

## DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN THE UKRAINIAN AND HUNGARIAN CHILD CARE SYSTEM AFTER THE TRANSITION

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*The article gives an overview of the changes of the institutional child care policies in Ukraine and Hungary, and analyzes the effect of decentralization on the child care system after the Transition. The present Ukrainian child welfare system is similar to that of Hungary in the 1990s. Given the present social and economic possibilities, Ukraine is making every effort to follow the example of the more developed countries. A positive move can be seen in the whole system, but it lacks an overall, complex vision of reforms and the legal regulations needed to furnish a basis for change and development.*

**Keywords:** disadvantaged children, child care system, decentralization, child welfare, non-government institutions

The goals of social policy and family welfare policy have gone through a lot of changes in the last decades, worldwide. In the years following WWII., there were differences between the countries as regards the development of the welfare state; however, they still had something in common: economic boom was helping their fast development.

In Western Europe, the grounds of social policy, of child welfare and of family social security were much more pragmatic, less ideological than in Hungary and the surrounding countries. Decisive in this process was the fact that citizen's rights and social rights have become universal values in these democracies, whose groundstones were particularities related to age and sex – the rights of women, children and old people. The findings of developmental and child psychology have contributed to a change in what was thought to be children and their needs, which in turn has led to a change in how child welfare systems were developing from then on.

In broad terms, child protection has in its scope those children that are in an endangered situation because of their social, emotional or any other deprivations, needing a higher degree of financial aid, attention and help.

There are very different and manifold levels in the child welfare system, altogether known in Western literature as 'the ecology of child welfare'. This broad term refers to the different levels of the natural and social environment, culture, community, family, interpersonal and intrapersonal relations.

Based on UNO's Declaration of Children's Rights, child protection can be split into two big fields:

- Preventive child welfare: the goal of prevention is to help the child's family and then the child within its own family. It means quick reaction in case of upcoming problems, fact-finding and setting of alarm signals, so that intervention and help can be delivered in time and the child would not suffer any losses.
- Problem-solving child welfare: with this term we refer to the point in time when the child is for some reason taken out of its family and transferred into institutionalised child protection of some sort. There are also so-called secondary preventive measures, which are meant to prevent serious cases in which the child has to be separated from its family.

In Hungary, just as in all neighbouring post-socialist countries, the social changes and transformations that took place at the end of the 1980s, the beginning of the 1990s, also led to changes in the social situation of children, setting new challenges to child welfare systems.

By child welfare we mean those social-political measures that are an expression of society's common responsibility for the bringing up of children. Social responsibility plays a major role in the context of the decentralised restructuring of child welfare: here we are talking about splitting up the former centralised, exclusively state-funded and state-managed institutional system and setting up new forms of provision and care. The notion of decentralisation, as used in present study, also includes another element of the change that is taking place in child protection, i.e., a change in the system's supporting structure - the appearance in the social political subsystem of what is broadly called 'non-governmental organisations'.

## Research methods

- Analysing documents (documents at different levels of regulation, statistics, foundation documents, etc)
- Examining the Ukrainian, Hungarian and English special literature used in training courses
- Fieldwork, studies and interviews with institute managers, helpers, child welfare experts
- We also took some more detailed information from the Yearbooks of the Ukrainian and Hungarian Central Statistical Offices.

For the analysis of our chosen topic, we relied on specialised literature, on statistical data and on our professional experience in child welfare institutions, thus using not only secondary findings but also our own research material.

In our study we would like to explore a less known field of interest, i.e., the role of the church in the protection of children's rights and the church social security system. Our aim is to emphasize some relevant points of the child welfare system and of the protection of children's rights. Furthermore, we will investigate the structure of state and church-funded child care institutions, respectively.

The final part of our paper contains conclusions and recommendations as to possible reform tendencies in the years to come.

## Ukraine

This article reviews the progress of child welfare reforms in the Ukraine, more precisely in Transcarpathia, and in Hungary. It is a well-known fact, that after the fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, changes have taken place in the political, social and economic structure of each country. In this transition the childcare system was also inevitably affected by socio-economic developments.

Present study reviews the current state of institutional childcare in the region, and analyzes the effects of decentralisation on the child welfare system after the fall of Communism. *Decentralisation in this form has two important aspects. First it means that the state-managed children's homes are closed. The second aspect of decentralisation is that the non-governmental actors appear in the child welfare system.* The role of the churches is most important in Transcarpathia following the regime change of 1989 because the first ten years of political transition were characterised by a restructuring of the economy accompanied by crisis periods. At the beginning of the 1990s, the child protection system in the Ukraine was one of the worst in Eastern Europe. At this juncture the first missionary organisation started their work in the region.

The social and political changes led to the reform of social policy on various levels, both in the Ukraine and Transcarpathia. On the one hand this was a reaction to the deficiencies of the system, on the other hand it was caused by the new social problems arising parallel to the change of regime and also by the changes connected to the economic reform and the new labour market. The crisis in social policy influenced its sub-sets as well and led to a new attitude to child welfare, resulting in its sudden development. The countries joining the UNO Declaration of Children's Rights started to make efforts to decentralise the state-governed child welfare system. It is widely known that until 1989 the state had played an important role in the regulation of the whole system, in social programmes, in administration and also in services. In the division of labour that had historically developed in social policy there had also been church and civil organisations taking various important roles in providing social services in the first half of the 20th century. Now the change of regime made it possible again for the organisations in this region to take an active part in reviving their activities interrupted for several decades. After 15 years following the fall of the communist regime we can finally say that the reform of the child welfare system does not depend on the state exclusively, though, there are still great demands on the state. However, locals, non-profit organisations, churches, national and international organisations are assuming more and more responsibility in this process of change.

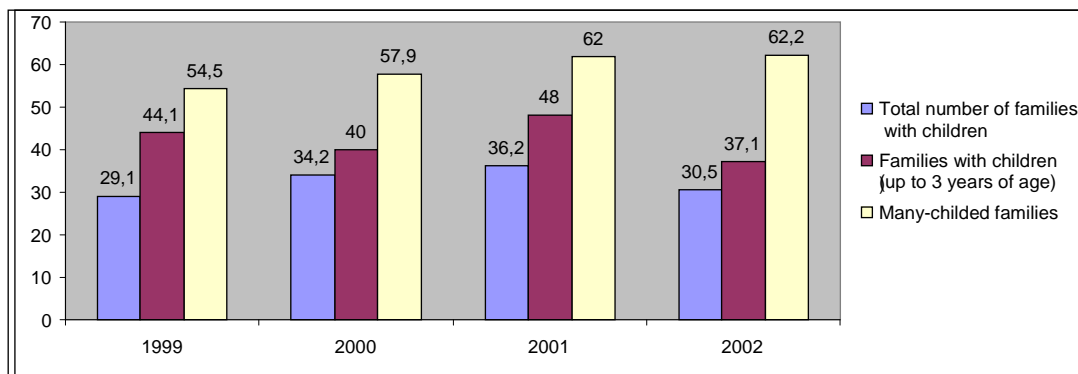
The new legal framework allows for the development of the pluralist child welfare system. However, there are serious problems caused by the introduction of new services because according to research the number of children growing up separated from their families is extremely high. Thus social policy and family welfare policy play a special role in developing basic services to prevent children from being transferred into specialised institutions.

Ukraine, as one of the successor states of the USSR, shows individual development as regards its social policy. The change of regime in the early 1990s also brought democracy for Ukraine. The reconstruction of social organisations, the activity of churches and other non-profit organisations is a

good example of the change. As civil organisations generally aim at solving problems or social needs, there is really great need for these organisations in the new social, economic and political situation.

Research carried out among Ukraine's population in 2002 shows that the level of poverty has decreased in all types of families except in those with many children. Many-childed families are the ones most seriously threatened by poverty. 94% of these families live below the poverty line, in 1/3 of them the daily calory intake remains below 2100. Thus this family type is most intensively in need of state support.

Chart 1. The extent of poverty in different family types



Aid for children of many-childed families takes the form of donations in kind, in the first place (free meals, clothing, school stationery, free admittance to cultural and sports facilities) (Makarova, 2004)

The want in state funding and the degrading of the protective function of the social netting has urged the state to look upon families with children as prioritised social target groups. As a result, support of families with children has increased between 1992 and 2002 as regards its nominal value and also on the basis of price calculations from 1999 (data taken from social security organisations). The average amount per individual has more than doubled in this period.

Nowadays, research on social tendencies clearly shows that the most vulnerable social group is that of children. Here are some of the facts that underline this tendency:

- There is an increase in diseases and mortality within the child population, and a tendency toward degradation of their health. According to research carried out by Zavgorodnya T. K., Lisenko N. V., Mazsec D. K. and Stuparik B. M., 2002., around 60% of pre-school-aged children in the Ukraine suffer from somatic and psychic diseases. Most striking of these are instances of psycho-neurotic diseases (328,800) and illnesses of the neurotic and sense organ systems (1,3 million). Approximately 10% of school-aged children are not fit for the school.
- Poverty of families belonging to the lower social strata, mostly the many-childed families and those with handicapped children.
- The situation of orphans has been an ever-increasing social problem. There are around 90,000 children who were either orphaned or transferred into institutionalised child care as a result of lacking parental support. Approx. 7% of these children are fully orphaned (Zavgorodnya & Lisenko & Mazsec & Stuparik, 2002). In order to solve this problem, the Ukrainian government has drafted a bill targeting a decrease in the number of social orphans, the biggest

challenge facing the social security system of the country now being the huge number of children living off the streets. These children are taken to state foster homes that can hardly live up to their roles as socially protective institutions. This is why the state would like to prioritise on strengthening basic child welfare services that would work as preventive actions aimed at helping children under age being brought up within their families.

- The increase in criminality among minors largely due to the difficult financial situation of families, due to lacking parental support, or other factors such as alcohol, tobacco or drug misuse.
- The quality of children's education has deteriorated greatly.

The problems outlined above can largely be attributed to the social-economic crisis facing the Ukraine. Providing for children's and families' welfare has become a serious issue since the change of regime of 1989. Thus the problem of children's social and legal protection is one of the biggest priorities of Ukrainian politics.

### Child welfare in the Ukraine

In this research we aim at drawing a picture of the child welfare system in Transcarpathia, focusing on the role taken up by the different historical churches.

#### Laws regulating the churches' child welfare activity

- *The Ukrainian Constitution (Article 35)*

Article 35 of the Constitution clearly states: "The Church and religious organisations in Ukraine are separated from the State, and the school from the Church. No religion shall be recognised by the State as mandatory."

- *The Law on Conscience and Freedom of Religion (Paragraph 5)*

All religions and religious organisations are equal before the law. It is prohibited by law to favour one or the other religion or religious organisation over the others. Educational work in schools is independent of the influence of any social or religious institution.

- *The proposal entitled 'Meeting people' (passed on 02/04/2005)*

"The State has to cooperate with religious organisations, but at the same time be independent of the church. The State has to guarantee for equal possibilities for all churches. Churches cannot be insulted upon or discriminated against. It is the State's mission to make the historical churches interested in taking up activity in the social sector."

- *Law 2402/III on child welfare passed in 2001 and its amendment of 25/03/2005*

The child welfare system incorporates state and non-governmental organisations set up to protect children in order to grant a fully-lived life for them, provide them with many-sided education, help their physical, moral and mental development, and work for the protection of their rights. Besides the state, civil organisations, charities, religious organisations, citizens can also take part in child protection, if their utmost aim is to improve the situation of children. A further goal is building a complex child protection system, tutoring the children and young people left in the care of the state, and developing a foster parent network. The State undertakes to help the work of civil and religious organisations, of individuals working in child

welfare, and grant them benefits within legal limits, e.g. through tax and customs allowances.

The legal regulation of the Ukrainian non-governmental sector can in its present state be described as follows:

*Positive features:*

- Has broadened the responsibility of local authorities in the development of local social policies, thus working toward the setting up of child welfare and other social institutions in the third sector.
- Has declared the responsibility of individuals, families and local communities.
- Makes it possible for religious organisations to enter the non-governmental social provision system, thus breaking with the theory and practice of previous decades.

*Negative features:*

- Parallel to the principle of sector neutrality, there is a lack of state normative; without this, it is highly questionable how many percent of civil organisations can actively partake in assuming duties normally performed by the state.
- Legal regulation is not complex enough; there have been no cumulative laws passed on social security, child protection and non-profit-making activity either. The Constitution and different laws treat the topic separately.

### Preliminaries to the research

Research of the Transcarpathian child welfare system in 2000/2001 and 2005/2006. Part of the research constitutes:

- Analysis of the Ukrainian child welfare system relying on special literature and statistical data
- Introduction to the legal background connected to the topic
- Field work (in 8 institutions maintained by the state and 5 institutions maintained by the church)

### Experiences gained during field work

*State institutions.* The state-maintained child welfare system is facing serious malfunctions both in the Ukraine and in Transcarpathia:

- These institutions were established 50 or 60 years ago, thus they need to be reformed as they cannot fulfill their function any longer.
- The conditions of privacy cannot be met because of the overcrowdedness in these institutions.
- Looking after children with special needs is the most critical point.
- The institutions are closed, difficult to access even because of their geographical position.
- There is a lack of specialists.

*Children's homes maintained by the church:*

- Financial support from abroad makes it possible to supply the personnel and the means of activity.
- The institutions are modern.

- Children's interests are highlighted.
- There has been a change of attitude toward handicapped children.

*The present child welfare activities of the different historical churches in Transcarpathia:*

*1. The child welfare activities of the Roman Catholic Church*

Founding of 8 nursery schools, 11 Caritas centres, 5 children's homes, one rehabilitation centre for children and 5 community centres by the Franciscan Mission, starting the 'Families for Families' movement and organising the 'Light and Faith' community

Organising training courses in order to prevent the formation of any deviancy, running of information services

Founding of social centres, dressmaker's salons and mini bakeries to promote social development

Providing free meals, medication and clothes on a regular basis

*2. The activities taken up by the Reformed Church in the area*

Children's homes and centres established together with the help of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands

Efficient cooperation with civil organisations (e.g. Dorcas Foundation)

Supporting many-childed families and families with handicapped children

Establishing a network of foster parents

*The main activities of child welfare supported/ maintained by the church:*

*1. Facilities supplied in preventive child welfare:*

Strengthening the creche and nursery school system

Providing help aimed at preventing families from getting endangered ( e.g. family allowance, keeping in touch with families at a disadvantage, free time activities, organising day nurseries) and providing special facilities (e.g. childcare at home)

*2. Facilities supplied in problem-solving child welfare:*

- Network of foster parents
- Establishing residential homes
- Special children's homes
- Early Development Centres
- Following care

In our presentation we have examined the role of the Transcarpathian historical churches in the field of child welfare by getting acquainted with the system and exploring it. By presenting the situation in Transcarpathia we have also shown that of Ukraine in general by taking a brief look at the legal foundations that make it possible for churches to act and help in this field.

## Hungary

In this part of our research paper we will take a look at Hungary's child welfare system.

Laws and regulations have been passed that led to a series of actions on the part of experts, all targeted at helping protect children and their families.

Of major importance of these was the Child Welfare Act of 1997<sup>1</sup>, regulating the range of tasks to be performed by child welfare and child protection institutions and their staff, in line with Regulation 15/1998 (IV.30.)NM on the duties and work conditions of people and institutions in this field.

We will not deal with this law in detail but will restrict ourselves to analysing how it applies in practice.

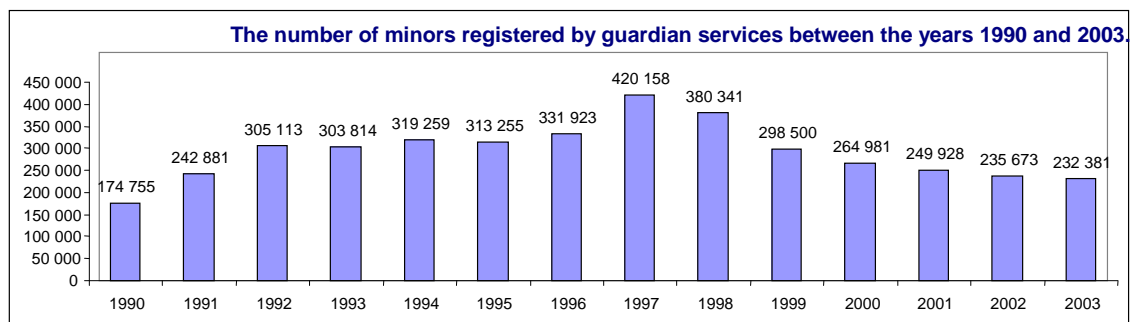
### Basic child welfare services

One of the most important aspects of this new law is the strengthening of basic child welfare services and looking at them as major preventive measures. The main goal of these services is to provide all the help and support the child and its family need at their place of residence (Herczog, 2001).

The basic element of the child protection institutional system is the Child Welfare Service. Its duties include, among others:

- Gathering information related to the children of the relevant settlement in order to work toward the bringing up of children within their own families.
- Giving families information on the aid and support available.
- Preventing the jeopardisation of children's social situation by activating the signal system, by helping and coordinating the work of child protection experts. Statistical data show a rapid increase in the number of endangered minors prior to the passing of the Child Welfare Act of 1997. Table 1. shows a clear dividing line between the periods prior and after the passing of the law. Between 1990 and 1997 there was a steady increase in the number of endangered minors, reaching 420,158 by 1997. From the following year on, however, this number decreased gradually – a fact probably also attributable to the coordinated work of child welfare services.

Chart 2.



Source: Statistical Yearbook 2003

- Working against children's endangered situation by cooperating with families, giving them help and support.

<sup>1</sup> In the Child Welfare Act of 1997, the child's right to be brought up in its own family is emphasised. The activities provided by the public guardianship authorities and the Child Welfare services were broadened in order to assist the parent holding parental responsibilities to better care for the child, in the hopes that the child would not be taken from its family

- Its main protective task is to work together with parents and children in drawing up a care and education plan, and to also cooperate with other actors of the child welfare system in order to liquidate the socially endangering factors.
- In order to help the development of the foster parent system, it provides prospective foster parents with information, while at the same time checking and helping the work of current foster parents.

### Creche

Day care must provide for the education and boarding of children whose parents cannot fulfil this task during the day as a result of their employment scheme, illness or other hindering factors.

The utilisation of creches in Hungary exceeds the 100% mark, and more than 90% of them (96.8% in 2004) are run by local authorities.

*Table 1. shows the situation of creches in the years 2000 to 2004, in respect to the number of creches, the number of places available and the number of subscribed children.*

	2000	2002	2003	2004
Number of creches	532	523	515	527
Number of places available	24 965	24 078	23 771	23 911
Number of subscribed children	29 561	28 847	29 422	30 333
Places available according to creche types				
Local authority creche	28 722	28 029	28 524	29 369
Non-profit organisational creche	86	286	409	505
Private creche	298	167	131	107
Other types	455	365	358	352

*Source: Statistical Yearbook 2004 (p.176)*

The table clearly shows a gradual increase in the number of creches maintained by non-profit organisations as compared to the number of creches supported by local authorities. There has been an almost five-time increase in the number of subscribed children in non-profit creches between the years 2000-2004.

### Foster parent system

As prescribed by law, in cases where families cannot provide for their children, children are temporarily taken to foster families. In earlier decades, children were institutionalised even if their families had only temporary difficulties in providing for them. The change in attitude on the part of authorities meant that the child was taken to foster parents only for the time of the crisis, until a solution to the family problems was found.

The foster parent system is not developing to the rate prescribed by law. Below tables show, based on statistical data taken from the years 2003 and 2004, that despite a steady increase in the number of foster families, the number of children sent to children's homes is still higher than that of children in the care of foster parents.

Table 2. The number of children and young people placed under child protection in the year 2003 (data also include those who were transferred from other modes of child protection into these institutions)

Children in children's homes	5,715
Children in foster families	2,544

Source: Statistical Yearbook 2003 (p.68-69.)

Table 3. The number of children and young people placed under child protection in 2004

Place of care	Children under age			Total number of children under age	Young people
	Provisory placement	Temporary care	Long-time care		
Children's home	527	7 016	682	8 225	2267
Foster family	186	7 604	1 036	8 826	1 893
Care-providing institution	8	395	114	517	9
Total	721	15 015	1 832	17 568	4 169

Source: Statistical Yearbook 2004 (p. 174.)

From the children who were taken into children's homes in 2004 (total number: 8,225), the proportion of those in temporary care (7,016) was much higher than that of children placed in long-time care (628). In the case of foster parenting (total number: 8,826), the decisive number of children are in temporary care (7,604) and comparatively only a few (1,036) are in long-time care. All this is in line with the provisions of the Child Welfare Act of 1997, stating that the right of children to be brought up in families is above all other rights. This because it is easier for them to integrate back into their own families if coming from foster families.

As stated earlier, since the passing of the Child Welfare Act of 1997, there has been strong emphasis laid on basic child welfare services. With this, the chance of children staying with their families increased greatly. This goal is being served by institutions providing provisional care, such as mothers' homes and families' transitional homes. Statistical data show that the role of non-governmental organisations, among them that of the churches, is huge. In comparison, looking at statistical data of the years 1990 and 2001 (look at Table 4., 5.) it clearly shows that while in 1990 there were hardly any civil and church-funded initiatives, in 2001 the number of such actions is considerable and ever-increasing.

*Table 4. Function of the occupied institutions by forma of economic management of the operator, 1990*

Function of the institution	Total	State (central government's) organisation	Local government	Government of a county (respectively the capital)	Church	Non-profit organisation with legal entity
Specialised child-welfare institutions operating in living-in system	197	-	-	197	-	-
Basic institutions of protection of children operating in living-in system	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dormitories, students' hostels	802	138	490	155	17	1
Institutions for the accommodation of workers	930	676	72	94	3	2
Religious houses, monasteries, nunneries	10	-	-	-	10	-
Long-term residential social institutions						
institutions providing nursing, attendance	443	21	208	165	46	1
institutions for rehabilitation	-	-	-	-	-	-
living homes	-	-	-	-	-	-
Together	443	21	208	165	46	1

*Table 5. Function of the occupied institutions by forma of economic management of the operator, 2001*

Function of the institution	Total	State (central government's) organisation	Local government	Government of a county (respectively the capital)	Church	Non-profit organisation with legal entity
Specialised child-welfare institutions operating in living-in system	410	21	22	341	7	17
Basic institutions of protection of children operating in living-in system	50	1	22	7	4	16
Dormitories, students' hostels	780	160	289	171	102	40
Institutions for the accomodation of workers	214	58	27	42	3	4
Religious houses, monasteries, nunneries	82	-	-	-	57	25
Long-term residential social institutions						
institutions providing nursing, attendance	792	18	269	230	104	140
institutions for rehabilitation	46	7	3	16	-	19
living homes	14	-	-	5	1	8
Together	852	25	272	251	105	167

Non-profit organisations, foundations contribute to a great extent to maintaining these institutions; they are the ones that provide financial means to the majority of transitional homes, child welfare centres, convents, and homeless centres. These organisations and foundations have a 9% share among all organisations that are active in this field.

The basic principle of temporary homes is not only to protect and care for the child but to also help mothers learn to fulfil their duties as parents. If a mother is capable of caring for her child, then she is the one most entitled to provide the care, education and protection her child needs. This is why I myself consider this principle extremely important, as it is independent of the given political, social and cultural environment and can be considered a stable starting point in child and family protection.

Part of the mother homes and family homes presently active have started their work years before the passing of the Child Welfare Act. They were called into life by necessity. Following the change of regime, mass unemployment and the weakening of families' supporting power led to many losing their homes, a process hitting not only single people but families as well.

In Hungary, the appearance of the term 'homeless' can be dated back to 1989. There were already people lacking proper housing prior to this, too,

but a change of political situation had to come in order for the facts to come to light. At the beginning most homeless people were single men, who had lost their families and employment and their homes as a result.

Table 6. Number of places

	<b>Budapest</b>	<b>Rest</b>
Family	310	164
Family, Mother-Child, Father-Child	0	865
Family, Mother-Child	0	70
Mother-Child, Father-Child	24	87
Mothers' home	213	537
Mother's home in the past, now in state care	0	24
Expecting mothers	0	5
Mothers' homes and expecting mothers	40	48

*Source: Prospect of Menhely Alapítvány (1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2003)*

Above chart shows that based on family types the social homes can be divided into eight groups. It is very important to realise, how very mixed the profile of these homes is in settlements other than the capital city. In Budapest only four family types can be differentiated. The task of providing adequate help and care for the manifold family formations that can be found in a single care centre is a big challenge for legislative experts, but even more so for those working in the field.

Following tables show a split-up of institutions based on who maintains them.

Table 7.

<b>Maintainer</b>	<b>Number of institutions</b>		<b>Number of places</b>	
	<b>Budapest</b>	<b>Rest</b>	<b>Budapest</b>	<b>Rest</b>
<b>State</b>	5	35	110	825
<b>Civil, church</b>	14	33	477	975
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>1800</b>

*Source: Prospect of Menhely Alapítvány (1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2003)*

Table 8.

<b>Maintainer</b>	<b>Number of institutions</b>		<b>Number of places</b>	
	<b>Budapest</b>	<b>Rest</b>	<b>Budapest</b>	<b>Rest</b>
<b>State</b>	6	22	113	571
<b>Civil, church</b>	17	30	657	925
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>770</b>	<b>1496</b>

*Source: Prospect of Menhely Alapítvány (1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2008)*

It is highly interesting to see how high the percentage of non-state-funded homes is in the capital. This might be caused by a scheme in which district authorities do not maintain institutions of their own but fulfil their social-political obligations prescribed by law by buying a certain number of places

in non-state-funded homes. Whether this solves the problems of the population is already a different question.

The first home for assaulted women was founded by SZETA in 1991, followed in 1992 by a similar home set up by the Hungarian Red Cross. The next home for families was opened in 1993 with the support of the Family Support Service of Terézváros. In this same year the Good Shepherd Mothers' Home started its activity (maintained by the Order of the Good Shepherd Sisters).

Statistical data based on research conducted by Pro Domo (Methodological Department of Marginalized Groups) in 1993 highlighted a new tendency in Hungarian society: the appearance of women and children among the homeless - 22% of homeless people were women, almost 8% were children. The statistics showed that in Budapest 49% of these minors lived in homeless homes, outside the capital city this rate was 51%, and on average they spent 87 days in these institutions. 77% lived in transitional homes, 19% in crisis homes, 3% in rehabilitation centres, 1% in night time centres. 78% of minors had not yet reached the age of 14; they usually went to these centres with their parents, mostly with their mothers. The percentage of minors aged between 14 and 18 was 22% (Oross & Kocsis, 1994). By the end of 1993, the number of accommodation places for mothers and children had reached around 200.

In 1996, Pro Domo did a survey of the work and turnover of 37 mothers' and children's homes in 1995. (Szilvási & Radoszáv, 1997)<sup>2</sup> Data showed that there were around 500 places available and these accommodated 800 families (mostly mothers) and 1,200 children. By 1997 the number of places had risen to 1,136. (Szilvási, 1998)

All the above show that there was a tendency to solve families' accommodation crises in the framework of homeless people care. *These institutions were run as transitional homes for the homeless.*

The situation of homeless families with children was thus on the borderline between homeless care and child protection. Over the years experts debated again and again, trying to decide which territory of social policy should deal with homeless families. The Child Welfare Act put an end to the debates. According to the law, institutions taking up single-parent families and full families belong among institutions providing basic child welfare services and are cumulatively called families' transitional homes. (Note: These institutions have mixed profiles - some only take up full families, others only mothers with children, and there are some that also take up fathers with children. This is why specialised literature also has its difficulties in giving a name to them. The designations 'transitional family home', 'family home', 'mothers' home' and 'mothers' and children's home' are used alternatively).

We can thus conclude that the transitional homes for families are an important part of the child protection system. They represent a secondary preventive possibility for children and families who have lost their homes. By providing the basic means of life, these centres help prevent the disintegration of families and children being separated from their parents. By tackling the critical situation and solving the problems, the endangerment of children can be avoided.

## Conclusions

In present paper we have analysed the decentralisation processes in the Ukrainian and Hungarian child protection systems.

When dealing with the situation in the Ukraine, emphasis was laid on the situation of children lacking parental support. Communist ideology had grossly underestimated the role of underprivileged families in the bringing up of children and had in turn overestimated the state's capability of "rescuing" these children. As a consequence of this principle, centres trying to tackle children's situation at the root, i.e., in families were neglected and disregarded, while attention was focused on the development of care institutions. This was the biggest fault of the Social system of help, which in turn has left its mark on the quality and quantity of the support provided. At the beginning of the 1990, the situation of children being brought up outside their families raised concerns both on national and international level.

The situation in Transcarpathia is similar to the child welfare system in Hungary and Romania probably because of their nearby geographical location. The image greatly reminds us of the dramatic situation in Eastern Hungary. The state is to abandon all fields of social services and childcare by taking less and less responsibility in health care, culture and education, while there is a new situation in children's rights which is highly supported by the civil sphere.

In 1990, a very large number of foreign and local NGOs started to become active in Ukraine. In Transcarpatia church activities were aimed at emergency aid. As time was passing and the conditions in most institutions failed to improve, more and more NGOs realised that all the efforts they made were actually encouraging the changing of the institutionalised system.

The activity of the historical churches in the Transcarpathian child welfare system also contributes to strengthening children's national and religious identity. Ukrainian authorities support these goals, thus more and more Hungarian child protection centres are being set up. The most important trait that sets church-funded institutions apart is the role they play in serving the national identities of religious and ethnic groups, more so in Transcarpathia where religious leaders have declared this as one of the key elements of their mission.

As a conclusion it can be stated that by the turn of the century it has become evident that the exclusivity of the state's role in social policy was no longer sustainable: an important role in this sphere was to be designated to civil, non-state-funded organisations and institutions that would react to social needs. In the last decade these have been some of the trends in social policy:

- Decentralization
- Strengthening of the autonomy of civic and church organisations in tackling specific problems on local level
- The principle of subsidiarity: means support based on solidarity, the activation of the potential of individuals, families, neighbourhoods, peer groups, other local and nation-wide communities.

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