



**Fostering Child-Friendly Legal Environments
through collaborative networks**

Training Needs Assessment Report Hungary



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Introduction and research methodology

Centre for Social Sciences Institute of Legal Science is a research center for the legal sciences, conducting theoretical, empirical and comparative researches. The Centre also carries out basic, applied and comparative research in these fields and conducts its scientific work independently of political influence.

The research team conducted a 120-minute focus group (FG) meeting with legal professionals on **November 12, 2024**, followed by another FG on **November 7, 2024**, involving a broader group of relevant professionals with both legal and non-legal backgrounds, including experts in medicine (e.g., traumatology, pediatric gynecology), clinical and child psychology, and social work.

Recognizing the need to engage additional stakeholders identified during the research process, a third, online FG was organized on **November 12, 2024**, to accommodate participants unable to attend the previous in-person sessions. Additionally, the research team conducted **11 individual interviews** with key professionals—including lawyers, attorneys, and child protection specialists—between **October 15 and November 28, 2024**.

Table 1. List of Interviewees

Code	Gender	Affiliation, position	Date	Form
H1	F	Lawyer, Child protection expert	2024. October 25.	online
H2	F	National Media and Infocommunication Authority, Internet Hotline Division, lawyer	2024. October 31.	online
H3	M	National Prosecution Authority, lawyer	2024. November 28.	in person
H4	F	Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, lawyer	2024. November 5.	in person
H5	M	Hungarian Helsinki Committee, lawyer	2024. November 4.	in person
H6	F	Hintalovon (Child Protection NGO), lawyer	2024. November 7.	in person
H7	F	Lawyer	2024. November 11.	in person
H8	F	Lawyer	2024. November 11.	in person



H9	F	Patent/NANE (NGO), lawyer	2024. October 24.	online
H10	F	Human Trafficking Expert, sociologist	2024. November 18.	in person
H11	M	National Media and Infocommunication Authority, head of media literacy department, media analyst	2024. November 28.	online

Table 2. Participants of the Focus Groups

Focus Group 1 (FG1)	Date: 2024. November 7., 10:00
Affiliation, Position	Gender
SOS Gyermekfalvak Magyarországi Alapítványa (SOS Children’s Villages Foundation), lawyer	F
Rákospalota Juvenile Correctional Institute, senior consultant	F
Baptist Aid, human trafficking expert	F
Menedék (Hungarian Association for Migrants (NGO), lawyer, sociologist	F
Independent Expert, Child psychologist, forensic expert in child psychology	F
National Child Protection Special Service, Budapest Office, social worker	F
Semmelweis University Medicine and Health Sciences, nurse specialized on children	F
National Child Protection Special Service Budapest Office, psychologist	F
Semmelweis University Medicine and Health Sciences, child-gynecologist	F

Focus Group 2 (FG2)	Date: 2024. November 12., 10:00
Affiliation, Position	Gender
National Media and Infocommunication Authority, legal analyst	F
Hungarian Child Rights Protection Coalition, lawyer	F
UNICEF Hungary, lawyer	F



ÜDE - Lawyers for Democratic Society Association, lawyer specialized on child protection	M
Budapest Methodological Center (governmental homeless service provider in Budapest, former leader of Budapest Child Protection Special Service (TEGYESZ))	M
Rosa Parks Foundation, director	F
Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (ombudsman), children's rights lawyer	M

Focus Group 3 (FG3)	Date: 2024. November 12., 16:00, online
Affiliation, Position	Gender
Family and Child Welfare Center (in Budapest XIV. District), director, lawyer	F
Heim Pál Hospital, National Pediatric Institute, leader of the child traumatology center	M
Budapest Juvenile Correctional Facility, director	M
Validity Foundation (NGO), specialist on children with disability	M
Associate Professor, Ludovika University of Public Services, child protection specialist	F



National framework

The legal framework on the rights of child victims of crime

Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and the administration of guardianship affairs (Child Protection Act, CPA)¹ is the main and primary legal document of the child protection sector. The CPA requires certain institutions and professionals to report a suspected or confirmed endangerment of a child to the local child welfare offices, or in case of serious endangerment to the guardianship authorities or to the police. In other contexts, the signaling system might be referred to as a “mandatory reporting” mechanism of children at risk. The CPA specifies that any “**endangerment**” or suspicion of endangerment of a child² needs to be signaled. Not only cases of imminent danger need to be signaled, but any cases that are at risk of endangerment. Also in these cases, the child welfare system is able to provide the necessary support services.

There are numerous laws with provisions concerning the rights of children and specifically the rights of child victims, however, the legal landscape is scattered and difficult to navigate in. The CPA had been amended with a new provision which established the legislative background of the Barnahus-type, Hearing and Therapy Centres (*Meghallgató és Terápiás Központ*)³. According to Article 61 (2) of the CPA, the child protection services may run special services for the examination and therapy of neglected and abused, and especially sexually abused children / sexually abused children in particular. Upon the request of the competent authority services for the facilitation of child’s hearing might be run. During the hearing of the child, the child protection service cooperates with the authority concerned. The new provision entered into force on 1 January 2019. The reasoning of the amendment (Act CXVII

¹Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and the administration of guardianship affairs. (1997. évi XXXI. törvény a gyermekek védelméről és a gyámügyi igazgatásról) <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99700031.tv>

² **Endangerment** is defined as a behavior of a child or another person or an omission or condition that hinders the physical, mental, emotional, or moral development of a child. This can be cases with the **suspicion** of emotional, physical, sexual abuse, neglect or any other serious risk. It does not matter who is the perpetrator of the endangerment and where the incident is taking place. It can include adults as well as other children who are causing the endangerment, it can take place in person, but virtual / online acts are included as well. In certain cases, the behavior of a child can endanger him or herself too.

³ Hearing and Therapy Centre. <https://ogysz.hu/meghallgato-es-terapias-szolgalat>



of 2018)⁴ referred exactly to the method that has been used in ‘Barnahus’⁵ since 1998 and the need to protect abused children from secondary victimization and their further traumatization. The method entails connecting the criminal proceeding with the toolkit of child protection with the aim to implement children’s best interests. Moreover, it aims to implement the Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention.⁶

Act XC of 2017 on Criminal Procedure⁷ in force since 1 July is providing enhanced protection for all so-called “persons requiring special treatment”, as a consequence a person under the age of 18 will continue to be considered a person requiring special treatment. The new Article 85 of the Act lists in detail the specific measures that the authorities may take to protect such persons (e.g. protection of personal data and privacy, taking procedural steps without delay and repetition, avoiding unnecessary meetings between victim and accused, making visual and audio recordings, using a special interview room or video conference, etc.).

The Act CLXXXVI of 2013 introduced into the Code of Criminal Procedure, with effect from 1 January 2014, the passage on the use of child hearing rooms. Following the Barnahus principles, the hearing session is adapted to the child's age, level of development, and cultural background, taking into account their specific needs, including the need for interpretation. Additionally, the duration of the hearing should be minimized, breaks should be allowed. The number of interviews conducted as part of the criminal investigation is limited to the necessary minimum. If multiple interrogations are required, they should be carried out by the same professional. All participants with relevant experience in this method welcomed its introduction. However, they believe it should be implemented nationwide, applied not only to cases involving victims but also to other situations involving juveniles. Furthermore, they emphasize the need to better disseminate information about this method among stakeholders.

The purpose of the establishment of child hearing rooms was to enable the investigating authority and the court to conduct the hearing of a person under the age of 14 in an environment where it can be ensured that the procedure is carried out with relative leniency and with the best interests of the child in focus. Act XC of 2017 was further amended with a new provision that entered into force on 1 January 2021 and is connected to the amendment of the CPA. It established the prevention of secondary victimization of minor victims in the

⁴ Act No CXVII of 2018 on the modification of certain social, child protection and connecting laws <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2018-117-00-00>

⁵ Currently 5 Hearing and Therapy Centres (two of them in Budapest, the others in Debrecen, Szombathely (where it is operated under the name of Barnahus, Barnahus.hu) and Gyula) have been established.

⁶ The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse was promulgated by Act No XCII of 2015 and certain laws were modified at the same time. <http://okk.kozlonyok.hu/PDF/2015/15.pdf>

⁷ Act XC of 2017 on Criminal Proceedings <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2017-90-00-00.4>



course of the criminal proceedings by the ‘Barnahus-method’. However, this amendment aimed to apply not only the Barnahus-method but also other techniques which provide the above-mentioned protection of child victims. Further amendments of Act XC of 2017 on Criminal Procedure were adopted (by Act CXXXIV of 2021 on the modification of certain criminal laws⁸, effective since 1 January 2022) which clarified that the expert having special knowledge has the status of ‘special expert’ in criminal proceedings. The ‘special expert’ is someone mentioned in Article 61 (2) of CPA or determined in other acts. So, according to the amendment [Article 87 (1) b) bb)] the court, the prosecutor and the investigating authority may implement the procedural steps involving a minor also with the assistance of a ‘special expert’ who works under Article 61 (2) of the CPA. This is left to the discretion of the said decision makers. The ‘special expert’ referred to in Article 61 (2) is the person having expertise in ‘Barnahus-method’. Other experts having expertise in child psychology (child protection) might also be in the status of ‘special expert’. According to the reasoning of Act CXXXIV of 2021 the requirements of ‘special experts’ are contained in the Decree of the Ministry of Public Welfare of 15/1998 (IV. 30.) on the tasks and operational conditions of child welfare and child protection services and professionals providing personal care⁹ and Decree of the Ministry of Justice of 12/2018 (VI. 12.) on the regulations concerning certain criminal procedural acts and persons taking part in criminal proceedings.¹⁰

According to Article 87 (1) b) of Act XC of 2017 on Criminal Procedure may require the contribution of the ‘special expert’ in the criminal proceedings. Decree of the Ministry of Justice of 12/2018 (VI. 12.) on the regulations concerning certain criminal procedural acts and persons taking part in criminal proceedings¹¹ provides some further details in Article 14/A. The assistance of the ‘special expert’ may be required if special expertise is needed concerning the evidence from the child, or required for the gathering of evidence requiring the child’s participation [Article 14/A (1) a)], or if it is necessary for the implementation of the child’s rights determined in law, or it is due to their best interests or for the child’s protection [Article 14/A (1) b)]. According to Article 14/A (2) the assistance of the ‘special expert’ is required in particular if a child under the age of 14 takes part in the criminal proceedings. According to the reasoning of Act CXXXIV of 2021 the implementation of the procedural acts is the task of the court, prosecutor and investigating authority concerned which determine the frames of the procedural act.

⁸ Act CXXXIV of 2021 on the modification of certain criminal laws. <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2021-134-00-00>

⁹ 15/1998 (IV. 30.) Decree of the Ministry of Public Welfare on the tasks and operational conditions of child welfare and child protection services and professionals providing personal care <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99800015.nm>

¹⁰ 12/2018. (VI. 12.) Decree of the Ministry of Justice on the rules for individual criminal acts and persons participating in criminal proceedings <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1800012.im>

¹¹ <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1800012.im>



According to police statistics on the child-friendly hearing rooms prescribed by the Decree of the Ministry of Justice 13/2018 (IV.12.), the regional police departments fulfill the criteria set by the decree, with 28 active rooms available in the country. There is no available data about the workload of these hearing rooms.

Following the establishment of the Government Offices ('kormányhivatalok') on 1 January 2011, the institutional system of victim support has been largely restructured, with the victim support services' territorial tasks (client reception, first instance administration) being performed by the victim support departments of the judicial services of the government offices. On 22 February 2011, the Victim Support Line, which is available free of charge, 24/7, for victims of crime, those interested in assistance and those seeking help, started its operations on the green number 06 80 225 225. From April 2012, the amendment to the Law on Assistance to Victims of Crime and State Compensation has made the state support system available to victims of offences against property.

Victim assistance is also closely linked to the new Penal Code and the renewal of the related procedural rules. When the new Penal Code entered into force in 2013, it was essential that it should meet society's sense of justice, and to this end it was essential to broaden and strengthen victims' rights. The establishment of a network of victim support centres (VSCs) has been started, the Budapest centre opened its doors to 88 victims in 2017, the Miskolc and Szombathely centres in 2018. The networking of the Centres continued in 2020, with the opening of the Pécs, Szeged and Kecskemét VSCs in 2020. In 2021, the Ministry opened three more VSCs: in Veszprém, Szolnok and Nyíregyháza, and in 2022 in Debrecen and Eger. In the meantime, Victim Support Points have also been opened in local police stations in Salgótarján, Érd and Siófok. It is planned to have VSCs in all counties by 2025.

VSCs provide comprehensive, personalized, and situation-appropriate information; emotional support, with the involvement of a psychologist if needed, in a specially designed, secure patron room; referral to problem-solving agencies; assistance in asserting their interests. protected shelters and financial support.¹² Research related to VSCs suggests that, while they are regarded as an effective means of supporting victims, certain challenges may arise. For instance, victims may disengage from the system, particularly if they continue to maintain contact with the alleged perpetrators. Since participation in the process is voluntary, victims are sometimes persuaded to abandon the procedure. Additionally, when the initial questionnaire is conducted—typically by police officers—to assess the needs of victims, the information gathered can sometimes be inadequate. This may occur either because police

¹² Act LXXX of 2003 about legal support.



officers are not sufficiently trained in the specific methodologies or because victims themselves struggle to identify or articulate the relevant factors affecting their situation.¹³

From 1 January 2021, an opt-out system for direct access to victims has been introduced. Victims of intentional crimes of violence could notify the police to indicate whether they wanted to be contacted by the victim support service so that the assistance process could start as soon as possible.

The juvenile criminal court, established by Article VII of Law 1913, was abolished by the legislator through an amendment to the Criminal Procedure Act, which entered into force on 1 September 2011, as a consequence independent juvenile court doesn't exist anymore, nor does it work an exclusive jurisdiction rule, but instead courts of general jurisdiction have a special composition in cases involving juveniles. (The judges are not specialized exclusively for juveniles).

Table 3. Number and age group of registered victims in Hungary per year (2018-2023)

Age group	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 14 years of age	2688	2170	2698	2677	2631	2902
14-18 y	4658	3654	3612	3149	3247	3318

Source: [Central Statistical Office](#)

Practices, tools and methods applied in justice involving children, with a special focus on child victims of crime

There is no methodology or guideline nor clear practice how the child's capability of forming his or her own views is assessed at all. It is a highly debatable matter of subject, and the practice of the courts are diverging very much.

¹³ De Coll, Ágnes - Molnár, Melinda: Összefoglaló tanulmány a BBa-5.4.5/10-2019-00001 számú „Komplex áldozatsegítési szolgáltatások az emberkereskedelem áldozatai részére” című projekt eredményeiről; Ministry of Interior, Budapest, 2022; 12, 23 pp.



For lawyers representing children in criminal proceedings, there are no government-organized or mandatory trainings. Three universities offer specialized postgraduate programmes in the field: Eötvös Loránd University a programme for experts and lawyers specialized in child rights (*gyermekjogi szakjogász és szakember*), while Pázmány Péter Catholic University and the University of Pécs programmes for lawyers specialized in juvenile justice (*fiatalkorúak ügyeinek szakjogásza*).

According to the National Office for the Judiciary (NOJ, Országos Bírósági Hivatal, OBH), *“Child-friendly justice is a justice system that promotes on the highest level the respect of the child’s rights, the child’s participation in every procedure, and the best interests of the child”*. In 2012, the OBH established a Child-friendly Justice Working Group with the objective to facilitate the assertion of the child's rights during legal procedures. The National Programme for Child-centred Justice has been operating in the court system since 2012, coordinated by the NOJ. Its aim is to ensure the highest possible level of respect for and effective enforcement of children’s rights and to promote the best interests of children in cases involving or affecting children. The programme also aims to ensure that judges whose proceedings involve children receive the training they need to do their daily job. The National Conference on Child-centred Justice is organized by the NOJ every November at the Hungarian Academy of Justice (MIA), with the topics of domestic violence and child abuse, on-line crimes against children, hearings of children.

In 2014, the OBH decision ruled that one of the main objectives of the National Office for the Judiciary's Child-friendly Justice Programme is to promote the interests of children in both civil (especially in family law) and criminal cases, so that they are treated in an age-appropriate manner, whether as witnesses, parties to the case, accused persons or victims of crime, and to improve the process of judges hearing cases involving minors as defined above.¹⁴ Later in 2020, the Children’s Rights Cabinet of the OBH was established with the No. 63. of 2020. OBH Decision,¹⁵ in accordance with the rules of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers' Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice. The Cabinet for Children’s Rights, with the help of a child psychology expert, has developed forms for notifying children according to their age in child-friendly language. The forms, which are available to all (but only to) judges, are recommendations for judges and are not compulsory, depending on the individual circumstances of the case. **FG1** participants agreed that authorities make some efforts to ensure their communication is more child-friendly. For instance, a judge might remove their robe and step down from the bench to engage directly with a child. However,

¹⁴ Az Országos Bírósági Hivatal Elnökének 274/2014. (VI. 27.) OBHE számú határozata a „Gyermekebarát Igazságszolgáltatás Munkacsoport” működéséről, a Bjt. 29. § (2) bekezdése alapján bíró kijelöléséről / Decision No. 274/2014. (VI. 27.) OBHE of the President of the National Office for the Judiciary

on the operation of the “Child-Friendly Justice Working Group” and the designation of judges

¹⁵ 63.SZ/2020. (V. 20.) OBHE határozat a Gyermekebarát Kabinet létrehozásáról.



one interviewee highlighted that the principle of respecting a child's right to be involved is often treated as fulfilled by merely sending lengthy and complex legal documents related to the procedure directly to the child. These documents are provided without explanation, summaries, or simplifications, making them difficult for children to understand (H9).

Article 4:171 (4) of the Civil Code¹⁶ was amended in 2022 concerning parental custody proceedings with the aim that the child who is capable of forming his or her own views shall be informed by the court that he or she may be heard.

A methodological guideline was published in 2016 by the Ministry of Human Capacities (*Emberi Erőforrások Minisztériuma, EMMI*) on the sector-neutral unified principles and methodology aiming the discovery and termination of child abuse in connection with the child protection signaling system.¹⁷ Furthermore, the institutional, operational and sectoral methodology for the investigation and management of cases of child and young adult abuse in child protection institutes, foster parent networks and correctional institutes was released by the Ministry of Human Capacities in 2018.

The Ministry of Human Capacities had introduced a professional guideline concerning the abuse of children.¹⁸ The professional guideline of EMMI on the tasks of the healthcare provider in case of the suspicion of a child's abuse or neglect which was published in the Health Official Gazette No 14/2020, deals with health-related tasks emerging from the signaling system in case of different forms of ill-treatment, abuse and neglect concerning children.

The clarity and application of protocols within healthcare and police services for handling cases involving children, including but not limited to victims, remain uncertain. While a protocol on child protection exists from the Ministry of the Interior, its usage and adherence are unclear (H6).

Police officers no longer directly select assigned attorneys for children. Instead, after the police contacts the bar association, where attorney applications are managed through the bar association, and assignments are made alphabetically, an attorney is assigned to the case. However, for specific cases, any attorney may be directly contacted and appointed as a guardian ad litem to manage the case (H3, H8). The Budapest Police Child-and Youth

¹⁶ Act V of 2013 on Civil Code. <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2013-5-00-00>

¹⁷ Methodological Guidance – Uniformed and sector-neutral principles and methodology on the operation of the child protection detection and signaling system aimed at recognizing and eliminating child abuse. <https://kk.gov.hu/download/e/60/c0000/A%20gyermek%20b%C3%A1ntalmaz%C3%A1s%C3%A1nak%20felismer%C3%A9s%C3%A9re%20%C3%A9s%20megsz%C3%BCntet%C3%A9s%C3%A9re%20ir%C3%A1nyul%C3%B3%20egys%C3%A9ges%20elvek%20%C3%A9s%20m%C3%B3dszertan.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://tegyesz.hu/storage/2020/02/Gyermekek%C3%A1ntalmaz%C3%A1s-kezel%C3%A9se-%C3%A9s-kivizsg%C3%A1l%C3%A1sa-m%C3%B3dszertan-2018.pdf>



Protection Unit (BRFK GYIVO) has developed a handbook emphasizing the importance of understanding victimhood, aiming to enhance the treatment and care of child victims (H8). In Barnahus-type centres, quality standards are upheld through the application of the NICD protocol and its variations, ensuring a systematic and child-centred approach to supporting victims (H10).

Best practices, guidelines and recommendations for lawyers when representing child victims of crime

No official guidelines or recommendations exist for lawyers; however, based on the interviews and focus group (FG) meetings, participants shared the following promising practices: during initial meetings with child clients, the focus should not be on the case itself or its details. Instead, the priority should be to build trust, demonstrate reliability, and understand the child's needs, background, story, and identity. The approach must vary depending on the child's history and the nature of the case. It is crucial to recognize early if one might not be the right representative. Trust is built by keeping promises and respecting cultural differences.

An NGO, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, employs a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) checklist to measure levels of traumatization (H5). The Hungarian Helsinki Committee has also developed a multidisciplinary regional training program within a project led by Fair Trials and in cooperation with the International Juvenile Justice Observatory and the Romanian NGO APADOR. This program aims to assist lawyers involved in criminal proceedings to provide effective support to children suspected of having a criminal record. The training manual addresses not only international (including EU) standards but also multidisciplinary knowledge, such as child psychology and neurobiology. It offers practice-oriented, experience-based guidance on supporting child suspects but is equally applicable in cases involving child victims.

Previously, experts working in children's homes or correctional facilities were invited to participate in training sessions as lecturers. This practice was effective, as these experts helped contextualize the challenges offender or victim children face, such as coming from disadvantaged social backgrounds and dealing with various prejudices. However, such experts are now invited less frequently to participate in training programs (H1).

A participant of **FG2** noted involvement in a project that developed a quality requirement system and guideline specifically for cases involving child suspects or accused individuals. This project aimed to establish criteria for lawyers and legal professionals to follow when handling such sensitive cases.



FG1 participants highlighted a shared expert Facebook group where training resources and news were shared. Unfortunately, this group is no longer active due to lack of funding, despite its wide participation and usefulness. **FG1** participants also discussed the interprofessional training sessions in Budapest's 13th district, where professionals from various fields participated. Initially, these trainings faced challenges due to the closed nature of existing systems, but over time, barriers were broken down. These sessions were deemed successful, as participants gained clarity on competency boundaries and how to support each other's work. Professionals in the field emphasized the importance of conducting training collaboratively.

In 2016, the Margit Schlachta National Institute of Social Policy published a handbook on the prevention and treatment of child abuse. The Institute also operates the Child Protection Hotline, which provides assistance to children and individuals at risk.

Legal chatbots designed to explain criminal law to children have shown promise, but their ethical implications and limitations require careful consideration. While the GDPR provides some guidelines for the use of chatbots, significant ethical and practical concerns remain. One key issue is ensuring that users, including children, fully understand who stores their data, how it is processed, and whether the chat content itself is treated as personal data. The language, tone, and style of chatbot interactions must be carefully designed to be age-appropriate and sensitive to the needs of child victims. There is also a need for clear protocols outlining how and when human intervention can occur during a chat, ensuring that support is available when required. Additionally, while chatbots can provide general or AI-generated information, they cannot fully account for the unique circumstances of each individual case. Finally, there is the matter of accountability, as chatbots cannot inherently bear responsibility for the accuracy or potential consequences of the information they share.

Challenges related to the application of child-friendly justice by lawyers, focusing on child victims of crime

The shortage of well-educated staff has proven to be a significant challenge in the child protection sector, as in other fields. The child protection service system is critically understaffed, with professionals reporting that they face numerous challenges and high expectations but lack resources, supervision, training, and adequate support (as highlighted in all three focus groups). For example, the Budapest Juvenile Correction Centre currently has 40 unfilled professional positions (**FG3**). Other correctional facilities also report numerous vacancies for essential roles such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and caretakers.



This is particularly concerning given that children and juveniles identified as offenders are often victims themselves.

The severity of staffing shortages varies across regions and disciplines, but the issue remains widespread. In state-run child protection institutions, the number of missing qualified employees has consistently been around 20% for an extended period.¹⁹ According to data from the Central Statistical Office, as of the end of 2022, there were 13,766 positions for professionals in child protection specialized care and detention institutions. Of these, 1,137 positions were vacant, representing an 8.3% staff shortage. This shortage has been exacerbated by the introduction of a new regulation in June 2024 requiring child protection workers to undergo a comprehensive aptitude test.²⁰ The assessment includes a 500-question questionnaire covering various aspects of the workers' personal and professional lives. Among other topics, it examines their standard of living, marital status, cohabitation arrangements (including with whom they live and for how long), and details about their dependents. Workers are also required to disclose information about their sexual life and orientation to a professional psychologist. Failure to complete this screening disqualifies them from continuing their employment in the sector.

The main challenge is that many professionals with different educational backgrounds shall cooperate and work together in the child protection system. The importance of education of the child's rights is often underestimated. The children's needs are much in the focus of several curricula. There is no special training or education in the field of child protection which would cover all professional actors. Child psychology is missing from the curricula of pedagogy, law, policing and law enforcement studies, which is a crucial point, which hinders later the possible interrogations.

There is no regular training on issues related to the identification, referral, and intervention for children delivered to all specialists involved in this area. According to Decree of 9/2000 (VIII. 4.) of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on the training of professional employees in the field of social care, child welfare basic care and child protection specialized care and persons on the field of personal caretaking and on the social special exam, the employees are obliged to attend trainings. These trainings include compulsory general training about relevant competences and training connected to certain positions. These latter provide

¹⁹ Written statement of the Directorate-General for Social Affairs and Child Protection for the 2023 Child protection mapping (31.05.2023)

²⁰ Government Decree 191/2024. (VII. 8.) on the examination of psychological aptitude of persons employed in child protection institutions (191/2024. (VII. 8.) Korm. rendelet a gyermekvédelmi intézményben foglalkoztatott személyek pszichológiai alkalmassági vizsgálatáról), <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2024-191-20-22>.



knowledge about specific methods. However, there is no common training for professionals involved in child welfare and child protection.

A key systemic issue is the lack of a unified, nationwide practice for implementing the wide range of regulations and laws concerning children and young people. For example, while larger police stations or courts in urban areas, particularly in the capital, often provide child-friendly hearing rooms and access to specially trained professionals, such resources are frequently unavailable in smaller towns or rural areas where conditions are less favorable. This disparity persists even in cases involving juvenile offenders, with urban areas generally offering better facilities and support than rural locations (**H1**).

One significant challenge is the lack of awareness among justice system professionals—such as police officers, prosecutors, and others—regarding the full range of options and resources available under the law. Special training is needed to educate professionals on tools such as mediation processes, special procedures for working with children, and the use of child-friendly hearing rooms (**H1**).

Another issue is the shortage of specialists specifically trained to handle juvenile cases. In the past, juvenile judges were highly skilled and specialized, but today, judges often manage a variety of cases, diluting their expertise in juvenile matters. This concern was confirmed during **FG1** discussions.

Additionally, addressing crime prevention and victimization with children presents a complex challenge. Determining how and when to discuss such topics depends on the child's age, development, and understanding. Certain risk factors increase the likelihood of some children becoming victims or offenders. However, there is no clear strategy for effectively protecting children in high-risk environments or situations, leaving this as an unresolved issue requiring urgent attention (**FG1**).

It is important to emphasize that criminology recognizes a fundamental principle: there is a significant overlap between offenders and victims, particularly among disadvantaged children. Many offenders later become victims, and in many cases, offenders are themselves victims. This raises the critical question of how the system perceives and treats these individuals. Unfortunately, these young people are often stigmatized as offenders and therefore do not receive the care and treatment that victims are entitled to. Working with such children is exceptionally challenging and requires thorough preparation and expertise (**H1, H3**). A notable example of this issue arises in cases of sexual exploitation. Victims are often not identified as such by the system but are instead labeled as offenders, particularly when they are involved in street prostitution. While there has been some progress in changing this perspective, significant challenges remain in ensuring these victims are treated appropriately and supported (**FG1**).

Another critical challenge is the high latency of abuse. Victims often come forward only years after the abuse has occurred, which complicates the process of proving their cases. In some



instances, reports have even been rejected by the police, citing the statute of limitations (FG1).

Several critical challenges continue to hinder the effectiveness of the child protection system, as described as follows.

Distrust Toward Authorities

Refugee children, for example, are often escorted to shelters by police officers, which they perceive as a form of punishment. This creates confusion and uncertainty about whom they can trust (FG1).

High Turnover in the Child Protection Sector

Child protection institutions face persistent staff shortages, often leading to unqualified or untrained individuals working with traumatized children. This situation further exacerbates the challenges:

- Some individuals within the system fail to perform their roles adequately or do not engage effectively with the children, undermining trust and the perceived reliability of support.
- There is a pressing need for more child rights representatives, as the current number is insufficient to meet demand.
- Professionals working with abused children must undergo serious self-awareness training to address their biases and enhance their capacity to handle such sensitive cases (FG1).

Lack of Restorative Procedures

Key restorative approaches—such as mediation and family conferences—are absent from the system, despite their potential to provide a holistic view of the family situation and facilitate constructive resolutions.

Burden of Reporting

The responsibility of reporting suspected abuse or endangerment often falls on a single individual, such as a health visitor, which places a significant burden on them. Reporting, notifying parents, and managing the consequences are overwhelming tasks, sometimes resulting in a reluctance to act. Efforts are being made to alleviate this burden, such as delegating court representation to legal representatives from central authorities rather than the reporting individual.

However, internal solutions, particularly in schools, are frequently preferred. These involve discussing the situation with parents (who may themselves be the perpetrators), but no further steps are taken. This occurs due to various factors:

- The process is perceived as burdensome.



- A lack of expertise prevents proper handling of the case.
- Fear of misinterpretation or retaliation discourages action.

Addressing these systemic challenges requires improved training, clearer protocols, and greater institutional support to ensure the protection of vulnerable children.

The participants identified several critical challenges that need to be addressed within the child protection and justice systems:

Lack of Knowledge

There is a widespread lack of understanding regarding children's rights, child psychology (including appropriate communication techniques), and child development among professionals.

Emerging Online Threats

Many new types of online acts and offenses are not always formally addressed as crimes but have profound and harmful effects on children, leading to victimization. Examples include sexting, doxxing, grooming, and activities involving new AI technologies such as deepfake content (H2, H11).

Trust and Child-Centered Approaches

Establishing trust and adopting child-centered approaches are crucial but not systematically taught to professionals. These skills often require a multidisciplinary approach, integrating expertise from legal, psychological, and social work fields (all interviews).

Systemic Issues

The child protection system faces significant structural problems, including burnout, underfunding, and high turnover rates. These challenges leave many professionals demotivated or prompt them to leave the field entirely. A major setback was the abolishment of separate juvenile courts in 2011, which previously had specialized and trained judges (all interviews).

Inadequate Resources

While specialized interrogation facilities, such as Barnahus-type rooms, exist in locations like Budapest (Fővárosi TEGYESZ), Gyula, and Szombathely, they are underutilized due to a lack of awareness and insufficient implementation (H10, H5, H6, H7).

Lack of Effective Participation of Child Victims

Although initiatives exist to ensure that children can express their views and actively participate in judicial proceedings, these are not effectively implemented in practice. As a result, children's voices are often overlooked during legal processes (FG2).



Specific practical problems identified by participants

1. Interrogation Practices

- **Re-traumatization and Insensitivity:**

Many interrogations are re-traumatizing due to inappropriate and insensitive questioning by untrained professionals, particularly police officers and sometimes judges (H5, H6, H7). This is compounded by the lack of trauma-conscious techniques, as many professionals lack the necessary background knowledge or training (H4, H9, FG1).

- **Challenges in Trauma and Stress Management:**

Children involved in judicial procedures often experience trauma or stress, affecting their ability to participate effectively. Communication barriers, such as legal language that is difficult for children to understand, exacerbate the problem (H4). Participants highlighted that the UN CRC emphasizes the need for adults to act in the best interests of the child, recommending that explanations should be repeated and adjusted until the child comprehends the situation (FG2).

- **Parental or Guardian Involvement:**

Parents or legal guardians are required to participate in legal proceedings, but their involvement can sometimes be a barrier. For example, in cases of domestic abuse, the non-abusing parent may be reluctant to initiate proceedings if they might also face liability (H3, FG2).

- **Inconsistent Use of Experts:**

Although expert involvement in interrogations is legally permitted and highly recommended, it remains rare in practice (H7, H5).

- **Children's Difficulty in Disclosing Abuse:**

Many children feel shame and lack the vocabulary to describe their abuse, hindering their ability to disclose it fully. This is particularly evident in cases of sexual abuse (H7, H10, H11).

- **Variable Empathy Levels:**

Sensitivity in handling cases, especially those involving sexual abuse, varies widely. Some professionals adopt overly clinical or dismissive approaches, which can hinder the child's ability to communicate (all interviews).

- **Lack of Systematic Training:**

Interrogation quality depends heavily on the individual professional's preparedness and knowledge. Although some relevant topics are covered in law schools, no



systematic training exists across professions to ensure consistent standards (**all interviews**).

- **Victims' Reluctance to Initiate Proceedings:**

Many child victims, particularly in cases of sexual abuse or human trafficking, are hesitant to file reports or participate in proceedings. Explaining the importance of protecting their rights requires careful mental preparation, especially when the perpetrator is a family member. These challenges are magnified for children in foster or specialized care, where fears of retaliation or unstable living conditions may lead to behaviours like running away (**FG1**). Refugee children frequently flee to Western Europe before proceedings can even begin (**FG1**).

- **Repetition of Interviews:**

Despite efforts to limit the number of interviews a child victim undergoes, repeated questioning is common and can exacerbate trauma. This is further complicated by the lack of appropriate interview rooms and the separation of roles between interviewers and experts, leading to inefficiencies and prolonged sessions (**FG1**).

- **Medical Examinations:**

There is a severe shortage of pediatric gynecologists, making it difficult to ensure that examinations are conducted by professionals of the same gender. Additionally, most pediatric gynecologists operate in private healthcare, creating further barriers (**FG1**).

- **Post-Judgment Support:**

The emotional and psychological needs of child victims are often neglected after a verdict is delivered. Continued support is critical, particularly when the perpetrator is a relative, as victims often blame themselves for the abuse and require assistance to process their trauma (**FG1**).

2. Information Accessibility

One of the key challenges in child protection and justice systems is the lack of accessible, child-friendly information, which creates confusion and anxiety among children navigating legal procedures and outcomes (**all interviews**).

- **Communication Gaps:**

Legal procedures are often not explained in ways children can easily understand, both in terms of language and length. For instance, children lack adequate information about the process itself, its stages, and the potential short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes (**H4**). This prevents them from making sense of the procedure in relation to their own lives and diminishes their motivation to participate meaningfully.



- **Lack of Awareness of Rights and Duties:**
Many children, parents, and even professionals are unaware of children’s rights and duties, highlighting a systemic gap in knowledge dissemination (H6, H7, H11). Parents also struggle to comprehend legal processes, limiting their ability to effectively support their children through them (H6, H7).
- **Complexity of the Legal System:**
The complexity and intimidating nature of the legal system presents significant barriers to children. Without proper support, children find it nearly impossible to navigate the system. Participants of **FG2** emphasized that this issue is compounded by the absence of internal procedures, particularly in schools.
 - Schools rarely have codified procedures or adequate training to handle internal investigations. Instead, they bear the burden of determining what happened and managing the child’s well-being and trauma.
 - Police, as the primary investigative authority, generally discourage school staff from conducting inquiries due to concerns about tainting a child’s testimony through inappropriate questioning.
- **Power Dynamics and Conformity:**
Children often cannot assert their rights independently, even if they are aware of them, as adults dominate the systems of power. Adults often design these systems to suit their own needs and stability, frequently at the expense of addressing children’s needs. This creates an environment where children feel compelled to conform, avoid conflict, and suppress their own concerns. Many abused children fear “causing trouble” and instead seek help from anonymous hotlines rather than approaching parents, schools, or law enforcement (FG1).
- **Prevention vs. Procedural Priorities:**
Prevention of re-traumatization is critically important, especially for vulnerable children. However, procedural complexities and systemic issues often overshadow its prioritization, leaving children without adequate preventive support mechanisms (FG1).

3. Case Management

The management of cases involving child victims faces several systemic challenges, often prioritizing procedural outcomes over the child’s best interests.

- **Children as “Subjects” of Legal Procedures:**
Children are frequently treated as passive subjects in legal proceedings rather than individuals with distinct needs and rights. The focus of professionals often shifts



toward achieving case outcomes, such as gathering evidence, rather than prioritizing the well-being of the child (H9).

- **Insufficient Collaboration Among Duty-Bearers:**

Despite legal requirements for information sharing under Act XXXI of 1997 on Child Protection (CPA), collaboration between key actors—such as police, social service providers, and guardians—is often inadequate (**all interviews**).

- Effective collaboration tends to depend on personal relationships and informal networks rather than the legal framework, making it inconsistent and variable.
- The ‘child protection signaling system,’ which mandates cooperation and information exchange between professionals, often fails to function effectively in practice.

- **Challenges in Identifying and Supporting Victims:**

Institutions are often reluctant to investigate cases of abuse, contributing to high latency in identifying victims. Professionals may struggle to contact child victims, further complicating efforts to address abuse (H4).

- **Isolation Among Professionals:**

FG1 participants highlighted that professionals in the field often work in silos, lacking understanding or insight into other specialties. This isolation can result in misdirected questions or consulting the wrong expert. Collaborative case discussions are essential for sharing observations and gaining a comprehensive understanding of a child's situation.

- **Need for Specialized Training:**

It is crucial for police officers, prosecutors, and judges to receive education on children’s mental and physical development (**FG1**). For instance:

- Recognizing why a 12-year-old may not answer every question or may reframe their trauma due to their developmental stage.
- Understanding how a child with limited education might express themselves differently.
- Addressing common preconceptions about physical signs of violence, which are often not detectable, to avoid bias in investigations.
-

- **Tensions Between Institutions:**

There is frequent tension between police, basic care services, and guardianship offices. These tensions arise because cases often run parallel but with time delays, creating overlaps in responsibilities and competencies (**all FGs**).



- Police investigations are often slow, while social services must continue their work in the interim. For example, if a report involves the father, the presumption of innocence applies, leading to procedural ambiguities and delays that complicate coordination.
- Social workers may be instructed not to speak to the child until the investigation progresses, leaving gaps in support and furthering tensions between sectors.

Addressing these systemic issues requires a holistic approach that prioritizes the child's needs, ensures proper training for all professionals, and fosters seamless collaboration between stakeholders.

4. Judicial and Institutional Failures

The judicial and institutional systems face significant shortcomings that undermine their ability to effectively support and protect child victims (**all participants**).

- **Lack of a Child-Centered Approach:**
Many judges, particularly younger or less experienced ones, fail to adopt a child-centered approach in their work. Hearings are often rushed and ineffective, neglecting the unique needs of child participants (**H7, H9**).
- **Skepticism Toward Children's Credibility:**
Widespread skepticism regarding the credibility of children discourages them from reporting abuse and erodes trust in the system (**H7, H6**).
- **Distrust of Authorities:**
The lack of supportive responses from some police officers, stations, or other authorities can severely damage the trust of child victims. Instances where reports are not taken seriously or are dismissed entirely leave children feeling unsupported and further alienated from the system (**H2, H6**).
- **Limited Meaningful Involvement of Children:**
Despite existing standards and guidelines, the meaningful, age-appropriate, and child-centered involvement of children in judicial processes remains uncommon (**H9**).
- **Gaps in Guardianship Office Procedures:**
Guardianship offices lack formal connections with law firms for cases requiring legal representation. Instead, they often select lawyers or firms based on familiarity or personal networks rather than standardized criteria, which can compromise the quality of representation.



- **Inadequate Knowledge Among Legal Professionals:**

Many lawyers lack sufficient understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) and child-friendly justice standards. This knowledge gap extends to the practical implementation of these standards, limiting their ability to provide effective and child-sensitive legal assistance.

5. Underrepresented and Vulnerable Groups

Certain groups of children, including LGBTQI+ youth, migrant children, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds—particularly Roma children—face systemic discrimination that exacerbates their vulnerability (**all interviews**).

- **Systemic Discrimination:**

Victim support centers often provide inconsistent help, with accessibility being a recurring issue (**H5**). Children from marginalized groups frequently encounter stigma and discrimination, which negatively impact their confidence and willingness to engage with judicial processes. For instance, Roma families often distrust law enforcement due to fears of retaliation or having their children taken away, making them less likely to report crimes. Investigations involving Roma children are sometimes conducted differently—or not at all—due to stereotypes and prejudice, particularly in rural areas (**FG2, FG1**).

- **Children with Disabilities:**

Children living with disabilities often experience neglect or abuse, particularly in institutional care, with high latency in identifying such cases. The system lacks adequate preparation to address the needs of children with disabilities, compounded by a lack of training and specialists focused on these groups. Children with mild intellectual disabilities, behavioral disorders, or special educational needs are particularly vulnerable as they may not fully understand the consequences of their actions or the seriousness of their circumstances. This is crucial in cases involving young offenders, where cognitive ability must be assessed to determine their understanding of their behavior and its impact (**H1, FG3**).

- **Cultural Barriers and Stigma:**

Marginalized children often lack the support needed to navigate the judicial process, compounded by systemic barriers. Among the most deprived groups, both children and their parents may struggle to understand legal processes. Even well-educated parents face challenges when interpreting information about children with special needs. Understanding cultural contexts, such as the higher latency of reporting abuse



in Roma communities and the role of shame, is essential for effective case management (FG2, FG1).

- **Refugee Children:**

Refugee children face multiple layers of discrimination and are often left without access to protection due to the lack of a meaningful asylum system in Hungary. Deportations occur swiftly, with no possibility of appealing police decisions. Many refugee children flee to Western Europe before proceedings can take place, further complicating their protection (FG1).

- **Children in Foster Care:**

Foster children are in an especially vulnerable position, with running away being a common behavior. Despite their vulnerability, these children are often not considered a priority, and police rarely search for them when they go missing (FG1).

- **Challenges for Male Victims:**

In cases of sexual offenses, male victims face unique barriers. Boys often feel ashamed and afraid to report abuse, making it difficult to build trust and ensure their protection (FG1).

6. Lack of Access to Various Specialized Services

Access to essential specialized services remains a significant challenge, particularly for vulnerable children.

- **Limited Availability of Legal Aid and Professional Support:**

Access to legal aid and professional services, including therapy, is severely lacking. While children in state care theoretically have better access due to the responsibilities of child protection guardians and children's rights representatives, the reality is hindered by excessive workloads and insufficient resources.

- Child protection guardians are often responsible for 30–40 children each, making it difficult to provide individualized attention.
- There are only 19 children's rights representatives nationwide for approximately 24,000 children living in state care.
- For children living in families, no official information is available on their awareness of their rights and duties, though it is presumed to be minimal.

- **Intercultural Mediation and Language Barriers:**

The lack of quality interpreters and intercultural mediation services further exacerbates accessibility issues, particularly for children from migrant or minority



backgrounds. These barriers hinder effective communication and can leave children unable to fully understand or participate in legal and social processes.

- **Lack of Specialized Tools for Disabled Children:**

The system lacks the necessary tools to facilitate the interrogation or support of disabled children. For example, tools like the ‘eye-mouse,’ which are widely used in countries like Scotland and are not excessively costly, could significantly improve accessibility and communication for children with disabilities.

7. Lack of Collaboration Among Different Authorities Involved in the Procedure

Participants of **FG1 and FG2** emphasized that collaboration among key stakeholders—such as police, healthcare providers, social services, psychologists, and social workers—is essential but often fraught with challenges. While multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional cooperation is recognized as critical to effectively addressing the needs of children involved in judicial matters, several barriers hinder its success:

- **Communication Barriers:**

Ineffective communication between stakeholders often results in misunderstandings or delays in action, complicating efforts to provide timely and effective support for children.

- **Differing Priorities:**

Each sector tends to focus on its own objectives, which may not always align with the best interests of the child. This lack of shared priorities undermines cohesive action.

Proposed Solutions to Address Challenges

To overcome the systemic and practical issues in child protection and judicial processes, participants proposed the following targeted solutions, focusing on improving communication, collaboration, training, and cultural attitudes toward child-centered practices:

1. Improved Communication and Collaboration

- Establish clear communication channels across sectors (e.g., police, healthcare, social services, psychologists, and guardianship offices) to ensure timely information sharing and aligned efforts.
- Develop formal frameworks and protocols that define the roles and responsibilities of each actor, reducing overlaps and confusion.



- Organize workshops and cross-sector training sessions to foster cooperation and mutual understanding among professionals.

2. Training and Professional Development

- Introduce comprehensive training programs on child-centered methods and sensitive communication techniques tailored to each profession (e.g., law enforcement, medical staff, legal practitioners).
- Provide interdisciplinary training sessions involving experiential experts to ensure professionals understand the broader needs of children.
- Offer specialized training for medical professionals to recognize signs of abuse (e.g., subtle symptoms that could indicate sexual abuse) and to handle cases with empathy and precision. Practical tools like checklists are recommended instead of lengthy protocols.
- Expand training on the child protection signaling system to enhance early intervention and provide supervision to reduce burnout among frontline workers.

3. Child-Friendly Communication

- Develop and enforce guidelines for age-appropriate legal communication using clear, simple language to ensure children understand proceedings.
- Train practitioners to actively listen, validate children's feelings, and create a safe, supportive atmosphere for dialogue.
- Use visual aids and simplified explanations to make complex legal processes accessible to children.

4. Support Systems

- Increase access to therapy and specialized trauma professionals for children.
- Reduce guardian workloads to improve the quality of care for children in state care.
- Ensure children feel safe and supported during legal and care processes through practical interventions, such as having psychologists present during interrogations.
- Provide psychological support and counseling to help children process trauma and emotional distress.

5. Cultural Change and Inclusion

- Foster a default position of belief and support toward children to reduce skepticism and mistrust.
- Mandate the involvement of trained specialists during child interrogations, ensuring no child is interviewed alone.
- Expand interpreter and intercultural mediation services to ensure effective communication for children from diverse linguistic or cultural backgrounds.

6. Awareness Raising



- Increase awareness of children's rights among children, parents, and professionals through campaigns and educational programs.
- Educate children in an age-appropriate manner about risks, including victimization and delinquency, to empower them to seek help.
- Help professionals understand each other's roles and competencies to improve inter-agency cooperation. For example, psychologists should understand law enforcement needs to prevent unnecessary interviews, and police should recognize the importance of child-sensitive settings for questioning.



Training needs of lawyers

To better serve child victims and address systemic challenges, lawyers require targeted training programs that focus on trauma-informed care, effective communication, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

1. Trauma-Informed Care and Child Psychology

- **Understanding Trauma:** Lawyers need to be trained on the impact of trauma on child development and victimhood, emphasizing care tailored to the child's needs to promote healing and resilience (H5, FG1, FG2, H4).
- **Child-Friendly Communication:** Legal professionals must adopt best practices for interacting with children, ensuring they feel safe and supported throughout the process. This includes learning techniques for explaining complex legal concepts in ways children can understand (all interviews and FGs).
- **Balancing Roles in the Legal Process:** Participants highlighted that while defense lawyers could play a crucial role in supporting children, legal procedures are often dominated by prosecutors, requiring a shift toward more balanced practices (FG2).

2. Improved Approach to Sensitive Cases

- **Empathy and Contextual Communication:** Lawyers should learn to build rapport with children by first creating a safe environment before delving into sensitive topics. Gradual disclosure and respecting the child's comfort levels are essential (H6).
- **Empowering the Child:** Training should emphasize empowering children by clearly explaining the situation, potential consequences, choices, and available support. Lawyers must ensure that children feel in control by allowing them to set the pace and take breaks as needed.
- **Non-Formal Methods:** Role-playing and interactive activities, rather than traditional teaching, can be effective for addressing issues like abuse prevention, recognition, and treatment.

3. Effective Communication with Children

- Lawyers need to prioritize clarity and simplicity when explaining legal procedures and rules. This ensures children understand their situation and can participate effectively (H8, H9, H10, H5, FG2).

4. Handling Vulnerable Children

- **Special Focus on Marginalized Groups:** Training should address the specific needs of minority children (e.g., Roma children) and children with disabilities. This includes understanding their protective characteristics and adapting approaches to handle their cases appropriately (FG3, H10, H4).



5. Child Development and Anatomy

- **Developmental Phases:** Lawyers must understand normal developmental phases in children to adapt their language and techniques accordingly.
- **Basic Anatomy Knowledge:** Awareness of what can be expected during medical examinations, including the role of child gynecologists, is essential for ensuring proper case handling.

6. Workshops and Interdisciplinary Training

- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Training programs should bring together professionals from various fields—lawyers, social workers, psychologists, and medical professionals—to foster mutual understanding and collaboration.
- **Focus on Substantive and Procedural Law:** Training should ensure that all stakeholders understand the rights and obligations during legal procedures.
- **Interactive Training Methods:** In-person sessions with opportunities for Q&A are preferred over online formats. These provide a platform for professionals to discuss and clarify specific challenges.
- **Streamlining Information:** While much information exists, it is scattered and difficult to access. Training programs should consolidate relevant knowledge for different professions, tailoring content to their specific needs.



Conclusions

Child protection systems face significant challenges that undermine their ability to effectively support vulnerable children. Among these are systemic issues such as insufficient collaboration among stakeholders, lack of trauma-informed practices, and inadequate access to specialized services. Legal and institutional processes often prioritize procedural outcomes over the best interests of the child, treating them as subjects rather than individuals. Furthermore, marginalized groups—including Roma children, children with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ youth—face systemic discrimination and barriers to accessing justice, exacerbated by cultural stigma and a lack of tailored support. Refugee children are particularly vulnerable, with limited protection due to systemic gaps in the asylum process. Persistent staff shortages, high workloads, and insufficient training compound these challenges, leaving professionals underprepared to address the complex needs of child victims.

To address these gaps, participants proposed solutions centered on improving training, communication, and collaboration. Trauma-informed care, child psychology, and effective communication techniques were highlighted as essential training areas for professionals, particularly lawyers, police officers, and medical staff. Interdisciplinary workshops and cross-sector training sessions can foster mutual understanding and cooperation among stakeholders, while formalized protocols can clarify roles and responsibilities. Establishing child-friendly procedures, simplifying legal communication, and creating safe environments for children are crucial to ensuring their active participation and protection. Specialized resources, such as interpreters, trauma therapists, and medical tools for children with disabilities, are also necessary to ensure equity in the system.

The training session – which should build on case studies, non-formal learning methods, instead of formal/frontal presentations - should aim for a cultural shift which is essential to prioritize child-centered practices and foster trust between children, their families, and institutions. Awareness-raising campaigns about children's rights, coupled with efforts to reduce skepticism and discrimination, can empower children and encourage them to seek help. By addressing systemic barriers and focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable, the child protection and judicial systems can create a more inclusive and effective framework that ensures the safety, dignity, and well-being of all children involved in legal or care processes.



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Annex 1. - Legal Framework of Hungarian Child Protection

Legislation	Date passed	Child protection areas covered
Fundamental Law of Hungary (<i>Magyarország Alaptörvénye</i>)	21/05/2011	It contains the main pillars of the Hungarian legal system including child protection.
Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and the administration of guardianship affairs (1997. évi XXXI. törvény a gyermekek védelméről és a gyámügyi igazgatásról)	08/05/1997	It is the main and primary legal document of the child protection sector.
Act XXVI of 1998 on the Rights and Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (1998. évi XXVI. törvény a fogyatékos személyek jogairól és esélyegyenlőségük biztosításáról)	01/01/1999	It is a legal document on the rights of disabled persons aiming to provide equal opportunities. Independent chapters deal with e.g., the right to rehabilitation, the realization of rehabilitation and the National Disability Program.
Act CXXV of 2003 on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities (2003. évi CXXV. törvény az egyenlő bánásmódról és az esélyegyenlőség előmozdításáról)	28/12/2003	The Act focuses on the implementation of equal treatment and the fight against discrimination.
Act CLXXXV of 2010 on media services and mass communication (2010. évi CLXXXV. törvény a médiaszolgáltatásokról és a tömegkommunikációról)	31/12/2010	The Act contains provisions about the protection of children in its general part.
Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education (2011. évi CXC. törvény a nemzeti köznevelésről)	29/12/2011	Important rules concerning public education affecting all children are included in the Act.
Act No. CCXI of 2011 on the Protection of Families (2011. évi CCXI. törvény a családok védelméről)	31/12/2011	The aim of the Act is to strengthen the importance of families in the society.
Act CLXXIX of 2011 on the rights of nationalities (2011. évi CLXXIX. törvény a nemzetiségek jogairól)	19/12/2011	The Act contains certain rights of children belonging to national minorities.



Act II of 2012 on infractions, infraction procedure and the infraction record system (2012. évi II. törvény a szabálysértésekről, a szabálysértési eljárásról és a szabálysértési nyilvántartási rendszerről)	06/01/2012	It contains rules on infraction liability, the statute of limitations regarding liability to punishment for an infraction, the legal consequences applicable to infraction, provisions on juveniles and the infraction procedure.
Act C of 2012 on Criminal Code (2012. évi C. törvény a Büntető Törvénykönyvről)	13/08/2012	It contains among others, provisions on juveniles (Chapter XI), offences against human freedom (Chapter XVIII), criminal offences against the freedom of sexual life and sexual morality (Chapter XIX), criminal offences violating the interests of children and criminal offences against family (Chapter XX).
Act V of 2013 on the Civil Code (2013. évi V. törvény a Polgári Törvénykönyvről)	26/02/2013	Book IV (Family Law) contains all family law related regulations which are closely connected to child protection.
Act CXXX of 2016 on the Code of Civil Procedure (2016. évi CXXX. törvény a polgári perrendtartásról)	02/12/2016	It contains procedural rules concerning personal status (including cases connected to family law), as well.
Act XC of 2017 on the Code of Criminal Proceedings (2017. évi XC. törvény a büntetőeljárásról)	26/06/2017	Chapter XCV of the Act regulates the juvenile criminal procedure.
Act CXVIII of 2017 on regulations to be applied in judicial noncontentious civil proceedings and certain judicial noncontentious civil proceedings (2017. évi CXVIII. törvény a bírósági polgári nemperes eljárásokban alkalmazandó szabályokról, valamint egyes bírósági nemperes eljárásokról)	12/10/2017	There are several non-contentious civil proceedings closely connected to family law, children and even child protection.
Act XXVIII of 2017 on private international law (2017. évi XXVIII. törvény a nemzetközi magánjogról)	02/01/2018	It contains the main private international law related provisions concerning children.
Act CXXXV of 2005 on Assistance to Victims of Crime and State Compensation (A bűncselekmények áldozatainak segítéséről és az állami	06/12/2005	It contains the main regulations, institutions and services available for victims of criminal crimes.



kárenyhítésről szóló 2005. évi CXXXV. Törvény)		
149/1997. (IX. 10.) Governmental Decree on the guardianship offices and on the proceedings of child protection and guardianship cases (149/1997. (IX. 10.) Korm. Rendelet a gyámhatóságokról, valamint a gyermekvédelmi és gyámügyi eljárásról)	10/09/1997	It is one of the main legal sources of several child protection issues. It contains rules on guardianship authority, the proceedings and the structure of child protection.
331/2006. (XII. 23.) Governmental Decree on the roles and responsibilities in child protection and guardianship affairs and on the authority and jurisdiction of guardianship offices (331/2006. (XII. 23.) Korm. Rendelet a gyermekvédelmi és gyámügyi feladat- és hatáskörök ellátásáról, valamint a gyámhatóság szervezetéről és illetékességéről)	23/12/2006	It is essential for the overview of child protection as it regulates the tasks and competences of different institutions involved in child protection.
381/2016. (XII. 2.) Governmental Decree on Integrated Judicial Protection Service (381/2016. (XII. 2.) Korm. rendelet az Integrált Jogvédelmi Szolgálatról)	01/01/2017	The Integrated Judicial Protection Service performs tasks on the field of representing the child's interests.
390/2017. (XII. 13.) Governmental Decree on the National Registration of the Names of Child Protection Experts and Names of Social Policy Experts (390/2017. (XII. 13.) Korm. Rendelet az Országos Gyermekvédelmi Szakértői Névjegyzékről és az Országos Szociálpolitikai Szakértői Névjegyzékről)	01/01/2018	It is a legal document on the registration of experts involved in child protection cases.
12/2018 (VI. 12.) Decree of the Ministry of Justice on the regulations concerning certain criminal procedural acts and persons taking part in criminal	01/07/2018	It contains rules on the regulations concerning certain criminal procedural acts and persons taking part in criminal proceedings.



<p>proceeding (12/2018. (VI. 12.) IM rendelet az egyes büntetőeljárási cselekményekre és a büntetőeljárásban részt vevő személyekre vonatkozó szabályokról)²¹</p>		
<p>15/1998 (IV. 30.) Decree of the Ministry of Public Welfare on the tasks and operational conditions of child welfare and child protection services and professionals providing personal care (15/1998. (IV. 30.) NM rendelet a személyes gondoskodást nyújtó gyermekjóléti, gyermekvédelmi intézmények, valamint személyek szakmai feladatairól és működésük feltételeiről)</p>	30/04/1998	Detailed rules on the personal care providers functioning in the field of child protection.
<p>29/2003. (V. 20.) Decree of the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs on the professional and exam requirements of substitute parents, foster parents and families providing day care and on counselling and preparation training prior to adoption (29/2003 (V. 20.) ESzCsM Rendelet a helyettes szülők, a nevelőszülők, a családi napközit működtetők képzésének szakmai és vizsgakövetelményeiről, valamint az örökbefogadás előtti tanácsadásról és felkészítő tanfolyamról)</p>	20/05/2003	It contains the training requirements for foster parents and prospective adoptive parents.



Annex 2. - National authorities and institutions involved in child protection

Name of the body	Level (national/regional/local).	Area of responsibility and roles in child protection (for example coordination, legislation, policy making, training, monitoring, financing, implementing)
Ministry of Interior	national	It is responsible for family policy, health insurance, child policy, youth policy, child protection, youth protection, education, social policy, equal opportunity in social affairs.
Ministry of Innovation and Technology	national	It is responsible for adoption and women's policy.
Directorate-General for Social Affairs and Child Protection (Szociális és Gyermekvédelmi Főigazgatóság)	national	According to the Act III of 1993 on social directorate and social affairs ⁹² and Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and the administration of guardianship affairs ⁹³ it is responsible for certain assigned tasks among others if functions as the maintainer of penitentiaries in Hungary.
Margit Slachta National Social Policy Institute (Slachta Margit Nemzeti Szociálpolitikai Intézet)	national	It functions as a knowledge and methodological centre for social, child-welfare and child protection affairs.
National Child Protection Service (Országos Gyermekvédelmi Szakszolgálat)	national	It is maintained by the Directorate of Social Affairs and Child Protection. It consists of 20 institutions, one in Budapest and there are 19 Regional Child Protection Services (in the 19 counties of Hungary). It represents the interests of children independently of their state care and promotes equal opportunities for children living in Hungary.
Regional Child Protection Service (Területi)	regional	There is a Regional Child Protection Service in Budapest and in every county too. They perform their tasks on the field of social work which is closely connected



Gyermekvédelmi Szakszolgálat)		to the authoritative tasks regulated by the and Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and the administration of guardianship affairs ⁹⁴ .
Government Offices	regional	These are the regional state administrative organs. Budapest and the 19 counties have its own Government Office. They exercise coordinative, authoritative, proposing and consultative tasks.
Local Offices of the Capital and County Government Offices	local	There are local offices under the 19 County Government Offices and the Capital Government Office. The local offices work in the concerned county's towns and the districts of Budapest as the Capital Government Office. The local offices are set up by departments where one of these departments is responsible for tasks related child protection and guardianship.
Guardianship Authority	regional and local	The tasks of the Guardianship Authority are exercised by three different organs, namely the Government Office, the Local Office of the Government Offices and the notaries (who are in a leader position in the mayor's offices).
Family and Child Welfare Centre (Család- és Gyermekjóléti Központ)	subregional	A county (megye) is divided to territorial units called districts (járás). The capitals of districts are responsible for Family and Child Welfare Centres in the county concerned.
Family and Child Welfare Service (Család- és Gyermekjóléti Szolgálat)	local	Every local self-government has got its Family and Child Welfare Service.
Office of the Commission for Fundamental Rights of Hungary – Ombudsman	national	It has an independent Children's Rights Unit of the Department of Equal Opportunities and Children's Rights.
Centres for Victim Support	subregional	Centres are available in Budapest (since 2017), in Miskolc, in Szombathely (2018), in Pécs, Szeged, Kecskemét (2020), in Veszprém, Szolnok, Nyíregyháza (2021), in Debrecen, in Eger (2022). Aims are to open centres in each county by 2025.





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