According to the Ombudsman, 36,1% of children aged 0-17 years old are at risk of poverty and social exclusion¹ and 30% of the children are separated from their families for financial reasons². However, the support services in the community are severely under-resourced and often non-existent, especially in rural, remote and poor areas where needs are the highest. Local authorities tend to refer clients to institutional care – under the financial authority of national Government – rather than invest in community-based services.

² Presentation of Dr. Zsuzsanna Gyórfy at the Child Rights Conference of the Ombudsman’s Office, 16 November, 2017, Budapest
Although foster care is widespread – over 60% of children in alternative care lived in foster families in 2016, their support and remuneration is very limited. Often the allowance provided for children is not covering even the basic needs of children.

As part of the deinstitutionalisation reform, Hungary established approximately 400 small group homes (SGHs) across the country. Each SGH has a capacity to accommodate 12 children. It is of concern, though, that the majority of SGHs are located in remote areas with no proper transportation and opportunities available for children to access basic services or mainstream/vocational education.

There is a lack of special programmes or adequate equipment to address children’s complex developmental needs. Other factors such as proximity of a facility to the biological family are not taken into consideration and make reintegration even more difficult.

In many instances, staff in the SGHs is underqualified, staff numbers fluctuate, supervision of staff is needed and the burnout rate is high. Given the low standard of care, children often run away. The prevalence of violence and substance abuse are also widespread.

In 2017, Hungary issued two calls for proposals for children’s deinstitutionalisation under the Operational Programmes focusing on the “replacement of children’s homes, resettlement of children’s homes and modernization of children’s home”. Despite the existing challenges regarding small group homes for children as described above, the Hungarian government seems to continue investments in this form of alternative care. The “Compass – Home for Children” (EFOP-2.1.1-16-2016-00009) project involves increasing child protection services from 600 to 800. The first infrastructure development under this project – a “20-person special home for children” consisting of three housing units for the education of boys with various psychological problems – will be completed by 2019.