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*Experiences of service and care planning in the child  
protection system*

Research report

Basically, the personal needs of the children determine what kinds of services are needed and how these services can provide adequate answers to the child's problems. As for the local operation, it is based on less established professional principles; the service planning and provision has an ad hoc nature and there is no conscious planning in the child protection. It is also unknown exactly how the needs of the service recipient determine the type of the services that they are accessed to. However it is well known that indentifying different children target groups, and then determining adequate answers in these cases are the only effective way to reduce the extremely high rate of primary and secondary errors in social policy which is currently presenting in the domestic system.

In the case of child protection system it includes how professionally established the proposal for the placement is; whether the utilization of the child protection service is the adequate answer to the children's need or the children get removed from the family only because there is not available service locally which can meet their specific needs.

Research<sup>1</sup> that support the planning of the child protection system's services and the effective allocation of the services, aims to work out a framework which states on what professional principles and with what methods can the need of care and capacity assignment be determined. Therefore the study provides a situation analysis for establishing a possible future capacity monitoring system. In order to do it we had to assess how planning of capacity that ordered to the needs and determinations of the concrete services resources are done.

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<sup>1</sup> The research made for the National Institute for Family and Social Policy TÁMOP 5.4.1-12. primary project. The research in topic of: "Creating surveys on the planning of social services and child protection services and on the implementation a more efficient allocation of service and care provision." is made in the workshop of Rubeus Association

The main questions of our research are the following: What determines the development of the current capacity? Is the planning of long-term care conscious? What are those needs of the children which the system cannot properly deal with? It is worth establishing a capacity monitoring system?

Our research is based on four pillars: We examined the statistics made on child protection on macro level, the conceptions of service planning made by the counties; using questionnaire survey we asked the maintainers and also we made individual interviews with four decision makers and 3 group interviews were made with child protection professionals.

In the following we summarize the main assignments of the finished research.

### **Statistics on child protection**

Considering the child protection system as a whole, it has dual function. Firstly, by the basic services it provides services for children and families in order to prevent endangerment and to promote children's availability to be raised in their own family. Secondly, through the child protection system it tries to provide family-like caring which can substitute family for those children who were removed from their own families.

The structure of the child protection system consists of two levels: the child protection is responsible for the recognition of endangerment, on the second level the County Child Protection Agency's activities aim to manage to keep the child in the family (orders a family carer for the family), if it is not possible, it initiates temporary placement for the child. The County Child Protection Agency decides on the temporary placement, decides the final status of the child and also on the most appropriate placement, - for the latter the Regional Child Protection Agency provides assistance.

In the following, we highlighted some relevant nationwide trends in regard of service development adjusted to the children's needs (during the period of 1999-2010). These trends can be found in the Child protection statistics Guide (2010).

Among the data that have been collected about the Child Protection System's activities, there are two input indicators which present the process of needs: Children who were registered as endangered and taken under protection in the reference year. Since the decrease that had been up until 2007, the number of those children who are endangered or taken under protection has been increasing continuously. The most prominent causes of endangerment are financial and behavioural problems. As for the latter, because of that, the number of children who became endangered doubled between 1999 and 2010. However, it is important to emphasize that there is a large variation in the counties regarding the development the number of children who are endangered or taken under protection.

In contrast the number of institutions and their capacity has been decreasing continuously, beside the change of the internal proportions. As for the internal proportions, there is a decrease in the number of children's homes including a remarkable decrease in the number of special children's home. There also a decrease in the number of multi-functional institutions and of the after care homes. In contrast the number of apartment homes, special children's homes for disabled children and foster care network has been increased.

The total of children and young adults who are in long-term care was 20999 in 2010, 9583 of these children and young adults lived in children's home and 1216 of them were placed at foster parents. The number of children who were placed in children's home has been increasing continuously. Throughout the examination period, the number of placed children was slightly below the permitted capacity.

The number of children who were placed in foster family had been increased from 1991 to 2009, but in 2010 it started to decline. Its reasons can be the general decrease in the number of children, the change in the composition of the children's needs and hardship of meeting the legal criteria of becoming foster parent, which is – connected to the economical decline – becoming increasingly difficult. Vast majority of the children (80%) are placed at traditional foster parents. This hasn't changed in the last 10 years.

As regards the distribution of the children's need for care, there is difference between these children who were placed in child's home and at foster parents. In foster care girls, children with special need and children with mental disabilities are overrepresented, while there more children in child's home who have special needs (addicted, psychiatric).

Regarding the distribution trends according to the children's age, there is difference between those who are raised in children's home and those who were raised in foster care. The number of those children who are raised in child's home and under 14 is decreasing year by year, however the number of those who are between 15 and 17 is increasing continuously i.e. children get into child's home at older age increasingly.

However the number of children who were placed in foster care at younger age has been increasing steadily.

### **Concepts for service planning**

The concepts for social service planning is a document, which establish the long-term development of service planning, determines the developmental purposes of the social services and also determines those guidelines which are needed for the elaboration of the developmental programs.

Since 2001 the Social Act obliges local authorities to draw up this document and to review it in every two years. In the analysis we searched for the answers for the following questions: What developmental priorities appear in the available service planning conceptions? (...) Are the professional aspects taken into consideration

during the planning? Are the children's needs explored and are the developments adjusted to these needs or are other aspects have more emphasize?

After analyzing the documents we came to the conclusion that the child protection, as an individual field of development, appeared in more than the half of the examined counties (Budapest, Fejér, Vas, Baranya, Tolna, Heves, Nógrád, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties). Consideration of the local needs was more or less done during the planning process. There are local characteristics for example in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county, the special needs of roma children was taken into account; and in Budapest the importance of promoting Medical Children Homes development. However only Vas county has development plan which is detailed and reinforced with needs. It is exemplary how the children's needs were taken into consideration during the settlement of developmental priorities.

According to the concepts it can be generally told that the counties are struggling with shortage of resources and it cause problem in the every-day maintenance. In this situation the primary aim is to meet the statutory requirements, development is hardly possible.

Services adjusted to the needs can only present where there is a need-assessment. However we didn't meet any need-assessment. At the same time, there're some attempts to estimates, for example the member of people waiting, trends, or they calculate the number of potential recipient based on some kind of formula. If we look at the trends of utilization, in most counties there is a decline in the long-term care of Child Protection System.

### **The results of the questionnaire survey**

With a questionnaire survey, that was sent to the maintainers, we summarized the data regarding the headcount of child protection care according to the types of care. In addition we tried to discover the attitudes of the maintainers regarding the capacity planning.

In the preparation procession of the study plan we determined the collection of data to be nationwide and to include all the maintainers (financed by the state, civil organizations or churches). However we managed to succeed partly due to reasons beyond our control. In addition the questions of the survey revealed that for the responders it was difficult to interpret the term of sibling line.

As for the headcount data, the following conclusions were made. The total number of allowed capacity is 16261. The governmental maintainers have 71% of the total capacity. However in case of the types of care, the capacity distribution of the maintainers is uneven. Almost exclusively the state takes part in the maintenance of special Children's home and also in running special children's home for disabled

children place, while the churches rather run traditional Children's home and foster care places; and the civilian are overrepresented in running external places and places where there are professional foster parents; it relates to the S.O.S. Children's village where only professional foster parents are employed.

Generally, all the types of care need a 30% enlargement. In the cases of certain types of care the necessity of enlargement is way bigger. The biggest demand for enlargement appears in the cases of Special Children's home, Special Integrated Children's home in after-care, external places and in the number of places at professional foster parents.

With questionnaire on attitude we would like to find out why the siblings are placed separately. According the received responses, indeed there are some cases when the siblings cannot be placed in the same place of caring. E.g. if the children's ages are very different; if there is a shortage of capacity, or when the committee of experts decides it would be the best interest of the children.

According to 2/3rds of the respondents, sometimes it occurs that the children cannot be placed in the most appropriate form of care where their individual needs could be satisfied entirely. Only 2/3rd of the respondents claim that there is consciousness in the capacity planning, only 1/3rd of them find it accidental. In relation of the establishment of long-term care, as the vast majority told, in the last 5 years the primary criteria was the development of foster care network due to some professional and economic reasons. According to the vast majority of respondents, mainly committee of experts decide on the placement primarily, the current direction of child protection as influencing factors secondary as well as the opinion of long-term care. Financial aspects have the least influential power, according to the maintainers. Capacity registration is done electronically in the 70% of the cases. However one-third of the maintainers do only paper-based registration. At the same time 82% of the respondents consider it to be important to establish a national registration system of capacity, for which otherwise all the information technological and the attitudinal conditions are met.

### **Opinions of decision-makers and professionals**

After overviewing the current situation and the preliminaries that lead to the current situation, the decision-makers who were interviewed highlighted the general financial problems firstly. In the cases of those institutions, which were run by the government before January 2013, the functionality of principles was restricted significantly due to the lack of financial resources. Because of the efforts to reach operability the pressure to meet the professional criteria was pushed into the background. All the interviewed decision-makers agreed on the view that a high-grade differentiation is required in the

long-term care. Development of foster care network is a beatific procession because it creates opportunity for differentiation of the system of apartment's home and children's home, which is a precondition for providing a more efficient way to meet the needs of those children who have complex problems.

All the respondents agreed on that monitoring the capacity of the caring system is very important. Collecting and evaluating the data as precisely as possible are essential in order to work out a professional and conscious planning. At the same time they also agreed on that this work would be extremely complicated and would require significant resources which are partly or not available. One of the respondents added, in many cases for the question line data collection, there isn't appropriate culture of data retrieval that is available; sometimes the questions are interpreted totally differently and this makes the processing of data more difficult.

About the relationship between the permitted and needed capacity, the majority of the respondents have the opinion of that the situation is complex, there are outstanding differences regionally, but overall the main problem isn't the lack or allocation of the places, rather the utilization. Several interviewees also pointed out that with the years, there are more and more children in the system who have special or dual needs, so more places would be needed because taking care of these children would be risky if they are among children who have normal needs. According to the respondents, the desired development direction is the differentiation of the capacity in the foster care network and in the institutional care in order to provide care as professional as possible for those children who have special and unique needs. In cases of children with dual needs, the most urgent issue is the lack of place which could provide adequate services. From the answers it turned out that in the decision-maker view the primary direction of development could be the development (and differentiation) of foster care network; and because of it there would be an increase in capacity of institutional places so they could be specialized.

There are significant differences between the optimal operation (based on professional principles and appointed by statutory regulations) and the actual conditions. As the respondents claimed, it occurs that during the process of placement and the service provision at the place of care the performance doesn't meet the expectations. Several of them mentioned the lack of health care and emphasize the need of a regular co-operation with children's psychiatric and addictology for children, for which the present establishment is insufficient.

When it comes to determine the direction of development it's absolutely necessary to reconsider the issue of quantitative and qualitative allocation of the places also the logic of capacity management and finance. It's an important principle that the system shouldn't have only the sufficient quantity of places, after an assessment of the needs and demands; it also should be able to assign special, differentiated service contents.

The system shouldn't use its capacity 100%, because it is important to have places in order to a crisis situation and to those placements that cannot be predicted in forward.

## Summary

Based on the results of the research it can be concluded that the capacity in the long-term care on child protection is decreasing, the internal proportions are distorted, and there are large inequalities regionally and also the type of maintenance. The planning becomes complicated because of the continuously changing legal framework and the anomalies arising from the logic of financing. The questionnaire-based research showed that each type of care need an at least 30% enlargement. In cases of certain types of care the situation can be called critical (the placement of children who have special and unique needs is not solved).

We summarized the results in five main points, using quotes from one of the interviewee:

1. **The planning of the child protection system's capacity is currently accidental.** The financial framework often override the professional principles: *"All types of financing attempts /initiated by the local authorities/ i.e. how to put together certain services often override the professional principles. And these have been unfavourably affected the local services."*
2. **The existent capacities are not in consonance with the child's needs.:** "... when a child gets into care, the Child Protection Expert Committee decides what type of place would be the most optimal for that child. It would be a lie to say that the placement only up to this. Nowadays, a lot of compromises have to be made, that type of place will the committee suggest which is available."
3. **The establishment of care is uneven regionally.** "There are counties, where almost every type of care can be found, and there are counties where the number of certain types of care is very small."
4. **There isn't enough place for children who have special and unique needs.** There're more and more special needs so we need more and more special place. (...) Nowadays, one of the biggest challenges is to meet the needs of children with dual needs, because these children (often disabled and with several psychological symptoms) often pry apart the institutional boundaries.
5. **There is a great need for a capacity monitoring system.** "we should see exactly that where, what can be founded and what kind of need we have to meet."

## Reference

Gyermekvédelmi statisztikai Tájékoztató, 2010. (szerk. Papházi, Tibor) Budapest, Nemzeti Család- és Szociálpolitikai Intézet, 2012. ([Child protection statistics Guide, 2010]