

Child Protection Working Group Meeting Minutes

12 January, 2023

[Recording of the meeting](#)

[Presentation](#)

Agenda

1. Brief introduction of the CP SWG and aim/result of the meeting
2. Presentation by Monika Szarvak, Child Welfare Department, Ministry of Interior: The Hungarian `signalling system` of children at risk: what are the obligations and responsibilities of organizations and helping professionals that work with children?

Participants

Mariana Alcoforado (ICRC), Helena Behr (UNHCR), Marta Barancsikova (Unity/Real School Budapest), Borbala Benedek (Menedek Association), Beata Csomos, (Carpathian Foundation), Gabor Daroczi, (Global Human Dignity Foundation), Balazs Dezsényi (UNICEF), Lilla Eredics (Romaversitas), Boglarka Fedorko (Romaversitas), Nina Hager (UNHCR), Mariann Hornyak (Kek Erdo Foundation), Katinka Huszar (UNHCR), Dora Gottgeisl (Oltalom), Andras Gyore (Child Protection Department, Mol), Andrea Gruber (Pressley Ridge Hungary Foundation), Eszter Harsanyi (NestingPlay), Orsolya Jenei (Traumacenter), Agnes Kalmandy Papp (Guardianship Department, Budapest Government Office), Karasz Katalin (Partners Hungary Foundation), Mariann Karman (Red Cross), Nataliia Kolomiiets (Ukrainian Refugee School at AISB), Krisztina Kovacs (UNHCR), Agnes Lux (IOM/NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child), Oksana Matviishyna (Ukrainian School), Catherine Odorige (Next Step Association), Zsigmond Petofi (Menedek Association), Jelena Petrovic (IRC), Orsolya Taler (Blue Line Child Crisis Foundation), Tamas Torok (Ombudsperson's Office), Eszter Toth (IOM), Erzsebet Szalayne Sandor (Minority Ombudsperson), Monika Szarvak (Child Welfare Department, Mol), Reka Szigeti (CalmSchool), Martina Tomic-Latinac (UNICEF), Jozsef Unszorg (UNICEF), Piarista Program

Discussion

I. Brief introduction of the Child Protection Working Group

The working group has been established in March 2022. It is part of a bigger inter-agency coordination forum that has thematic working groups on basic needs, protection, MHPSS, PSEA, education and this is the child protection one.

The aim of the current meeting is to discuss the Hungarian mandatory reporting system for children at risk. Many (newly established) organizations working since Feb/March 2022 with children in Hungary. Roles and responsibilities of signaling child protection incidents are not sufficiently clear to all actors. As a result of the meeting, **the working group aims to develop a short briefing document about the signaling system and obligations**, with relevant contact details in English, Hungarian, Ukrainians, Russian

II. Presentation by Monika Szarvak, Child Welfare Department, Ministry of Interior

Please see the presentation [here](#) (from slide 9, in Hungarian)

The Child Protection Act (Act 31 of 1997) regulates the Hungarian CP services: there are child welfare (basic) and child protection (specialized) services. The **mandatory reporting system ('signaling system')** is operated by the child welfare. Under the CP Act, **any child who is in the territory of Hungary shall be protected by law** and placed in child protection and have an appointed guardian if necessary. Child welfare aims to support and enable families to raise their children within the family and to prevent abuse and endangerment. If it is not possible anymore, the child protection specialized services are taking over.

There is a **mandatory reporting obligation for anyone who belongs to an organization that is part of the child protection system** (e.g. organizations, associations, health care providers). Besides these organizations and institutions, **any citizen and social organization** representing the interest of children **can make a signal to the local child welfare and family support service**. In working hours, the cases are handled by the child welfare and family services but **out of working hours the police shall be contacted in urgent cases**. After a signal arrives to the authorities, all actors listed in the CP Act have the obligation to inform each other and cooperate to prevent and eliminate harm. It can happen in a form of a case conference, or it can be through written communication.

What is endangerment and when to report? A behavior of a child or another person or an omission or condition that hinders the child physical, mental, emotional, or moral development is a danger. For example, in Hungary there are strict rules about school attendance, if a child does not attend school for 20 lessons it should be reported to the child welfare services. The schools are also part of the signaling system, hence they are obliged to signal if they for exam-

ple they notice some injuries on the children (unless they believe there is an acceptable explanation for the cause of the injury).

When do we start an **immediate administrative procedure**? If a child is left unattended and it is not possible to contact the family.

If there is a (risk of) harm but it does **not pose an imminent danger** on the physical and mental wellbeing of the child, the signal is still important because then **the child welfare system is able to provide the necessary support services**. But if there is no change or improvement after a series of interventions it might require further measures (e.g. child care placement of the child). **In serious abuse cases immediate measures are taken and children are placed in child care.**

Generally, **signals should be sent in a written form**, but urgent cases requiring immediate interventions shall be verbally reported. Written signals should include: name of the person signalling, name of the child, place and date of birth, address, TAJ number, name of the parent of the child, reason of the signal, steps already taken, what kind of help is expected from the child welfare.

If an organization fails to fulfill their reporting obligation the biggest consequence is that the child does not get the needed help. There are also **disciplinary proceedings** initiated by the employer. Child welfare has 15 days to investigate the case and reach out to the relevant stakeholders. A written report is prepared by the child welfare, and a **written feedback is sent to the person signalling the case within 30 days**. The only exception is if the person who reported lives in the same household, then the feedback is not provided in writing.

On local level, the responsibilities of the child welfare services are to receive signals, provide interventions, and provide feedback. They organize discussions, workshops 6 times a year with all members of the signaling system to discuss good practices and challenges. There are also **different layers of the signalling system** besides the local system, there is a district level with the supporting role to the local child welfare authorities. In addition, there is a county level, and a country level institute, called Slachta Margit National Institute. This **national institute has a phone number (0680630155)**, it can be called if someone does not know where to turn to with a case.

Any child, regardless of their legal status should receive help. **There is a reporting obligation in case of non-Hungarian children as well. However, their legal status is important because if they are refugees their case has to be treated differently.**

Reporting of UASC: They usually don't reach the signalling system, because after their identification they immediately get into the child protection system.

What happens if a family with temporary protection leaves Hungary, and it is uncertain if they will return. Shall this case be reported to the child welfare since the children are not attending school anymore?

Education experts within MoI will be asked for advice.

Can a signal be made in any other language than Hungarian?

Language is a challenge for child welfare services, please signal in Hungarian. 1812 can be called for interpretation.

What advice should be given to someone who is uncertain if a case should be reported?

Child welfare service or the child welfare center can be contacted for advice on what the person who is signalling could do or if the case has to be officially signalled and handed over to the child welfare. The guidelines suggested above describe some cases and there is an excel with signs of abuse that might be helpful to recognize them. However, **unless it is a serious abuse, it is always worth to ask delicately from the parents if everything is alright, if the need any help.** We also need to look out for the **co-existence of different signs.**

How is the best interest of the child incorporated in the case conferences?

In the guidelines it is described when and how the best interest of the child should be assessed, considered.

What is the definition of endangerment? Are unaccompanied children automatically considered being at risk?

There are descriptions in the guidelines about danger but these are rather supportive ideas. Unaccompanied children are at risk, but most of these children are identified at the border. If they lose the care of the parents or legal guardians after crossing the border, the signalling system can be used to report their case. Since 2022 March there were 24 unaccompanied children cases reported.

In case of refugee children an additional challenge to the signalling system is that cultural differences need to be taken into consideration. It is important to talk to the refugee family and try to understand and assess their individual situation and needs. Available resources (e.g. appropriate accommodation) might also pose a challenge.

Supporting materials (in Hungarian):

<https://szocialisportal.hu/csalad-es-gyermekjoleti-szolgalatasok-szakmai-szabalyzo-dokumentumai/>

https://szocialisportal.hu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Menekult-Tajekoztato_osszedolgozott_vegleges_0525.pdf

III. **Follow up:**

Draft one pager on the signalling obligations will be prepared and shared with the child protection working group.

