

## Summary of Case Report No. AJB-643/2021

On 20 January 2021, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights of Hungary, who is responsible for performing the tasks of the National Preventive Mechanism (hereinafter referred to as: the “NPM”), and three of his staff members paid a visit to the Nagybjom-based Kékmadár (Blue Bird) Children’s Home of the Somogy County Child Care Centre and Territorial Child Protection Service. The purpose of the visit was to check the execution of the measures taken to prevent the spread of the coronavirus infection (COVID-19)<sup>1</sup> and to examine the changes caused by the restrictions ordered by the Government<sup>2</sup> in the lives of children in state care and adolescent mothers, with special regard to their access to education, development and contact.

During the inspection, the members of the visiting group were wearing protective equipment, coverall suits, shoe covers, masks and rubber gloves.

During the on-site inspection, the members of the visiting group inspected the three housing units, requested some documents for review and conducted interviews with the children and young adults living at the institution, as well as the staff members.

There were 33 residents in the children’s home with a capacity of 36. There are two housing units that serve as “mother’s shelters”, where shelter is provided to adolescent mothers in child protection and their children, with 12 places in each unit. The young residents may receive follow-up care at the Children’s Home after reaching legal age. There were 11 residents in the third housing unit, their average age was 11 years and 5 months, the youngest resident was 4. It raises concerns that the children under the age of 12 were not placed in the care of foster parents.

The physical conditions of placement were adapted to the needs of the children and their age characteristics in all three housing units. The mothers shared their rooms with their children, the combined living and dining room, the covered balcony and the courtyard provided sufficient space for the children to move around. The carers taught the young mothers to become independent, they introduced them to performing child care tasks, helped them establish their daily routines, and also, they assisted them with preparing meals. Based on the reviewed menus, the NPM proposed that a more diverse diet be compiled.

The measures and restrictions ordered by the Chief Medical Officer of Hungary for the prevention of the spread of the epidemic were put in place. Responding to the threat of pandemic, the frequency and intensity of cleaning and disinfection were increased, for which the necessary detergents and equipment were available. The potential danger of infection was reduced by keeping contact outdoors in different timeframes. An isolation plan was prepared for any isolation that may become necessary in the Children’s Home. In the second wave of the pandemic, the staff managed to prevent the spread of the infection into the Children’s Home. The children were informed of the pandemic situation and the prevention thereof, they understood the point of the restrictions.

Secondary school students were provided digital education, while elementary school pupils attended classes in person. At the Children’s Home, it was a goal to enrol all the residents in education, they helped those who were lagging behind by several grades to find the form of education by which they could best continue their studies, so there were home-schooled students and students participating in adult education as well. The physical conditions of digital

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<sup>1</sup> Infection or disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus

<sup>2</sup> Government Decree No. 40/2020 (III. 11.) on the Declaration of State of Danger; Decision No. 13305-16/2020/EÜIG of the Chief Medical Officer of 17 March on the visiting ban and curfew also imposed on child care institutions; Government Decree No. 283/2020 (VI. 17.) on introducing a state of epidemiological preparedness; Government Decree No. 478/2020. (XI. 3.) on the Declaration of State of Danger

education were established in the first wave of the pandemic with support from the supervising authority and some foundations, they were available at the time of the visit as well.

The Children's Home had a solid staff, there was not a high rate of turnover. The requirement of the NM (Minister of Welfare) decree regarding personal conditions was not fully met, in one of the groups, no carer was employed and the number of hours spent at the institution by the psychologist was lower than required.

In the second wave of the pandemic, there was no interruption in the access to development, consultancy, the medical doctor and the health visitor.

Several residents expressed their satisfaction with the personal and physical conditions provided at the Children's Home. The fact that several of the residents considered it possible, and also applied for follow-up care at the institution after their having reached legal age also shows that they feel safe at the Children's Home. From the experience gained from the visit, the NPM concluded that the residents appreciated and highly valued the Children's Home and they deemed it to be their home.