection Strategy therefore starts from the premise that an urgent response is needed to determine what approach, priorities and means of minimising the risks in the online environment will enable us fully to unlock the potential – for the moment barely imaginable – concealed in digital culture (in terms of relationships, ways of working and cooperation). We will provide a continuous response to Hungary’s social needs by means of the projects described below.

The OkosÓvoda ('Smart Kindergarten') programme supports the development of digital culture and competence and of media awareness and literacy and serves as a communication channel to disseminate publications on digital child protection and online safety to kindergartens, crèches and parents. Children of kindergarten and crèche age are clearly starting to use smart devices and other digital tools. We know little about the impact of this important new phenomenon on the development of children's personalities, cognitive and other capabilities, but we must be aware of the changes which are taking place. To this end we carried out the 'DigiMini' research project as part of the programme. This enabled us to monitor the use of smart devices by kindergarten and crèche children. Analysis of the results of the research will be of use in the training and upskilling of kindergarten teachers.

The 'Peer NETMENTOR' programme enables us to teach pupils in the 9th and 10th classes to lead awareness-raising activities in media use, data protection, public media and online abuse for their peers and for younger children in host primary schools. During the course, teaching staff of the participating primary and secondary schools take part in a workshop on digital child protection, a one-day preparatory course for teachers actively participating in the programme, and a course for future 'netmentors' lasting several days. The necessary information and teaching materials for all this are provided. Netmentors can lead activities on four different topics for small groups from one or two primary school classes, supported by their teachers, and this can lead to long-term mentoring. The programme impacts not only the participants; it can also have an effect on the attitude of the whole school towards awareness in internet use and, in the course of the mentoring activities, of the primary school pupils involved in the programme, and on tackling problems related to internet use.

The premise on which the Digital Media Literacy for Parents programme is based is that children start using internet tools at an ever-younger age, yet there is no example on which parents can model their handling of media use in an educational context, and they often lack the necessary knowledge and capabilities to do this. The Digital Media Literacy for Parents programme aims to develop the media literacy and media education capabilities of parents and families. Its objective is to make adults playing the most direct roles in children's education aware of their task and develop their media education competences. The course builds on the work of mentors under the Digital Well-Being Programme Points programme who help parents in local communities. Other trainers can also be involved. After the course finishes, mentors organise programmes and presentations for parents (and grandparents) enabling ideas to be exchanged and problems considered, in addition to providing them with the everyday knowledge necessary for media education. Mentors can also help parents through direct conversations. Mentor training takes the form of a 24-hour blended learning course, and mentors also have access to a database containing ancillary materials which is constantly being updated.

An interactive e-learning study package enabling independent learning was developed in 2021 which is accessible to parents and specialists working with children and which aims to popularise the Digital Media Literacy for Parents programme.

The 'Alongside children in the digital world' e-learning teaching material presents the basic concepts of online child protection and digital education, providing support, assistance, readily usable information and tools in an entertaining and interactive way. The course aims to familiarise every interested parent, grandparent and professional working with children with the basics of digital child education, presenting an approach which, once mastered, enables parents and families to develop their own digital education strategies. Clicking on the link brings up an interface where the teaching materials are available following a short

registration procedure. On completion of the course, participants will be able to download a personalised certificate.

Teacher Training Centres also provide a number of accredited upskilling courses in support of teacher preparation for the programme. These include a teacher upskilling course in connection with the ENABLE programme entitled ‘Prevention and management of bullying at school involving adolescents – delivering the ENABLE school anti-bullying programme’, which was accredited in May 2018, and an upskilling course entitled ‘Online against online bullying’, reflecting on the pandemic and digital teaching outside the classroom, which was accredited in 2021.

The following factors should be borne in mind in training courses:

- digital developments must incorporate barrier-free access, including the digital teaching environment (as well as smart coursebooks and other teaching materials), to ensure that children with disabilities can benefit from the advantages inherent in such developments; and
- the digital awareness of professionals working in child protection must be improved to enable them to support children and families in the course of their work.

7. Measures to ensure that services are designed and delivered in an inclusive way to provide equal opportunities, thereby avoiding stigmatisation and segregation

As well as contributing to the sustainable development of society, public services in large social policy systems play a major role in ensuring equal opportunities for children. Since 2015, these systems (social protection, early childhood care, public education, vocational education and training, employment support, health care, public transport, housing support and culture) have been restructured in particular in the fields of health care, education and social protection. In many cases, responsibilities were transferred from local governments to higher, regional or central, State level. This means that their funding became independent of the current situation of local governments and, in a more transparent system, broader options are provided for developments differentiated according to need while ensuring equal opportunities.

In Hungary, the use of crèche facilities is not mandatory; it is largely based on the parents’ needing/wanting to work. In certain cases such facilities may also be provided to children in need. (The network of Sure Start Children’s Centres is a service within the child welfare system specifically designed to promote the social integration and inclusion of deprived children, and as such does not fall within the system of institutional daycare, i.e. early childhood education and care.) The childcare system has undergone significant changes since 2017, in order to improve access:

- As regards the daycare for young children under 3 years of age, municipalities were required to provide demand-driven²² services. Also, in addition to the establishments (crèche, mini crèche), it became possible to provide daycare in private homes (family crèche) or at the workplace (workplace crèche), in response to local needs, making access more flexible.

²² Where there are more than 40 children under the age of 3, or at least the families of 5 children of crèche age indicate that they wish to use the service, it is compulsory to provide crèche facilities in settlements with a population of less than 10 [sic]. The provision of services is compulsory in all cases for settlements with a population of over 10 000.

- As a result of this comprehensive crèche development programme, the daycare system has undergone (and will continue to undergo) a major improvement, also improving accessibility. As the number of places in daycare facilities continues to increase (by more than 80% between 2010 and 2022), the number of children under 3 years of age who do not have access to crèche facilities in their place of residence has been gradually decreasing for years, according to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. In 2021, daycare was not available locally, directly at the place of residence, in 2 320 settlements for around 56 000 children (i.e. 20.1% of the children concerned). This is an improvement of 5.5 percentage points compared to 2017. By 2021, residents in all districts had access to crèche facilities²³. Thanks to the developments, this trend has been continuous. As part of the process of developments aimed at increasing places at crèche facilities, local needs were assessed with the involvement of municipalities and established churches. In the ongoing EU (RRF, TOP Plus etc.) and nationally funded projects, the needs of small villages, including the beneficiary districts/settlements, have been taken into account. These improvements are expected to create a further 10 000 daycare places.
- Access is also made easier by the legislation on fees, taking into account the financial situation of families: where the payment of a fee is required, the following are exempt from paying the fee if the child is in a daycare establishment: children receiving regular child protection benefits (i.e. whose family income per person is below the legal minimum), children in large families, children with a long-term illness or disability, children in temporary care, children in temporary foster care or children’s homes, children in foster care or in protection, or where the person responsible for paying the fee has no income. Otherwise, the amount of the individual fee is calculated as a percentage of the parents’ income. Also, another legal guarantee (a cap on the percentage of per capita income per beneficiary in a specific family) applies to establishing fees. Daycare operators may establish fees at their own discretion; 70% of children enrolled in the establishments received free daycare, according to the 2021 HCSO-OSAP data. This is because in a significant number of daycare establishments (mainly crèches and mini crèches), no fees were introduced. Where they were, exemptions were available for those in need. In 2021, 63% of children enrolled in daycare establishments received free meals at the crèches.
- Providing crèche facilities for children with special educational needs or children entitled to early intervention is based on specific rules that promote their inclusion.

In the field of public education, one of the priorities of the Public Education Strategy 2021-2030²⁴, drawn up by the Government in 2020 for the EU, is to support access to quality education for disadvantaged and highly disadvantaged pupils, including Roma pupils, and to prevent or deter segregation.

Under Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, ensuring the right to free and compulsory primary education as well as free secondary education which is accessible to all children until graduation, in respect of vocational secondary schools and vocational schools, in accordance with the Vocational Training Act, and, in respect of skill-development schools, until the completion of the last year of practical training, is within the public service remit of

²³ <https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/stattukor/kisgyermnapkozbeni/2021/index.html>

²⁴ Government Decision No 1551/2020 of 25 August 2020 on the adoption of the Public Education Strategy 2021-2030 prepared for the European Union:
<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/download/d/2e/d1000/K%C3%B6zvetlen%C3%A9si%20strat%C3%A9gia.pdf>

the State. Participation in school-based education is free for multiply disadvantaged pupils and for those with special educational needs. In the case of children with special educational needs, to ensure inclusive education, it is particularly important to provide the necessary personal and material conditions for their development in the public education system as a whole, to upskill teachers and to raise awareness among pupils and parents.

From September 2015, in order to promote academic success, with a focus on promoting the progress of disadvantaged children, compulsory kindergarten attendance was introduced, from 3 years of age. As a result, kindergarten attendance rates have increased for all age groups. The kindergarten attendance rate for children aged 3 and over in Hungary is 92.8%, compared to the EU average of 93.0%²⁵. Overall, as a result of the measures to expand and renovate kindergarten buildings, the number of kindergarten places increased by more than 16 000 between the 2010/2011 and the 2021/2022 school years²⁶.

Free meals are provided for disadvantaged children to ensure access to quality education and to offset disadvantages stemming from their socio-economic background: 75.3% of children in kindergartens received free meals in the 2021/2022 school year. Free or reduced-price meals are also provided at schools, with 33.4% of primary and secondary school pupils benefiting²⁷. Also, from 2020, coursebooks are free for all pupils in primary or secondary education. This measure concerns more than 1 million pupils.

Early school-leaving rates are above average among disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, perpetuating the risk of social exclusion. An early warning and pedagogical support system to prevent early school leaving ('ESL') has been in place since 2016 to support the academic progress of pupils most at risk of dropping out, including socio-economically disadvantaged children. The system identifies pupils at risk of dropping out and offers them tailored support. It also provides tailored support to schools with high ESL rates and low performance. The reasons for low or deteriorating academic performance (i.e. the reasons behind the increased risk of dropping out) should also be indicated in the support system. These may include low academic performance, failing a class, grade repetition, absenteeism, reasons related to their socio-economic situation, etc. Reporting schools must also record the measures taken to ensure the pupils' academic progress. The Pedagogical Training Centres of the Educational Authority evaluate the data of public education establishments and educational units, then recommend pedagogical support measures to the schools concerned, which can help them to reduce the number of pupils at risk of dropping out and to improve academic success of the pupils.

In order to prevent ESL, comprehensive and differentiated institutional improvements were made in 2019-2020, with a focus on improving equitable teaching arrangements ensuring access to quality education. Particular attention was given to schools which, based on the results of the national competency assessment, have been identified in recent years as requiring sustained development; they received specialised pedagogical support.

In addition to the early warning system, the ESL prevention framework includes pedagogical systems that include interventions at both pupil, school and class level to prevent early school leaving. These pedagogical improvements are aimed at the overall improvement of the school,

²⁵ Eurostat, 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/educ_uae_enra21/default/table?lang=en

²⁶ https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/okt/hu/okt0007.html

²⁷ Public education statistical survey, KIR-STAT 2021.

including the modernisation of classroom practices, the organisation and management of teaching, the personal development of pupils, the implementation of tailored treatment, the improvement and maintenance of motivation, the upskilling of teachers, the improvement of the learning environment, etc.²⁸ While these interventions primarily target pupils and teachers, their effectiveness can be further improved by increasing the focus on parents and families.

As part of the Educational Authority's flagship project 'Supporting schools with pupils at a higher risk of drop-out' (January 2017 - July 2021)²⁹ (the 'project'), the educational districts' equal opportunities action plans ('action plans') based on data and situational analysis were developed in accordance with Section 21 of Government Decree No 229/2012 of 28 August 2012 on the implementation of the National Public Education Act. The project also provided methodological and mentoring support for the further improvement of desegregation action plans required by court rulings concerning school segregation and the violation of equal treatment principles for educational district centres and school management. The project covered 300 educational units, 154 of which were included in the programme partly due to the 'segregation index' applied/developed as part of the project, and partly because the courts established that segregation of children was illegal. 102 units were schools at high risk of ESL, and 44 were partner establishments supporting the comprehensive institutional development process. In addition to calculating the segregation index, a detailed analysis was carried out at the level of educational units. This in-depth analysis looked at the proportion of multiply disadvantaged pupils in each school compared to the municipal average, at the overall proportion of multiply disadvantaged pupils in the settlement, and at the proportion of disadvantaged pupils in each school, compared also to the municipal average. In the maintenance period of the project, the aim is to keep and improve the results achieved so far.

In order to mitigate the risks of segregation, educational district centres review and, if necessary, revise the catchment area boundaries each year³⁰. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of changes to catchment area boundaries, owing to the anti-segregation task forces as well as to the situation analysis and planning carried out as part of project EFOP-3.1.5.-16-2016-00001 (see above).

Anti-segregation task forces ('task forces') operate in all educational district centres responsible for operating state-run schools (under Section 2/C of Government Decree No 134/2016 of 10 June 2016 on entities involved in performing public functions in State public education as school operators, and on the Klebelsberg Centre. The task forces' permanent, regular tasks include: continuous and regular data collection and updating in order to prevent or deter segregation, taking account of professional considerations (the proportion of disadvantaged and multiply disadvantaged pupils and their distribution within and across schools; monitoring the proportion of pupils with integration, learning and behavioural difficulties and those with special educational needs, trends in the proportion of pupils at risk of dropping out and in ESL indicators, etc.), and making recommendations to the school operator on the basis of these data.

²⁸ *Az iskolai lemorzsolódás megelőzését támogató pedagógiai rendszer* [Pedagogical system supporting the prevention of ESL]; Educational Authority – <https://hirmagazin.sulinet.hu/hu/s/ilmt>

²⁹ Project Id: EFOP-3.1.5.-16-2016-00001.

³⁰ Legal framework: Section 50 of Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education; Section 24 of Decree No 20/2012 of 31 August 2012 of the Minister for Human Resources on the operation of educational establishments and the use of names by public educational establishments

In the field of special child protection care, an anti-segregation achievement is that large establishments operating until the 1990s, typically on the outskirts of settlements and in buildings established for large-scale institutionalised care, were gradually replaced by smaller, more familial home-care facilities with 8-12 places, integrated into the settlement. Then, from 2014, the legal requirement has been that providing foster parent care should take priority. This major shift in approach and structure was particularly important for the social integration and preparation for an independent life of children growing up in protective care who were deprived of their birth families.

8. Use of EU funds in relation to issues covered by the Council Recommendation

8.1. Regulation on the European Social Fund Plus

Invoking the Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee, in order to address the persistently high level of child poverty in the Union, and in line with principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Regulation on the European Social Fund Plus³¹ ('ESF+ Regulation') requires Member States programme an appropriate amount of their resources of the ESF+ strand for activities addressing child poverty.

Member States that had an average rate above the Union average of children of less than 18 years old at risk of poverty or social exclusion for the period between 2017 and 2019, on the basis of Eurostat data, must allocate at least **5%** of their resources of the ESF+ strand under shared management to support targeted actions and structural reforms to tackle child poverty.

For Hungary, these figures³² were as follows:

	2017	2018	2019
Hungary	33.5%	26.4%	24.1%
EU27	25.1%	23.9%	22.8%

Under paragraph 3 of Article 7 ('*Consistency and thematic concentration*'), Member States allocate an appropriate amount of their resources of the ESF+ strand under shared management targeted actions and structural reforms to tackle child poverty under the specific objectives and structural reforms set out in the Child Guarantee National Action Plan. In doing so, the following specific objectives of Article 4(1) must be taken into account:

- promoting equal access to and completion of quality and inclusive education;
- fostering active inclusion; and
- promoting social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including the most deprived persons and children, through specific objectives to address child poverty.

8.2. Meeting the thematic concentration requirement in the use of EU funds³³

In line with the above requirements of the ESF+ Regulation, Hungary intends to contribute to the attainment of the objectives of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan with the

³¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

³² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_PEPS01N__custom_3648303/default/table?lang=en

³³ Based on information from October 2022, the final version of the EFOP Plus requires a review of the table before the completion of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan.

prospective projects in the table below. The target group of these prospective projects do not always fully coincide with those defined in the Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee, but these interventions contribute to tackling child poverty in terms of their impact and their objectives.

Priority title	Sector responsible	ESF SO	Intervention	Relevant OP
Social inclusion projects	Social inclusion ESF+ 1)		Districts for children's opportunities	EFOP+ ESF+ 1)
			Opening new locations for Sure Start Children's Centres	EFOP+
		ESF+ 1)	Common Grounds – public service centres for inclusion	EFOP+
		ESF+ 1)	Opening new locations for <i>Tanoda</i> study centres	EFOP+
		ESF+ 1)	Boarding School Plus programme	EFOP+
		ESF+ 1)	ESL prevention for Roma girls	EFOP+
		ESF+ 1)	Kindergarten of opportunities	EFOP+
	ESF+ j)	Comprehensive anti-slum programme	EFOP+	
Catching-up settlements (Social innovation axis)	Social inclusion	ESF+ 1)	Catching-up settlements	EFOP+
Social developments	Social sector	ESF+ k)	Developing the foster-care preparation for the reunification	EFOP+
			Preserving mental and physical health in child protection	EFOP+
			Building a better future (safe childhood; becoming a successful adult)	EFOP+
			Developing services for children with special and additional needs ³⁴	EFOP+
			'I'll take you in': increasing the operating efficiency of fostering providers networks	EFOP+
			'Being a good enough parent' – Strengthening parenting skills, supporting parents	EFOP+
			Further development of services offered to persons with disabilities	EFOP+

³⁴ In case No AJB-416/2021, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights called on the Minister for Human Resources to report on the measures taken or planned with a view to establishing a children's home or establishment for children with special and additional needs. The planned measure also reflects the recommendations of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights.

			Supporting independent living (Developing a social- and child welfare system tailored to the requirements of independent living — of the measures affecting persons with disabilities, with psychiatric diagnosis, with dementia, as well as families and children, the measures concerning children.)	EFOP+
			Developing local healthcare and social infrastructure – modernising and expanding family shelters and children’s shelters, creating new services	TOP+
Higher education and vocational education training (VET)	VET	ESF+ f)	Operating the <i>Apáczai</i> grant scheme supporting talented children	GINOP Plus
			Operating programmes to compensate for disadvantages and to support flexible learning paths (a school year dedicated to competency development with guidance, ‘ <i>Műhelyiskola</i> ’ workshop-based schooling, ‘ <i>Dobbantó</i> ’ [‘Springboard’] programme, remedial work in small groups, mentoring)	GINOP Plus
21st Century Public Education	Public education	ESF+ f)	Improving pupils' academic success through creating opportunities and developing key competences	EFOP+
21st Century Public Education	Public education	ESF+ f)	Implementing comprehensive thematic programmes	EFOP+
Teacher career path	Public education	ESF+ l)	Career path for teachers working with severely disadvantaged pupils	EFOP+

8.3. Hungary’s Recovery and Resilience Plan

In addition, Hungary’s Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) can contribute to the attainment of a number of objectives set out in the Council Recommendation and in the European Pillar of Social Rights. EFOP+ and the RRP also include complementary interventions (mainly in the field of public education and social inclusion) which are in synergy with each other and provide further significant resources to attain the objectives of the Child Guarantee National Action Plans. The European Recovery Fund gives Member States the opportunity to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and get their economies back into a growth cycle. This EU instrument is mainly aimed at accelerating public investment and reforms. In line with this, Hungary has prepared and submitted its Recovery and Resilience Plan, which responds to the economic and social impacts of the pandemic, while also promoting the green and digital transition.

IV. ACTIONS ALREADY TAKEN AND ACTIONS PLANNED FOR THE WAY FORWARD

1. Policy programmes previously adopted by the Government to implement the Child Guarantee National Action Plan

Ensuring the well-being of families – including children – is one of the Government’s top political priorities. To this end, several laws, government measures, strategies, action plans, programmes and projects have been adopted and implemented since 2010, all contributing to this goal. The national commitment to the EU target on combating poverty and social exclusion has been developed in line with those initiatives.

As a result of these government efforts, Hungary already largely complies with the Council Recommendation. The following are the detailed programmes and measures adopted by the Government, the implementation of which also ensures the implementation of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan.

1.1. Measures promoting the implementation of the Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities, and a healthy meal each school day

‘With a view to guaranteeing effective and free access to high quality early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities and a healthy meal each school day for children in need, Member States are recommended to:

(a) identify and address financial and non-financial barriers to participation in early childhood education and care, education, and school-based activities;’

- 1) Financial barriers have been identified and addressed: Crèche fees are payable on a *pro rata* basis (based on the income declaration in Annex V to the relevant Government Decree), while public education establishments (kindergarten, primary and secondary school) are free of charge.
- 2) Crèche: the rules on eligibility for crèche daycare for children of working parents allow for a means-tested approach. The fee is waived for families in need (i.e. for children receiving regular child protection benefits, children in large families, children with a long-term illness or disability, children in temporary care, children in temporary foster care or children’s homes, children in foster care or in protection, or where the person responsible for paying the fee has no income). In other cases, the fee is calculated on a *pro rata* basis. Since 2017, the current Central Budget Act includes as an incentive the option of differentiated funding for service-based crèche establishments (family crèches, workplace crèches) providing care for disadvantaged/multiply disadvantaged children (whose care is already ensured in regular crèche establishments, with a number of benefits). It should also be noted that the provision of crèche care should be a municipal responsibility tailored to actual needs. Priority is given to deprived children (i.e. children in protective care, or children of working parents who receive regular child protection benefits, who live in large families or who are raised by a single parent). In addition, with the consent of the parent, individual members of the child protection reporting system may also request the admission of the child to the crèche. In the case of children in a vulnerable situation, the child may exceptionally be admitted to a crèche or mini-crèche any time during the school year. In this case, the maximum number of

children in the group may be exceeded by one until the end of the school year. Early childhood intervention and prevention are two key points of the national core programme for early childhood education and care.

- 3) Projects under GINOP-5.3.11-18 – ‘Supporting the return to the labour market of parents with young children’ and ‘Supporting the return to the labour market of parents with young children in the Central Hungary region’ facilitate the return to the labour market of parents with young children by providing a State contribution to the daycare fees paid to family crèches/workplace crèches, private crèches/mini-crèches, or daycare centres. By mid-March 2023, around 9 375 parents had benefited from the projects. The application period ends on 31 March 2023.
- 4) Improving crèche facilities: the continuous increase in the number of places (more than 80% between 2010 and November 2022, i.e. currently nearly 59 500 places, and facilities available at three times as many settlements (around 1 000)) contribute to reducing territorial disparities across the country. Several grants have helped to increase the number of places and to improve facilities, and the changes are still ongoing. These grants include TOP, VEKOP, TOP Plus, RRF and national budgetary sources (national crèche development programme, local crèche and family crèche development programme for non-state crèche operators, and the Hungarian Village Programme). Developing flexible forms of care, increasing the wages of professional staff.
- 5) As part of the free services of Sure Start Children’s Centres and Great Little Place projects, professionals engage with families with children aged 0-3, until the compulsory kindergarten age. The service is used by disadvantaged, mainly Roma, families. In the children’s centres, children have the opportunity to reach the most important stages of their development at the right pace and not to fall behind their peers. Children’s centres focus as much on the parent as on the child because the involvement of the family is indispensable in achieving the goal. The partnership that evolves with the parents provides an opportunity to expand and shape educational competences and to positively influence the individual well-being and vision of the adult. In Hungary, the development of Sure Start Children’s Centres started in 2003 with local pilot projects, and accelerated after 2013 with government support. These children’s centres were established in the most underprivileged sub-regions and districts. In 2022, there are nearly 200 Sure Start Children’s Centres, visited regularly by more than 2 500 children and their parents every year. These children’s centres fill a large gap and will remain a substantial pillar in the child protection system.
- 6) The ‘Great Little Place’ project entails comprehensive programmes operating in settlements lacking services with a population of less than 1 000, targeting the 0-25 age group with a wider range of services which have been locally unavailable so far. The project has been implemented in 38 settlements.
- 7) Kindergarten and mandatory education in the primary and secondary cycles: legal safeguards are in place to ensure the right to free and accessible education for all until graduation. In establishments maintained by the State or local governments, as well as in establishments maintained by the State and other establishments participating in the performance of state tasks, the use of pedagogical specialist services supplementing kindergarten education and school education, as well as

boarding school accommodation is free of charge for children and pupils participating in free education who meet certain conditions. Participation in primary arts education is free for disadvantaged pupils in all cases. Cultural institutions support the objectives of educational establishments through non-formal and informal extra-curricular activities. –Participation in these EU- and nationally funded programmes is free of charge.

- 8) Developing community centres for inclusion: a pilot programme to develop previously established community centres for inclusion, to ensure a consistent professional approach and services. Objective: to develop the methodology for operating 40-50 community centres with an expected reach of 1 000.
- 9) Programmes to create opportunities: scholarship schemes ('Útravaló' scholarship programme, János Arany talent programme, János Arany boarding school - and János Arany boarding school and vocational school programme, Bursa Hungarica); free driving licence for youth under 20; free language examination for those under 35, and free language courses abroad (2×2 weeks) for pupils in years 9 and 11. Preparations for the latter were completed in 2021, including discussions with establishments abroad, the clarification of travel arrangements and the online publication of the call for applications. Also in 2021, the application interface was further improved, and representatives of interested establishments could attend a webinar on 30 November 2021. The project is expected to be implemented in 2023. 'Útravaló' scholarship scheme: the aim of the scholarship scheme is to provide personal mentoring and scholarships to disadvantaged and multiply-disadvantaged Roma pupils, to prevent ESL and to increase their chances to continue their education. Eligibility for the scholarship scheme is determined primarily by the pupil's socio-economic circumstances and eligibility, while the amount of the scholarship depends on the pupil's academic record and performance at the end of the previous school year. In previous school years, 10-11 000 pupils received such support on average. The János Arany Programme offers comprehensive (pedagogical, social, health and cultural) support to disadvantaged, multiply-disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils in order to prevent ESL, to facilitate their graduation and continuing studies in higher education, and to ensure their successful integration into the labour market. The aim of the Roma National Minority Scholarship Programme is to support Roma pupils with excellent academic results and motivate them to continue their studies in higher education after leaving school and to play an active role in the community life of the national minority.

'(b) take measures to prevent and reduce early school leaving, taking into account a gender perspective, to re-engage children who are at risk of dropping out or have dropped out of education or training, including by providing personalised guidance and strengthening cooperation with families;'

- 10) Early warning and pedagogical support system: based on the data and information gathered through the system for preventing ESL introduced in 2016, schools are paying more attention than before to supporting pupils at risk of dropping out, and schools themselves are looking for ways and means of providing support to be more effective in this area. Schools with pupils at a particularly high risk of dropping out have received targeted pedagogical support through the Pedagogical Training Centres.

- 11) Developing low-performing schools: the Educational Authority, in cooperation with Pedagogical Training Centres, pays particular attention to schools which, according to the results of the national competency assessment, have been persistently underperforming in recent years and have not been able to improve academic performance, therefore school operators were required to prepare an action plan. Pedagogical Training Centres offer pedagogical cooperation to the operators of the schools (educational units) concerned, as a way of offering methodological support to low-performing schools. Pedagogical Training Centres have set up teams of expert advisers to provide targeted support to these schools. A school's performance, including the difficulty and quality of the work carried out by the teachers, is best described by the social background and the extent of any prior knowledge of the pupils who took the national competency assessment.
- The educational unit-level results of the national competency assessment, published by the Educational Authority each year following the annual assessment, also report on these indicators using data describing the added pedagogical value.
- 12) 'Supporting schools with pupils at a higher risk of dropout': under this flagship project, 300 primary and secondary units and 157 kindergarten units benefited from comprehensive, differentiated and process-oriented institutional development. Participating educational units received support under the methodological framework of the Pedagogical System for the Prevention of Early School Leaving. The educational system is based on, for example, the inclusion index and the PFI. The ESL prevention framework includes pedagogical systems that include interventions at both pupil, school and class level to prevent early school leaving. These pedagogical improvements are aimed at the overall improvement of the school, including the modernisation of classroom practices, the organisation and management of teaching, the personal development of pupils, the implementation of tailored treatment, the improvement and maintenance of motivation, the upskilling of teachers, the improvement of the learning environment, etc.³⁵ The programme continues in the next funding cycle, involving schools that have already received support, and other schools, as needed.
- 13) 'Methodological training of teachers to prevent ESL': The consortium involved in the project undertook to develop and distribute across the country a teaching methodology that addresses ESL in a comprehensive and preventive way, involving diverse groups of pupils. The project indirectly aims to support pupils at risk of dropping out, who are more prone to educational failure. To attain its objectives, the project focuses on the development of teacher training and upskilling materials that can be used to strengthen and disseminate differentiated practices tailored to individual needs, thereby fostering openness.
- 14) Pedagogical Framework for Inclusion (PFI): primary and secondary schools organise courses to nurture talent or foster inclusion in order to compensate for the disadvantages arising from pupils' socio-economic situation and maturity. These sessions serve to develop the pupils' individual skills and strengths, to promote their development and to increase their chances at academic success and continuing their

³⁵ *Az iskolai lemorzsolódás megelőzését támogató pedagógiai rendszer* [Pedagogical system for the prevention of ESL]; Educational Authority – <https://hirmagazin.sulinet.hu/hu/s/ilmt>

education. The relevant Ministerial Decree sets out the responsibilities of both the school and the teachers.

- 15) Kindergarten and school social workers: kindergarten and school social workers, employed since 1 September 2018, through their helpful, preventive and comprehensive approach, focus on competency development and the resolution of conflicts that may arise between children, their parent(s) and teacher(s), facilitate children's social integration, participate in children's health promotion, and prevent early school leaving through improving the children's academic performance. In a group setting, they carry out prevention activities and help children, parents and schools alike. They also carry out community work, or engage in the events and projects organised by the school, such as health day, environmental events or developing financial literacy. In the course of individual case management in kindergartens and schools, they help children deal with problems at school, listen to their grievances and address these problems in cooperation with other professionals, as necessary.
- 16) Mandatory kindergarten attendance: From 2015, kindergarten attendance has been mandatory for children over the age of 3 to promote academic success (previously, the mandatory age was 5). Since then, kindergarten attendance has increased in all age groups, with 95.7% of children aged 4-6 attending kindergarten.
- 17) ESL prevention programme for Roma girls: designed to improve the knowledge of disadvantaged Roma girls aged 8-18. The programme aims to encourage Roma girls to continue their education after completing the first eight grades of school. It also aims to increase the motivation of girls at risk of dropping out to study, and to reinforce encouraging attitudes towards learning in their families. The programme has been operating in Hungary since the autumn of 2015, as a nationally-funded PILOT programme, and the project ran for 2 years from 2017 with HUF 2.66 billion in EU funding (EFOP). The programme was implemented by 89 (church and civil society) organisations. As a result, 1 780 young disadvantaged girls received support.
- 18) The aim of the project entitled 'Districts for children's opportunities' is to strengthen coordinated action against poverty among families with children, to reinforce measures at district level covering the entire child life-cycle and to provide district-level services which have been missing or scarce. The programme provides support to professionals working with children with an inclusive approach and aims to develop a network of experts within and across professions at district level. Districts new to the programme receive support for infrastructural developments, including the infrastructural development of kindergartens and other public education establishments.
- 19) 'Their Future in Your Hands' programme: developing hands-on training for university students on teacher training programmes; hands-on training of future teachers working with disadvantaged children, to improve the supply of professionals in underprivileged schools. The programme also aims to strengthen and expand the network of partner institutions in the field of public education methodology, cooperating with higher education teacher training establishments in order to enable students on teacher training programmes to gain appropriate experience for working with disadvantaged children. The objective: to engage 70 schools, 1 500 teachers and

7 000 students and pupils, and for these institutions to provide a place for students to practise.

- 20) New system of reducing ESL in vocational education and training: a multi-component programme was launched in the field of VET with risk-management capability. The new system will also provide opportunities to pupils who are falling behind to catch up in an inclusive learning environment that is tailored to their needs, learner-centred, and inclusive, enabling them to progress at their own pace. VET reforms introduced in 2020 creating attractive career opportunities greatly contribute to the reduction of the risk of ESL. The new VET structure offers a variety of career paths for different circumstances and ambitions: before choosing a career path, pupils acquire industry knowledge, making career choices more informed and thus reducing ESL resulting from poor choices. From the 2020/2021 school year, pupils choose a profession after two years of technical education in technicums, and after one year in vocational schools. The compulsory schooling requirement laid down in the VET Act also plays a major role in prevention. That provision sets out a new obligation for minor pupils' legal representatives to enable them to continue their education, even after the completion of compulsory schooling, until the age of 18, but at least until they acquire a specific vocational skill. A successive system of scholarships and income from the pupil's apprenticeship contract has been developed and introduced. All apprentices receive a performance-based scholarship, or a wage for work done under the apprenticeship contract, up to the minimum wage. A one-off career start allowance has been introduced for pupils who pass their vocational exams. The Apáczai Scholarship Programme (GINOP-6.2.9-VEKOP-20) serves as an incentive to keep talented disadvantaged pupils in school: they receive financial support based on their socio-economic circumstances and academic performance. In addition to that, a mentor helps pupils to improve their performance. In the 2021/2022 school year, nearly 3 500 full-time vocational pupils received support under the programme. Competency assessment at the beginning of the school year for Year 9 pupils, and the tailored development that builds on it, is integrated into the curriculum. There is also a newly available option to develop competencies for a year in vocational schools, targeting young people who are uncertain about their career choice, or those who leave primary school with a competency gap. Every school year, 250-300 pupils opt for this career guidance year.
- 21) 'Second chance' programmes: the '*Dobbantó*' programme is designed to assist pupils with behavioural and learning difficulties who are lagging behind academically with catching up. Under the '*Dobbantó*' programme, basic skills are developed in a flexible timeframe, as required for tailored development, in order to show young people aged 16–25 with behavioural and learning difficulties, who are behind in their schooling or have 'drifted away' from the school system, a way to get back to work or school, and to help them lead a fulfilling life. On average, around 500 pupils participate in this programme each year. Following the completion of the '*Dobbantó*' year, they can continue their studies in a '*Műhelyiskola*'. '*Műhelyiskola*' is a programme replacing the Vocational Bridging Programme. It is a form of training designed to equip pupils with the skills they need to enter vocational education and training or the job market. In workshop schools, young people who would leave school early or those who have completed the '*Dobbantó*' programme but cannot study in a traditional school environment can acquire a specific vocational skill. In the last school year, over 500 pupils participated in the workshop-based

education. Experience so far shows that the drop-out rate is significantly lower than in previous programmes with the same objective (around 20%). The Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta and the Salesians (as school operators) were also involved in developing the curriculum for ‘*Műhelyiskola*’ schools.

- 22) Ensuring access: in line with the VET Act, participation in vocational education and training offering student status is free of charge for persons with multiple disadvantages and persons with special educational needs or disabilities in vocational education and training institutions maintained by the state or by an operator with a cooperation agreement. In the VET system, persons with special educational needs or disabilities must be offered preparation and examinations adapted to the nature of their specific educational needs or disabilities.
- 23) Other measures: upskilling teachers, with a focus on the methodology for working with disadvantaged pupils. Providing individual support, involving mental health professionals, and organising recreational activities in VET institutions to facilitate integration. A survey was carried out on the need to compensate digital disadvantages in VET.

‘(c) provide learning support to children with learning difficulties to compensate for their linguistic, cognitive and educational gaps;’

- 24) *Tanoda* study centre programme: Provides after-school educational support for pupils in financial need and poor socio-economic circumstances. Pupils who would need help from their parents at home to complete their schoolwork, but face obstacles because of their parents’ low educational attainment and financial means, receive help to meet academic expectations through the *tanoda* programme. The programme is open to primary and lower and upper secondary pupils. Since 2019, the Government has provided domestic funding for nearly 181 *Tanoda* centres. In Hungary, *Tanoda* study centres operate as part of the social assistance system, with HUF 2.5 billion per year allocated in the national budget to support the education of nearly 6 000 children in 181 study centres each year.
- 25) For children who are not diagnosed as having special educational needs: children and pupils with integration, learning and behavioural difficulties are guaranteed individual support by the legislation in force. Based on the opinion of the expert committee, the following types of accommodation can be made: longer preparation time, longer time to complete the task, use of teaching aids, preference for or exemption from written or oral examinations. In addition, these pupils are required to receive development assistance in the areas identified by the panel. In the context of the developmental education they receive, pupils are taught by a teacher qualified for teaching the specific subject or educational stage, while their skills are developed by a special education teacher.
- 26) For children who are diagnosed as having special educational needs: if the child’s or pupil’s problems are so severe that they fall into the category of special educational needs, the development is carried out by a special needs teacher or conductive educator (depending on the type and the severity of the special educational need). Special education teachers or conductive educators may be employed by the schools, or they may be members of the network of peripatetic special needs teachers and conductive educators. In addition to mandatory development, children can also

benefit from the following accommodations: the local curriculum or educational programme may specify a longer period than one school year to meet the requirements of each grade. On the basis of the opinion of the expert panel, the school principal may authorise an individual study and care plan, tailored to the pupil's individual ability and skills. On the basis of the expert panel's opinion, the pupil with special educational needs should be granted the accommodations indicated in that opinion. These may include longer preparation time, more time to complete tasks, use of teaching aids, preference for or exemption from written or oral examinations, or even total exemption from the specific subject(s). In the next funding period, as part of the measures planned to strengthen the opportunity-creating role of public education, a priority objective is to expand and improve the travel services of pedagogical specialist services and the equipment of institutions involved in the education of children and pupils with special educational needs and those providing education for children and pupils undergoing long-term medical treatment.

- 27) *'Tanítsunk Magyarorszáért'* ['Let's teach for Hungary'] ['TMO'] programme: the programme was launched on 5 December 2018 by the Ministry of Innovation and Technology, the Ministry of Human Resources, the Klebelsberg Centre and the National Conference of Students' Unions ['HÖÖK'], and implemented by the IFKA Public Benefit Nonprofit Ltd. It aims to reduce the ESL-rate of disadvantaged young people, to facilitate their transition to secondary education, and to support their labour market integration through a mentoring programme tailored to the needs of the target group. It focuses on four main pillars: university mentoring programme, upper secondary mentoring programme, HÖÖK mentoring programme and workplace mentoring programme. Currently, there are 17 universities, 1 028 mentors (students), 4 040 mentees (pupils) and 107 primary schools participating in the TMO programme. The TMO programme is based on the recognition that pupils drop out of secondary school because they are overwhelmed by the challenges of being away from home, of travelling and of a new community. This is why the programme involves university students (mentors) working alongside the pupils, who undertake to spend one day (at least six hours) a week with three to five mentees, helping them with their studies and broadening their horizons by showing them local secondary schools, universities, work opportunities and leisure facilities outside their local environment. Organisers of the programme believe that learning through experience can become a core memory, helping young people through the difficulties of changing schools, so that they can eventually finish vocational training, secondary school, or university, and successfully enter the labour market.
- 28) Piarist Outlook Career Guidance and Labour Market Development Methodological Centre: the centre, established in Vác in 2019, provides career guidance, research, development and service improvement services, to create, develop and provide tailored assistance and services to pupils with special educational needs and normally developed pupils and young adults with special educational needs who are stuck in their career planning, in an integrated system from the end of primary school to adult employment, depending on the nature and extent of the special educational need in question. The centre is also responsible for creating professional content, methodology, programmes and research that enable pupils with special educational needs and those with normal development to plan their careers together in an inclusive way. The Piarist Outlook Centre provides help and support for pupils aged

12-18 with special educational needs, and for young people aged 12-18 who require special personal attention in their career planning. Its target group includes young people aged 16-30 who are out of school and are unemployed.

‘(d) adapt facilities and educational materials of early childhood education and care and of educational establishments and provide the most appropriate response to the specific requirements of children with special education needs and of children with disabilities, using inclusive teaching and learning methods; for this purpose ensure that qualified teachers and other professionals are available, such as psychologists, speech therapists, rehabilitators, social workers or teaching assistants;

- 29) Crèche: The national core programme for early childhood education and care aims to provide preventive activities for all young children and their families, in line with a broad understanding of early childhood intervention. Crèche facilities serve integration purposes as well, so crèche care can be provided for children with special educational needs and children eligible for early intervention until 31 August of the year in which the child turns 6. Children with special educational needs and those entitled to early intervention may be educated and cared for in a crèche in an integrated or special group. In order to ensure adequate and targeted care, special rules apply to the calculation of places and group sizes, and special multipliers are applied. The existence of special educational needs and the eligibility for early intervention is determined by the expert panel of the pedagogical specialist services, on the basis of which the child will be entitled to early intervention, and to certain social and child protection benefits. In the case of children with special educational needs, crèches are obliged to cooperate with the competent local pedagogical specialist services providing early intervention. The number of children with special educational needs in crèche facilities is on the rise. According to 2021 HCSO-OSAP data, 1.8% of children enrolled in crèche facilities have special educational needs. The ambitious increase in the number of places in crèche facilities is contributing to a significant improvement in access to daycare for children with special educational needs and those entitled to early intervention. According to the KIR-STAT survey, the total number of children who received special education counselling and early intervention was 5 887 in 2019. Of these, the number of children aged 0-3 was 5 084, including 560 who were less than one year old.
- 30) Specialists in crèche facilities: as appropriate compensation for the increased attention required by children with special educational needs and those entitled to early intervention, the salaries of crèche staff have also been increased. From 1 January 2020, the amount of special needs educators’ allowance varies for early childhood teachers and special needs teachers, depending on the number of children in the above categories in their care. Conductive educators play a key role in supporting children’s development, which is why from 1 July 2021, the rules of the teacher promotion system also apply to conductive educators working in early childhood education. In crèche facilities with children with special educational needs or those entitled to early intervention, special needs teachers, physiotherapists, conductive educators and special needs teaching assistants may be employed, their number being determined by the competent school operator. The ambitious increase in the number of places in crèche facilities contributes to a significant improvement in access to daycare for children with special educational needs and those entitled to early intervention.

- 31) Public education institutions (kindergartens, schools): special educational needs are diagnosed by the expert panels of pedagogical specialist services during their comprehensive pedagogical-special needs education, psychological and medical examination. In addition to a number of other issues (such as areas to be developed, specialists required), the expert panel also issues an opinion on whether the child or pupil should receive inclusive education or special education. Inclusive education emerged in the Hungarian public education system in the early 2000s. Since then, it has increased significantly and rapidly become widespread. Today, 72% of children and pupils with special educational needs receive inclusive education (including VET institutions), and 80% of public education establishments accommodate children and pupils with special educational needs (of which only 4% separate special needs pupils, and 3% provide semi-inclusive education). Networks of peripatetic special needs teachers and conductive educators play a major role in inclusive education. Projects initiated to further develop the system: The project entitled 'Strengthening the role of public education in creating opportunities' targets the following three groups: Establishments working with children with serious and multiple disabilities, pedagogical specialist services and network of peripatetic special needs teachers and conductive educators. This project aims to improve the infrastructure of pedagogical specialist services and establishments involved in the development and care of children.
- 32) Coursebooks and teaching materials: many coursebooks designed for pupils without special educational needs are already available online in digital format, accessible to all from an IT point of view. The legislation guarantees that all coursebooks should be made accessible to blind and visually impaired people on demand in accessible print or digital formats. Special coursebooks are also available to help educate pupils with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities. All smart coursebooks are accessible on the National Public Education Portal. Coursebooks that have not been converted into smart coursebooks can be downloaded as pdf files from tankonyvkatalogus.hu. Screen readers can handle pdf files. The KELLO coursebook centre makes braille coursebooks for the blind and visually impaired. For pupils with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities, special coursebooks are produced, some of which are available as smart coursebooks.
- 33) Additional requirements for establishments (specialist, special curriculum and teaching aids) for the education of children with special educational needs include: employing special needs teachers or conductive educators for the individual-based education, integrated kindergarten education, school education and activities determined by the expert panel, developing a special curriculum and coursebooks, special therapeutic and technical appliances and an accessible school environment, as required for the nature and extent of the special educational need in question. In the future, however, the intensive and comprehensive upskilling of teachers to work with children with special educational needs, and their regular attendance at support talks, could be considered.
- 34) Special needs teachers and other support staff: special needs teachers are trained in all areas of special educational needs (i.e. eight streams). In 2012, 'pedagogy for children with autism spectrum disorder ('ASD')' was launched in Hungary as an independent stream in the special needs teacher training programme. Thanks to government measures, the number of students admitted to the special needs teacher

training programme almost doubled between 2015 and 2021. From 1 January 2020, the amount of the special education allowance increased significantly and its scope was extended to include early childhood educators who also work with children with special educational needs. In addition to employing a special needs teacher or conductive educator, the legislation also provides for the employment of special support staff (special needs educational assistants): one child and youth protection officer or special needs educational assistant for every 15 pupils in schools working only with children or pupils with special educational needs, and one child and youth protection officer or special needs educational assistant for every 6 pupils in schools and boarding schools working with deaf or blind children, children with moderate intellectual disabilities, locomotor disabilities, ASD and multiple disabilities, or severely and multiply disabled pupils. In addition, in certain cases, schools are obliged to employ an early childhood psychologist or school psychologist, coordinated by the pedagogical specialist services. These services can also help to improve the provision of care through the following activities: special needs counselling, early intervention, participating in the expert panel, educational consulting, speech therapy, study and career guidance, conductive education, physiotherapy, and nurturing exceptional talent.

- 35) Accessibility: In the 2014-2020 EU funding period, a number of public education establishments have undergone infrastructure improvement. In order to guarantee equal opportunities, ensuring full accessibility for persons with disabilities in all categories was mandatory for building extensions, and the physical and information communication accessibility requirements for the intervention activities had to be taken into account for the renovation of the properties. Accessibility for all disability categories is also a mandatory element of calls for proposals for the development of crèches, in order to ensure equal access to services in new buildings and/or parts of buildings.
- 36) Special curriculum: prepared for pupils with mild or moderate intellectual disabilities. For the other disabilities, the regular curricula apply, provided that the Guidelines ('Guidelines for the school education of pupils with special educational needs') are also implemented. The Guidelines outline the ways to adapt the activities and the curriculum for each area of special educational needs, describe possible deviations from the regular curriculum, and include inclusive educational and methodological guidelines.
- 37) Kindergarten of opportunities: the aim of the programme is to strengthen the role and ability of kindergartens to create opportunities and compensate for disadvantages in order to enable them to provide high-quality education. Objective: to involve 250-300 kindergartens, at least 5 000 children aged between 3 and 6, and 300-400 kindergarten teachers.

'(e) put in place measures to support inclusive education and avoid segregated classes in early childhood education and care establishments and in educational establishments; this may also include giving priority to, or, when needed, early access for, children in need;'

- 38) Prohibition of segregation: Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education and Act CXXV of 2003 on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities

explicitly prohibit segregation; any discriminative measure taken by the establishments or their operators is considered unlawful.

- 39) Prohibition of segregation, integrated care in crèche establishments: crèche establishments may also provide for children with special educational needs and children entitled to early intervention. Children with special educational needs and those entitled to early intervention may be educated and cared for in a crèche in an integrated or special group. Special groups can accommodate up to six children. An early childhood education service provider may work with no more than three children in a special group in a crèche, mini-crèche and workplace crèche setting, and no more than two children in a family crèche.
- 40) Public education equal opportunities plans: these are drawn up by educational district centres at district level, also taking into account the municipal equal opportunities action plan and concern the provision of basic public education tasks of the State. These plans are then sent to the Klebelsberg Centre. The April 2018 amendment to the regulation introduced a stronger guarantee by requiring a mandatory review of the public education equal opportunities plans at least every 3 years. The measure is aimed at improving inclusive education and preventing and deterring segregation, including the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the tasks carried out by collaborating partners. The EFOP 3.1.5 project, which came to an end in 2021, provided methodological support for the review of equal opportunities plans, and these methodological innovations were integrated into the process of implementing the plans.
- 41) Anti-segregation taskforce: anti-segregation taskforces with the power to give opinions, advice and suggestions were set up at educational district centres operating State-run schools. These taskforces are responsible for the monitoring of the desegregation processes, developing a warning system, and proposing measures for effective desegregation. Their other important activities include monitoring the distribution of pupils, liaising between school operators and the public, managing the segregation index used to measure the extent of segregation, establishing dialogue with stakeholders, and setting up a regular professional forum for consultation.
- 42) Regular revision of catchment areas: there is free school choice in Hungary. This and the way catchment areas are designed contribute to the prevention and management of segregation. The competent educational district centre, with the involvement of the local government and the national minority local government, establishes catchment areas following the procedure set out in the legislation. Catchment areas may be amended in order to mitigate segregation risks, and they have to be revised every year.

'(f) provide at least one healthy meal each school day;'

- 43) Free or subsidised (50%) school meals are provided: to children in crèches, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, boarding schools and to disabled persons in daycare receiving regular child protection benefits; to children with a long-term illness or disability, or children of families with a child with a long-term illness or disability; to children of families with three or more children; to children of families where the amount of monthly income per person does not exceed 130% of the mandatory minimum wage less personal income tax, and employees', health and

pension contributions (i.e. HUF 172 900 in 2022), or to foster children or young adults requiring follow-up care. The exact conditions vary according to the type of establishment.

'(g) ensure provision of educational materials, including digital educational tools, books, uniforms or any required clothing, where applicable;'

- 44) Free coursebooks: starting from the 2013/2014 school year, free coursebooks have been gradually introduced in Hungary for pupils in public education. From the 2020/2021 school year, all pupils in public education have been receiving coursebooks free of charge. As part of the digital content services provided by the public body responsible for the development and publication of coursebooks, digital coursebooks are also available, and most of the coursebooks on general knowledge are also available online as smart coursebooks.
- 45) School supplies: The Klebelsberg Centre has put together packages of high-quality school supplies, one set for each grade, as required and appropriate for their school work. First-graders also receive a personal hygiene kit. Packages are assembled and packaged separately per pupil and per grade. Disabled workers were also involved in the preparation of the packages, supporting social awareness-raising and demonstrating that disabled workers are also capable of value-added work on the labour market. There is no compulsory uniform/dress code in Hungarian schools.
- 46) Distribution of school supplies: Under the FEAD-funded RSZTOP, a project for the distribution of school supplies was launched in the 2019/2020 school year and provides personal items and school supplies for the most deprived pupils in primary school and lower-secondary school (Years 1-8). In addition to pupils in State-run schools, the project was also extended to those in non-state schools.
- 47) Back-to-kindergarten packages: with a view to reducing and preventing child poverty, the RSZTOP in 2021 distributed packages containing kindergarten supplies to the most deprived, helping families with kindergarten-aged children in the 300 poorest settlements.
- 48) Digital education environment: schools have received more than 100 000 new digital devices in recent years. By 2020, every school had broadband internet access and a wi-fi network inside their buildings. During the pandemic, the number of servers increased to accelerate digital education. Pupils and teachers who did not have their own computers could borrow devices from the schools. In the 2020/2021 school year, 28 000 new devices were purchased for the most deprived pupils (by educational districts, children's homes run by the Directorate-General for Social Affairs and Child Protection, *Tanoda* centres, and church school operators). In addition, as part of the digital content development project, 81 'smart coursebooks' are available on the National Public Education Portal (for Years 5-12, in general knowledge subjects). Digital content has been published on the Sulinet platform and a coursebook catalogue – coursebooks in pdf format – has been created and published. The functioning of online platforms has evolved during the pandemic. The KRÉTA Digital Collaboration Space was launched in September 2021, and has been running tens of thousands of hours online every day. In addition to State-developed platforms, a wide range of privately developed platforms are available to pupils and their parents, as well as to teachers. As a result of the gradual provision of ICT

devices, by 2026, 85% of Year 5-12 pupils and all teachers will have access to a sufficient number of modern devices, including for their personal use. (Disadvantaged and multiply-disadvantaged pupils have priority in the distribution process.) These devices can be used effectively for inclusion and empowerment purposes, provided that an appropriate pre-installed support framework is in place and users have at least a basic level of digital literacy. A digital learning environment also requires high-speed internet access in pupils' homes and a calm environment for quiet learning.

'(h) provide high speed connectivity, digital services and adequate equipment necessary for distance learning to ensure access to educational content online, as well as to improve digital skills of children in need and teachers and undertake the necessary investment to tackle all forms of digital divide;'

- 49) Improving teachers' ICT skills: in recent years, tens of thousands of teachers have attended digital methodology courses and have been able to put their skills to good use during the pandemic. A detailed list of methodology guidelines is available at oktatas.hu. Specific recommendations were made for kindergarten teachers, for teachers of pupils with special educational needs and for school psychologists, as well as for teachers on innovative forms of assessment.
- 50) Developing public education and VET establishments: Establishments with more than 500 children or pupils must be equipped with an internet network with a bandwidth of at least 1 Gb/s. The minimum requirement for schools with fewer than 500 pupils is 100 Mb/s. The project involved improving the infrastructure of educational establishments in the convergence region. The relevant government decision also provides for the development of the Wi-Fi network in all VET educational units.
- 51) Superfast internet: An objective of the National Infocommunications Strategy is to ensure that by 2020 every household has internet access at speeds of at least 30 Mbps, and that at least 50% of households have access to internet at 100 Mbps. The GINOP project will make it possible to provide broadband access to disadvantaged or sparsely populated areas where this is not yet available on a market basis.
- 52) Clean Software Programme: All public education establishments, including teachers and pupils, have access to licensed, subscription-based software, experience of which is widely expected in the labour market and in higher education, thus promoting equal opportunities for pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds.
- 53) Digital Child Protection Strategy: The strategy aims to educate children to use the internet in a safe way, with awareness and creating value, to inform them about harmful content on and risks of the internet, and to equip them with media literacy by training kindergarten teachers. A key target group of digital child protection are families; parents and grandparents, whose (online) digital media skills are of utmost importance. For them, the Digital Media Literacy Programme for Parents has been offering an educational programme and support materials since 2018. Developing families' digital media literacy also requires the operation of other programmes: SmartKindergarten 2.0 Programme: To improve children's media literacy, under the Peer NETMENTOR Programme, schoolchildren demonstrate the benefits and risks

of using the internet to their most impacted peers; they can also offer assistance if needed.

- 54) Upgrading the equipment in *Tanoda* centres: In view of the state of emergency declared in 2020 and the period of digital education, an internal survey was carried out, which resulted in the publication of the tender for the purchasing of equipment to support centrally funded *Tanoda* centres. The pandemic has created serious challenges for the most deprived families and young people, many of whom do not have the infrastructure and electronic devices needed for digital education outside the classroom. Depending on the number of children they work with, *Tanoda* centres were able to apply for grants which they could spend on IT equipment (laptops, tablets, internet subscriptions), other equipment or small meals and snacks.
- 55) Donation of computers during the pandemic lockdown: with the introduction of the digital home-schooling ordered during the first wave of the pandemic, 2 793 computers were provided to school operators from central budget funds and with the help of civil donors, coordinated by the Ministry of Human Resources, in order to facilitate the participation in digital education (and their keeping in touch with their relatives) of pupils placed in special child protection care or youth detention centres.

‘(i) provide transport to early childhood education and care and education establishments, where applicable;’

- 56) The transport to and from school of kindergarten- and school-age children is a core task of district and home care support services. According to the Social Act, the purpose of district and home care support services is to mitigate the disadvantages of villages and dwellings in built-up and non-built up areas, including farm dwellings, resulting from the lack of services, and to provide access to services and public services that meet basic needs and to certain essential services in order to help meet individual and community needs. In the 2022 budget, the budget allocated was HUF 250 000 000, which allowed for the funding of 28 vehicles.
- 57) Transport to these institutions is guaranteed by means of public transport travel discounts: see the details in points 58-63.
- 58) Travel discounts for children: children up to the age of 6 travelling with an adult are entitled to free travel on both local and inter-urban transport. As a general rule, children aged 6-14 years are entitled to a 50% discount for inter-urban transport. For local transport, the discounts set out in Government Decree No 121/2012 of 26 June 2012 laying down the rules establishing and using subsidised fares based on social policy apply. In addition, pupils, students and the accompanying persons of groups (e.g. on kindergarten and school trips) are entitled to a travel discount. Travel companies may decide to offer further discounts linked to specific events or occasions. In addition–, the target groups covered by the Recommendation –may also benefit from additional discounts as follows:
- 59) Access for children and pupils with disabilities and those in institutional care to public passenger transport services in Hungary is supported by special discounts. The following are entitled to a discount: chronically ill or severely disabled children whose parent or guardian receives a higher family allowance due to that illness or disability, and chronically ill or severely disabled persons who receive a higher

family allowance due to that illness or disability; persons receiving allowances for the blind, and persons holding a photo ID issued by the Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, plus one accompanying person. The discount amounts to 90% for inter-urban, and 100% for urban travel.

- 60) A 90% discount is granted for both the child and two accompanying persons on inter-urban travel, if the child or pupil with special educational needs attends a public education establishment, an establishment providing early intervention, or an establishment providing remedial intervention. However, there is no discount on local travel.
- 61) Travel discount for social care home residents or for those who regularly or occasionally visit such institutions: 90% discount on inter-urban travel for the cared-for person and up to two accompanying persons, including visitors to residential institutions. There is no discount on local travel.
- 62) Travel discount for children placed in protective foster care: a 50% discount on tickets for inter-urban travel 16 times a year, and a 90% discount on tickets on two other occasions; A group of at least three children in a children's home or in foster care and two accompanying carers is entitled to discount on local transport, based on the passenger list issued by the children's home or foster care network operator for the day of travel. Where more than 10 children travel together, an additional 2 accompanying carers per 10 children are entitled to a 90% discount on inter-urban travel. There is no discount on local travel.
- 63) Travel discount for large families: parent(s) and at least three children travelling with them (who must be under 18 years of age, students under 26, or where the parent receives the increased amount of family allowance for one of their children) are entitled to a 90% discount on inter-urban travel. There is no discount on local travel.
- 64) Improving access by amending timetables: in developing the timetable, as well as in amending the individual regional timetables, particular attention is paid to ensuring accessibility to educational establishments from all relevant directions. The Public Service Centre usually also invites school operators to the annual district-level timetable meetings, in order to receive information in a timely manner on the needs that arise and the appropriateness of the proposed changes. In addition, there may be exceptional timetable changes to adapt to changes in demand at the start of the school year.
- 65) Transport of children with special educational needs to crèche establishments: from 2021, if the legal guardian of a child with special educational needs or a child who is entitled to early intervention wishes to use the support service to transport the child to and from a crèche establishment, both services can be provided on the same day, with central budget funding.

'(j) ensure equal and inclusive access to school-based activities, including participation in school trips and sport, leisure and cultural activities;'

- 66) Free travel with museum visit: in addition to the travel discounts granted by the above-mentioned business decisions of travel companies, on school trips during the school year on school days, including Saturdays, where the trip is confirmed for a

Saturday – with the exception of the autumn mid-term break, the Christmas and the spring break, as specified in the Ministerial Decree on the school calendar – in order to discover the national and universal cultural heritage, full-time pupils in primary schools, secondary schools and special education and conductive education schools and one accompanying person (teacher or parent) for every 10 pupils are entitled to free rail travel to visit the museums, memorials, monuments and historic sites of national importance specified in the legislation, including the Hungarian National Archives.

- 67) Under the Fundamental Law, ensuring the right to free and compulsory primary education as well as free and accessible to secondary education until graduation, in respect of vocational secondary schools and vocational schools, in accordance with the Vocational Training Act, and, in respect of skill-development schools, until the completion of the last year of practical training, is within the public service remit of the State. Participation in school-based education is free for multiply disadvantaged pupils and for those with special educational needs. The public educational services provided free of charge in public educational establishments operated by State bodies, educational district centres, State-run higher education establishments, municipalities, national minority local governments and a municipal corporations include compulsory classroom and non-compulsory other activities, extracurricular cultural, art, sports, school trips or open-air school and other activities related to the delivery and processing of the curriculum and to daily physical exercise.
- 68) A number of initiatives in the field of culture and sport aim to ensure that extra-curricular activities reach as many children as possible: thematic daycare and boarding programmes, in line with the National Core Curriculum. Under the National Public Education Infrastructure Development Programme, the infrastructure for everyday physical education, i.e. learner swimming pools and gymnasiums, is also being created and modernised. Athletically gifted children who have pupil status can compete against their peers in the School Olympics. The Small Schools Tournament is part of the School Olympics and is open exclusively to teams from schools in disadvantaged communities, promoting the spirit of fair play, ensuring access to competition and play, and building friendships. The European School Sports Day is dedicated to making the last Friday of September a day of health awareness and quality physical activity in as many countries as possible. The ‘Do 60’ Programme uses social media platforms to encourage 60 minutes of moderate- to intense physical activity for school-age children, as recommended by the WHO. The events are organised by the Hungarian School Sports Association. ‘Challenge Day’, organised by the Hungarian Leisure Sports Association, is open to public educational establishments, providing a common sporting experience and quality time for the whole community. The grant scheme entitled ‘*Kincses Kultúróvoda*’ [‘Cultural Treasure Kindergartens’] is aimed at strengthening the cooperation between kindergartens and cultural institutions and at promoting the integration of culture into the local educational programme of kindergartens. The Ervin Lázár Programme gives all primary school pupils the opportunity to visit theatre, dance or circus productions and zoos exhibiting local wildlife. In addition, a wide range of cultural institutions (museums, archives, public cultural institutions, performing arts organisations, etc.) offer non-formal an informal learning opportunities (e.g. study groups and camps) for children in educational establishments (from kindergartens to secondary schools), which complement the educational programme of these establishments, contribute to

the development of competences, quality education, the reduction of ESL and the mitigation of socio-cultural and territorial handicaps. Thanks to grants, participation in these events is free, ensuring equal access for all.

- 69) In 2018 and 2019, thematic daycare and boarding programmes were implemented in primary schools, with free access for pupils, in line with the objectives and tasks set out in the National Core Curriculum, focusing on the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and abilities, helping them achieve their full potential and providing the conditions necessary for personal development, taking into account the fact that the school is not the sole place of education. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme could not resume until 2022, but it is being planned for the EU funding cycle 2021-2027.

'(k) develop a framework for cooperation of educational establishments, local communities, social, health and child protection services, families and social economy actors to support inclusive education, to provide after school care and opportunities to participate in sport, leisure and cultural activities, and to build and invest in educational establishments as centres of inclusion and participation;'

- 70) Cross-sectoral cooperation: the legislation in force requires cooperation between certain establishments and sectors. Educational establishments must define in their organisational and operational rules the system, form and manner of external communications, including communications with specialist pedagogical services, professional pedagogical services, child welfare services and the health care provider providing school health services.
- 71) Specialist pedagogical services: Specialist pedagogical services must define in their organisational and operational rules the manner of and procedure for communications with the educational, VET, child welfare, child protection and social institutions, as well as the guardianship authority, and the manner of and procedure for communications with parents. In addition, the specialist pedagogical services also liaise with other external actors (such as talent counsellors or school and kindergarten psychologists) as part of their various activities.
- 72) Promoting sharing best practices: Several activities have received funding as part of the call for proposals for the 2014-2020 development period, open to State and non-State public school operators, which was published to support special needs educational units, conductive care educational units, pedagogical specialist services, Unified Special Education Methodology Institutions and jointly-managed public education establishments. These include knowledge-sharing between establishments, and supporting the adaptation of best practices; organising other events to support knowledge-sharing (such as workshops, training courses, mentoring); organising and promoting events and information days to support parents; organising and running awareness-raising activities (such as dialogue between children with special educational needs, their parents, the host schools and the community as a whole; common recreational activities; open days).
- 73) Strengthening family and child welfare services: In 2014, during a public administration restructuring exercise, family support services and child welfare services were integrated, as required by law. From 2015, family support service providers could only be established alongside child welfare service providers. From

2016, these changes were not only organisational, but involved the integration of professions and the amendment of tasks in the new establishments, i.e. family- and child welfare services and centres. The priority tasks of these centres include the tasks related to official child protection measures, liaising with the guardianship authorities, and providing special services and counselling such as legal and psychological counselling, mediation and supervised visitation centres, social assistance in kindergartens and schools, and social work in the streets (slums). The family and child welfare service plays a major role in the prevention of child endangerment, strengthening the parenting skills of parents, and providing life coaching.

- 74) Cross-sectoral development of early intervention: The indirect and medium-term objective of the project is to ensure that all children, regardless of their gender, social status, cultural heritage or minority background, start their education at an appropriate level of physical, intellectual, social and emotional development, thus improving the quality of the care provided to the children and families concerned, and their well-being. This project results in making a real difference for families whose children are suspected of having a developmental disability in early childhood. A key objective is to regulate children's educational paths and to improve access to services for children. Under the EU project on the cross-sectoral development of early intervention, a validated assessment tool has been developed for children under 3, which, in addition to early screening, allows the monitoring of progress by assessing the child upon entering and leaving the establishment.
- 75) Integrated Regional Children's Programmes: the project, which runs for almost 5 years, is operating in 31 districts and is funded by the ESF (HUF 15 billion) and the ERDF (HUF 3 billion) in the 2014-2020 EU funding period. The programmes employ an average of 35 professionals per district – 1 100 in total – and target disadvantaged children aged 0-24 by creating opportunities and services for development, slowing down the poverty cycle and supporting professionals working with children. There are nearly 80 000 children involved, who participate not only in developmental and preventive activities, but also in camps and experiential education activities. These activities contribute to the direct development of children, enabling them to hone their skills, as well as to the development of communal experiences, and the demand for quality recreational activities. The administrative and professional background for the operation of the 'Gyerekesély Program' [Chances for Children] project is provided by the Chances for Children Office mandatorily set up in each district. The project helps to prepare, implement and monitor integrated regional children's programmes and provides professional methodological support to domestically funded existing Sure Start Children's Centres and Great Little Places, and those yet to be established.

1.2. Measures to implement the Council Recommendation on health care

'8. With a view to guaranteeing effective and free access to quality health care for children in need, Member States are recommended to:

(a) facilitate early detection and treatment of diseases and developmental problems, including those related to mental health, ensure access to periodic medical, including dental and ophthalmology, examinations and screening programmes; ensure timely curative and

rehabilitative follow-up, including access to medicines, treatments and aids, and access to vaccination programmes;)

- 1) The health visitors' network: contributes to the early detection and treatment of diseases and developmental disorders, as well as to access to vaccination programmes. Health visitors provide care to pregnant mothers, persons under the age of 19 and persons planning a family to maintain their health in their home or at a clinic, to prevent diseases or detect them early and to promote health. Health visitors provide services to Hungarian citizens with a Hungarian address, residing in Hungary, and to foreign citizens with a Hungarian address, residing in Hungary, at their specific request. Their tasks include supporting children from newborns until they start school, and providing kindergarten and school health services. As actors in the child protection warning system, once they identify vulnerable children, they notify the competent GP, paediatrician, and family and child welfare services.
- 2) School health services: In addition to general paediatricians, these services aim to prevent diseases, developmental disorders and mental health problems and to ensure access to dental screening and vaccination programmes.
- 3) Pedagogical specialist services: they support the educational work of parents and teachers, and the performance of the tasks of the educational establishment. Their activities cover the following areas: special educational needs counselling, early intervention; speech therapy; physiotherapy; kindergarten and school psychology.

'(b) provide targeted rehabilitation and habilitation services for children with disabilities;'

- 4) Assistance services: ambient assisted living for people with disabilities, primarily by helping them to access public services outside their home and to maintain their independence while providing specialised assistance within the home. Assistance services provide access to services that support basic human needs, to public services, to healthcare and social services, and to intervention and development, and they provide information and counselling to ensure social integration, offering administrative assistance and access to a sign language interpreter. The fees are determined by means-testing.
- 5) Daycare centres for persons with disabilities: these provide daycare, social contact, and basic hygiene for persons with disabilities over the age of 3 who are partially able to care for themselves or who are unable to care for themselves but need supervision. They also arrange daytime meals as required. A child with a disability who is of compulsory school age and attends a public education establishment during the school year is also entitled to daycare during school holidays or if they receive early intervention in a public education establishment, or if, according to the expert panel's opinion, attending school would prevent them from participating in developmental activities and therefore they receive individual intervention. The fee is calculated in accordance with the legislation.
- 6) Disability counselling services: counselling contributes to the well-being and development of individuals, families and various groups of the community, and to their integration into their social environment. A disability counsellor has specialised knowledge and makes information, knowledge and skills from different disability-related sectors (such as the social sector, health care, education or labour market)

available in one place. The counsellor provides support to those who need it to access services. The concept was launched on 1 April 2018 as a flagship project and, since 1 January 2022, it has been operating in the designated family and child-welfare centres. The four years since the introduction of disability counselling have clearly shown that the service has proven to be a success in the field. In order to ensure that the services remain available after the end of the project in 2021, Parliament adopted an amendment to the law in autumn 2020, which ensures that disability counselling remains available after 1 January 2022 in family and child-welfare centres designated by the Minister responsible for welfare policy. These services are available free of charge to all Hungarian citizens.

- 7) Temporary ambient assistance for persons with disabilities: the programme aims to relieve the burden on family members by providing flexible services (personal assistance), reducing their isolation and keeping them active in the labour market. The service is targeted primarily at families and secondly at family members with a disability under the age of 14. The service is available 24/7 (families use an average of 12 hours a month), and includes supervision, basic care and accompaniment. The current budget of the grant is HUF 114 million, funded in whole by the welfare policy department since 2018. The grant is open to organisations that help people with disabilities and have been registered for at least one year. It is currently available in 10 counties. The future of the service: we aim to use EU funding to develop the service, ensuring national coverage, expanding the capacity currently available and increasing the number of hours of service available.
- 8) Parent assistance services: the grant aims to provide support that responds to the needs of parents of children and adults with disabilities. Indirect objectives: community building, providing information and counselling, encouraging cooperation and networking, providing mental health counselling. Implementation period: 1 June 2022 – 31 May 2023

‘(c) implement accessible health promotion and disease prevention programmes targeting children in need and their families, as well as professionals working with children.’

- 9) ‘Health Promotion Office – Mental Health Centres’: these centres, independently and in cooperation with others, carry out, coordinate and promote activities to develop individual health-related skills, strengthen community action, and create and maintain an environment that promotes health, in order to strengthen the preventive capacity of the healthcare sector, in accordance with the physical and mental health needs and the circumstances of the whole population in their jurisdiction. They became an active and integrated part of the district community by providing free individual and community health promotion services locally and by developing a wide network of partners. The offices provide individual life coaching in a way, place and time that suits the needs of the person concerned, as well as community programmes that support healthy choices. Innovative organisational forms, linked to the existing institutional system, allow for the emergence of new quality approaches to care, responding to the professional challenges of the day, targeting interventions at critical points for improving the health of the population and making low-unit-cost, relatively simple yet effective professional interventions backed by scientific evidence on a mass scale. This is a cornerstone of public health thinking, which has

already proven effective in a number of specific areas and has been able to mitigate the burden of diseases in the medium and long term.

- 10) In public education establishments: since the 2012/2013 school year, prevention activities have been continuous and compulsory in Hungarian public education establishments. The aim of the mandatory comprehensive school health promotion ('TIE') is to ensure that all children benefit from regular, daily health promotion activities that effectively improve their overall physical, mental and spiritual well-being and health during their time in the educational establishment. TIE covers the following four areas: maintaining a healthy diet; getting exercise every day; strengthening mental health; promoting health literacy. Based on the curricula building on the National Core Curriculum, children are taught about healthy nutrition and lifestyle in an age-appropriate way in school.

1.3. Measures to implement the Council Recommendation on healthy nutrition

'Article 9 With a view to guaranteeing effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition for children in need, including through the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme, Member States are recommended to:

(a) support access to healthy meals also outside of school days, including through in-kind or financial support, in particular in exceptional circumstances such as school closures;'

- 1) Meals during school holidays: From 1 January 2016, municipalities have the obligation to arrange child meals for school holidays. This means that at the request of the parent or guardian of a child receiving regular child protection benefits, or of a disadvantaged or multiply-disadvantaged child, the child must receive a free hot meal during the day during the summer holidays for at least 43 working days, but for no more than all working days of the summer holidays and, during the autumn, winter and spring holidays, in line with the school calendar, for the duration of the school holidays in question. Similarly, in kindergartens and crèche establishments, a meal must be provided on each working day during the corresponding period when the educational units are closed. Similarly to pupils, children who are not enrolled in an educational establishment – typically crèche-aged children between 5 months and 2.5 years – may receive a hot meal for at least 43, but no more than all, workdays during the summer holidays, and all workdays during the autumn, winter and summer school break as set out in the Decree of the Ministry of Human Resources on the school calendar. The programme, then, is targeted at disadvantaged or multiply-disadvantaged children living with their families who have no access to school meals during the (workdays of) school holidays, because of school closures. Children placed in foster care or children's homes are not entitled to this benefit in kind, because during the school holidays, the foster parent or the children's home provides adequate meals, which are funded by the State.
- 2) Children's meals during digital education: during the digital home-schooling period declared on 16 March 2020, school meals had to be provided to children in crèche establishments, public education and VET establishments, since there were no school closures. Any additional expenditure incurred in this context, such as the cost of providing meals to children who previously had their meals at school or the cost of delivering meals, could be offset against the school meal allowance. During the second wave of COVID-19 in autumn 2020, municipalities and non-state public

school operators also had to provide meals in crèche, public education and VET establishments in the form of takeaway or delivery services in the event of school closures or digital education. With the amendment of Act XCIX of 2021 on transitional rules in connection with the state of emergency, a provision was introduced in the Child Protection Act stating that during the exceptional break declared for the transition to digital home-schooling, and the exceptional closure of crèches and mini-crèches, establishments must provide meals, for takeaway or delivery, at the request of the parent or guardian.

‘(b) ensure that nutrition standards in early childhood education and care and educational establishments address specific dietary needs;’

- 3) Addressing specific dietary needs in crèche establishments and educational units: in accordance with the relevant provisions of the legislation, all children with specific dietary needs must receive nutrition appropriate to their condition, taking into account the schedule of meals determined by the specialist and the appropriate portioning of food determined by the dietitian, with particular attention to children with carbohydrate metabolism disorders. If the institutional food service cannot provide the child or pupil with nutrition that meets their dietary requirements, on the basis of the written declaration by the parent or guardian, the child may have the opportunity to consume the food they bring, or their parent or guardian orders, to the educational establishment. To this end, the head of the educational establishment must ensure appropriate conditions for refrigeration, heating and consumption, in compliance with the legislation and the professional standards in force. We do not anticipate any objective obstacle to catering for specific dietary needs, since the central budget funding allows for the meals to be purchased from external providers, such as hospitals or social care institutions already prepared for catering for specific dietary needs, including transport costs.

‘(c) limit the advertising and restrict the availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugar in early childhood education and care and educational establishments;’

- 4) Designing the product range offered by school canteens, food and drink vending machines: a public health product charge was introduced to reduce the consumption of foods high in salt and sugar, and energy drinks and alcoholic refreshments, which are harmful to public health. No product subject to Act CIII of 2011 on the public health product charge, or alcohol and tobacco products, may be sold in educational establishments or events organised for children and pupils outside the educational establishment. These include foods high in fat, salt and sugar. If the operator or director of the educational establishment wishes to conclude an agreement for the operation of a food shop or vending machine in the establishment, they must obtain the opinion of the school health service as to whether the range of products meets the recommendations on healthy nutrition, and whether it contains any product that could be used to influence the attention or behaviour of pupils to such an extent as to disturb the operation of the educational establishment or to impair the effectiveness of the educational work. Official controls of the range offered by school canteens are carried out by the staff of the district offices responsible for public health. In addition, the detailed rules for catering and the amount of trans fatty acids in foods are laid down in a ministerial decree, in order to reduce them and to create an appropriate nutritional environment.

‘(d) provide adequate information to children and families on healthy nutrition for children.’

- 5) In the first period after birth, health visitors are responsible for providing assistance and advice on health, lifestyle and lactation. They also provide information on healthy lifestyles from newborn to school age, as required by the child’s current developmental stage.

1.4. Measures to implement the Council Recommendation on adequate housing

‘10. With a view to guaranteeing effective access to adequate housing for children in need, Member States are recommended to:

(a) ensure that homeless children and their families receive adequate accommodation, prompt transfer from temporary accommodation to permanent housing and provision of relevant social and advisory services;’

- 1) Family shelters have the opportunity to create off-site accommodation: families with children who have lost their home and are in a crisis may receive temporary assistance from family shelters as part of the primary child welfare services. An important tool for the reintegration of families is off-site accommodation, where families who require a lower intensity of support for independent living can be placed. Families live independently in off-site accommodation, in a building separate from family shelters, and staff assist them in finding their own place to live. Family shelters are key to keeping children in the family, and keeping the family together. They provide the child with the care they need, and the parent or expectant mother in a social crisis with a place to live. Family shelters provide a place for a child and parent to be accommodated together. The amendment of the Child Protection Act provides for the creation of off-site accommodation, from 1 January 2018.
- 2) Increasing the available capacity of family shelters: the implementation of the action plan for the 2020-2021 national strategy adopted by Government Decree No 1046/2020 of 18 February 2020 required the creation of at least five off-site accommodation units, each accommodating five persons, for a total amount of HUF 250 000 000 by 31 December 2021. Provision No II.1.10 of the child welfare department laid down the requirement to expand support services addressing exploitation, in particular to increase the available capacity of family shelters. In 2021, the Ministry of Finance allocated HUF 220 000 000 for this purpose. In 2021, the Ministry of Human Resources provided the Hungarian Protestant Aid organisation with a further HUF 30 000 000 to support this goal. The grant was used to create off-site accommodation (apartments) for three families. In addition to this, the Ministry of Human Resources provided an additional HUF 35 000 000 to family shelter operators who have experience in assisting and rescuing victims of trafficking in human beings. Thus, on the basis of applications submitted, using a total of HUF 285 000 000, 109 new off-site places were created in 22 apartments, helping families living in family shelters to reintegrate into society, to support their independent life and to reduce their risk of ‘returning’ to life in an institution.
- 3) Further increasing the available capacity of family shelters: the project provided support to create off-site accommodation at family shelters, helping to ensure the efficient operation of the service, the integration of families, the exit of families from

shelters, and improving the access of victims of trafficking in human beings to the service. For the year 2022, HUF 250 000 000 in funding has been earmarked under Title 20, Chapter 19, Article 12 of Act XC of 2021 on the 2022 central budget of Hungary, entitled ‘Grants to certain sectoral social, child-protection, child-welfare programmes, and programmes promoting equal opportunities for persons with disabilities’. With the approval and based on the decision of the State Secretary responsible for welfare policy, a grant budget of HUF 250 000 000 has been allocated to the National Institute for Social Policy to create off-site accommodation at family shelters, in order for the Institute to conduct the grant procedure and manage funds once the decisions have been taken. The Institute published a call for proposals to develop off-site accommodation with a deadline of 30 June 2022. There were 22 applications received, for a total requested amount of HUF 928 298 747. The applications have been evaluated and 59 places are expected to be created in 19 apartments.

‘(b) assess and revise, if necessary, national, regional and local housing policies and take action to ensure that the interests of families with children in need are duly taken into account, including addressing energy poverty and preventing the risk of homelessness; such assessment and revision should also include social housing or housing assistance policies and housing benefits and further improve accessibility for children with disabilities;’

- 4) Local equal opportunities programmes: every five years, the local governments of villages, towns and districts of Budapest adopt a five-year local equal opportunities programme. This must include an analysis of the educational, housing, employment, health and social situation of disadvantaged social groups – in particular women, people living in extreme poverty, the Roma, disabled people, children and the elderly – as well as an action plan based on the analysis which must define the measures needed to tackle the problems identified in the analysis in a comprehensive .
- 5) The model programme entitled ‘Boarding School Plus’, launched in September 2017, is aimed at finding solutions: providing assistance and support to the most deprived children, while keeping the family together. This, on the one hand, is to prevent the child being taken from the family to preserve emotional security and attachment and, on the other, to create opportunities, nurture talent, and encourage further education or VET. The objective of the programme is to provide disadvantaged and multiply-disadvantaged children with services to compensate for their disadvantages in a boarding school setting. The model programme includes small-scale boarding schools with a high proportion of pupils receiving regular child welfare benefits or who are disadvantaged. These establishments operated by the State, the church or civil society are located in the most disadvantaged regions of Hungary, in 8 counties. On average, the model programme provided assistance to/concerned 240 pupils and their families. Without the programme, more than half of the pupils involved could have been taken into special child protection care.

‘(c) provide for priority and timely access to social housing or housing assistance for children in need and their families;’

- 6) The family home grant (CSOK) is a State grant for families with existing children or couples who undertake to have children, for the purchase or construction of a new home or for the purchase, extension or modernisation of a second-hand home (the

latter is only available in small settlements). In addition, under the Hungarian Village Programme, village CSOK is available in more than 2 600 disadvantaged settlements ('preferred settlements') with a population of up to 5 000, as well as for farms and estates. A state-subsidised housing loan at an interest rate of no more than 3% is available for families receiving the Village CSOK for the purchase and simultaneous extension and/or modernisation of a second-hand property, as well as for the extension and/or modernisation of their existing property.

'(d) take into account the best interests of the child as well as the child's overall situation and individual needs when placing children into institutional or foster care; ensure the transition of children from institutional or foster care to quality community-based or family-based care and support their independent living and social integration.'

- 7) Child Protection Act: since its entry into force, the Child Protection Act has set out the primacy of the rights of the child, and as part of this, the enforcement of the child's best interests, not only for child welfare and for the child protection institutional system, but also in general. The child should be removed from the family only as a last resort, in the child's own best interests, and efforts should be made to reunite the child with their birth family, or if this is not possible, adopt them. The Child Protection Act lays down detailed requirements for the placement and care of children in special child protection care, including the primacy of foster care, in accordance with their individual needs – corresponding to their age, disability or disease, in particular.
- 8) Foster parent network: foster care placement became the general rule from 1 January 2014, since when, the proportion of children under 12 and those with a disability or a chronic illness (special needs) in foster care has increased. As a result of the network's development in recent years, foster parents are now officially employed. The foster-parent allowance is indexed to the minimum wage and weighted depending on the number and the needs of the children placed in their care. The employment comes with full health and pension insurance entitlements, family tax and contribution allowances, and the foster parent is also entitled to take up work outside the foster parent network. Between 2013 and 2022, this resulted in a 3.5-fold increase in foster parents' income on average.
- 9) Supported housing: from 1 January 2019, the conditions of the care for minors in supported housing were strengthened by an amendment of the Social Act, which defines the mandatory components of the service. From 2019, certain components of supported housing, i.e. supervision and meals, must be provided to minors in all cases, while supervision must be provided in person.
- 10) Children's shelter: this is a shelter for children over the age of 12 living with a family, or under the age of 12 not living with a host family, who are temporarily without care and supervision, or who would be without care and supervision if they were not placed in a children's shelter, and whose care is at risk because their family is experiencing difficulties in managing their lives. Children's shelters – in cooperation with the child welfare service – provide assistance to reunite children with their families.

1.5. Comprehensive measures taken to implement the Council Recommendations set out in points 1.1-1.4 above

- 1) Catching-up settlements programme: a long-term comprehensive programme gradually involving 300 settlements, on the basis of identifying local characteristics, ensuring professional presence, and an individual diagnosis. Under the programme, launched in 2019, involving 118 settlements so far (178 settlements from 2023), several measures have been implemented targeting early childhood intervention, developments in health care, and improvements in housing conditions. Following the preparation of the municipal assessments and action plans, ‘Presence’ contact points were established, and social work with families has started. We must also mention comprehensive screenings, such as eye screening for children, or the creation of employment opportunities (e.g. sewing studios, community kitchens, fruit and vegetable processing plants, carpenter shops). The first solar panel park for social use has been set up.
[points 7(b), (c), (j); 8; and 10(b), (c) of the Council Recommendation and programme components outside the scope of the Council Recommendation]
- 2) Flagship project entitled ‘Fókuszban a Gyermekek’ [Focus on Children] (1 January 2021 – 31 December 2023): The aim of the project is to ensure that no child is left behind in the settlements covered by the project (currently 117 settlements, one in Pest county; another 60 settlements are expected to join the programme from 2023) and that children receive all the support they need for their healthy development, from childcare supplies and equipment to a healthy home environment, focusing on the first 1 000 days of their lives. Key activities: a set of programmes focusing on the first 1 000 days of a child’s life, supporting health visitors; housing project components; paediatric eye screening programme; professional and methodological support to schools; running a mobile playground; community-building activities; debt counselling; programmes for social awareness-raising, crime prevention, managing drug abuse and supporting victims.
[points 7(d), (e), (j); 8(a); and 10(b) of the Council Recommendation and programme components outside the scope of the Council Recommendation]
- 3) Comprehensive anti-slum programme: this aims to support the inclusion and integration of disadvantaged people living in segregated environments in extreme poverty. The goal is to improve access to services for people living in slums and slum-like housing; to increase the educational attainment of the people involved; to increase the number of people involved in social inclusion programmes; to increase the number of people living in the target area entering employment; to increase the rate of kindergarten attendance of children living in slum-like housing.
[points 7(b), 8(a); and 10(b) and (c) of the Council Recommendation and programme components outside the scope of the Council Recommendation]
- 4) Grants under the innovation axis of EFOP Plus mainly support increasing the number of settlements involved in the Presence programme to 300, operating the social components of the project, providing comprehensive support in early childhood and organising community-building sports and music events and prevention activities (crime and drug prevention) targeting primarily children and young people, as well as improving access to health care (paediatric eye screenings and mobile health units, laboratories). The measures also include ‘soft’ interventions to improve housing

conditions, such as activities to promote financial inclusion and the promotion of responsible pet ownership.

[points 7(d), (e), (j); 8(a); and 10(b) of the Council Recommendation and programme components outside the scope of the Council Recommendation]

- 5) Key objective of component C of the Catching-up settlements RRF programme: to develop the 300 most disadvantaged settlements in a comprehensive and integrated manner, reducing socio-economic and territorial handicaps. Areas of intervention:
- (a) ‘Community renewable energy production and use’ – establishing a revenue-generating system based on community energy production, providing welfare support to deprived families with children.
 - (b) ‘Construction and renovation of social housing, improving housing conditions’ – improving the living conditions of families by improving their housing conditions (heating, bathrooms).
 - (c) ‘Improving economic literacy based on local specificities, work experience and skills development’ – creating opportunities in the labour market, improving families’ self-care ability.
 - (d) ‘Community-oriented pedagogy’ – increasing the knowledge of disadvantaged children and reducing ESL rates.

[points 7(b), (c), (e), (j), (k); 10(b) and (c) of the Council Recommendation]

2. Further measures required to implement the Child Guarantee National Action Plan

The analysis of the target group of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan and the new measures planned to address the deficiencies identified during a review of the existing interventions, as well as those planned to facilitate moving forward, are set out in Annex 1 to Government Decision No .../2023 of 2023 adopting the Child Guarantee National Action Plan 2030.

A comprehensive, major social policy goal of the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy 2030 is ‘to prevent the reproduction of poverty and social exclusion’, and ‘to improve equal access to social and economic benefits and to strengthen social cohesion’, both of which have a significant impact on children living in poverty. Each of these comprehensive goals have sub-targets and commitments specific to those areas. Of the eight quantifiable targets in the Strategy, five are specifically targeted at children and young people, with the main objective of reducing financial and social deprivation rates. The latter is in line with the national target for Hungary to contribute to the EU-level 2030 poverty reduction target.³⁶

	2019 baseline data	2026	2030
Material and social poverty among families with children	22.9%	19%	13%
Number of children attending Sure Start Children’s Centres	2 379	2 700	3 400
Early school leaving rate among Roma pupils	64.6%	58%	45%

³⁶ The EU-level target: to achieve a reduction of at least 15 million in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including at least 5 million children.
Hungary’s contribution to the EU-level target: reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 292 000 by reducing the rate of financially and socially deprived families with children to 13% by 2030.

Proportion of 15- to 24-year-old Roma students participating in higher education	2.2%	3%	4%
Young Roma NEETs	41.0%	36%	30%

A strategic goal of Hungarian public education is to create opportunities as early in life as possible, by ensuring equal access to high-quality early childhood education and care establishments. Further improvements are justified where there is demand for kindergarten places, typically in settlements where the population has grown in a relatively short time. The current kindergarten grant schemes allow for further improvements, so that the renovation of kindergarten buildings and the development of kindergarten equipment can provide substantial support for the organisation and implementation of an effective and efficient formal kindergarten education and pedagogical activities that help form a child's personality. The EU's strategic objective for 2021-2030 relates to the kindergarten attendance rate for children from the age of 3 to the compulsory school age: in Hungary, this is 92.8%, while the EU27 average is 93% (Eurostat, 2022).

V. MONITORING

1. Monitoring

Firstly, the implementation of the Council Recommendation is monitored through the indicators set out in the EU monitoring framework. This will allow the monitoring of social changes and the development of the target group's circumstances. Point 2 provides details of the EU monitoring framework indicators.

Secondly, a report must be drawn up for the Government on the measures set out in the Child Guarantee National Action Plan, first by 31 May 2025, and thereafter every two years by 31 May. Due to the close link, it is appropriate to develop a system of indicators suitable for monitoring in conjunction with the indicator system of the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy 2030, taking into account the indicators included in the Action Plan. This will involve a review of available data and data sources in order to ensure that relevant data for the target group and sub-groups in the areas covered by the Action Plan are available in an integrated manner.

Thirdly, the Government strategies and action plans referred to in Chapter III on the supporting policy framework have their own monitoring systems through which the development of the situation of the target group of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan can also be monitored:

- (a) The situation of children living in poverty and their access to the services covered by the Council Recommendation can be tracked in the monitoring framework of the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy.
- (b) For children with disabilities, the monitoring framework is set out in Parliament Resolution No 15/2015 of 7 April 2015 on the National Disability Programme for the timeframe 2015-2025, and in Government Decree No 1187/2020 of 28 April 2020 on the implementation of Parliament Resolution No 15/2015 by the end of 2022.
- (c) For children struggling with mental health issues, the monitoring framework is set out in the health sector strategy entitled 'Healthy Hungary 2021-2027', and in Government Decree No 1722/2018 of 18 December 2018 on national health programmes and related policy programmes for the timeframe 2019-2022.
- (d) The situation of children in alternative (mainly institutional) care can be monitored on the basis of the surveys conducted by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office on special child protection care services, young offender rehabilitation and guardianship administration reported for OSAP (National Statistical Data Collection Programme). Special child protection care services do not have their own monitoring system; certain measures are monitored in the framework of the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy, the National Disability Programme and the National Strategy on the fight against trafficking in human beings.
- (e) Among vulnerable children from third countries, the situation of unaccompanied minors placed in special child protection care (and formerly unaccompanied minors who are now in post-18 care) can be monitored through the data provided by the establishment designated to care for them.

- (f) To make the monitoring process more efficient, it is necessary to link up the different data systems and make them compatible with ‘big data’ analysis methodologies. Data analysis, together with components of existing data clusters (such as the national competency assessment or the ESL early warning system), will determine the direction to be taken by future interventions.

2. List of indicators used for monitoring³⁷

2.1. Trends in the size of the group of children living in poverty

1. Number and proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) (0-17)
2. Number and proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) (0-17) broken down by by: monetary poverty, severe material and social deprivation rate, [quasi] jobless households.
3. Relative median poverty risk gap of children (0-17)
4. Number and proportion of children in single-parent households
5. Number and proportion of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in single-parent households
6. Number of children with at least one parent born outside the EU
7. Number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) with at least one parent born outside the EU
8. Number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion with at least one parent with disability

2.2. Monitoring free and effective access to early childhood education and care

9. Share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in formal early childhood education, broken down by the child’s age (0-3) and the intensity of the provision
10. Differences in the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in formal early childhood education

2.3. Monitoring free and effective access to health care

11. Child mortality (1-14), vaccination coverage (Eurostat/WHO data)

2.4. Monitoring access to adequate housing

12. Differences in the proportion of children under 18 at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) who experience an excessive burden of housing costs
13. Differences in the proportion of children under 18 at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) living in inadequate housing
14. Proportion of children under 18 at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) living in overcrowded housing, and the difference between these
15. Proportion of children under 18 at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) living in a household without adequate heating

³⁷ The list includes the monitoring framework indicators developed by the Indicator Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee.

VI. INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILD GUARANTEE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

Stakeholders were involved in the preparation of the Child Guarantee National Action Plan through the consultative forums referred to in chapter 2.2.1, as follows:

Preliminary consultations were held with representatives of the following forums:

- Make Things Better for Children! National Strategy Evaluation Committee, 19 October 2021
- Working Party on Children’s Rights, 11 November 2021

Consultative forums involved in the public consultation on the draft Child Guarantee National Action Plan:

- Make Things Better for Children! National Strategy Evaluation Committee, 21 March 2023
- Roma Coordination Council, by written procedure
- Public Education Strategy Round Table, by written procedure
- National Student Council, by written procedure
- Working Party on Human Rights, by written procedure
- Thematic Taskforce for Child Rights, 21 March 2023
- National Disability Council, by written procedure

The monitoring committees and the consultative forums involved in the implementation and the monitoring process are described in chapter 2.1.