**UPR Hungary**

**UNICEF Hungarian Committee**

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Mr President,

Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

UNICEF has been represented in Hungary since 1975. Today, UNICEF Hungary works to advance and protect the rights of every child, focusing on child rights education, meaningful child participation, mental health and protection from violence.

For the past 16 years, we operated in an increasingly restrictive and polarized political environment, where civil society and professional dialogue were under pressure, and child rights were often subordinated to political narratives rather than addressed through evidence-based policy.

The current review follows the April 2026 elections and a change of government. This political transition was significantly shaped by two years of intense public debate over serious child-protection scandals, institutional failures and abuse. Child protection became a central election issue and remains a government priority. Public expectations are therefore exceptionally high, creating a rare opportunity to translate political attention into measurable, rights-based and lasting reform.

**To begin, I will focus on family separation and the crisis of the child-protection system.**

In Hungary, 17.4 per cent of children live in relative income poverty. Despite the legal prohibition, an estimated 7,000 of the 21,212 children in alternative care were removed primarily because of poverty or inadequate local services.

The system is also facing a severe placement crisis:

- In April 2026, 325 babies and young children were living in hospitals. Nearly four in five had no medical reason to remain there but were simply awaiting safe placement.
- At the same time, 1,364 children continued to live in seriously unsafe family environments while waiting to enter care, and a further 1,207 children already were waiting for an appropriate placement.
- An official survey found that more than one in five children in alternative care had experienced abuse; 38 per cent of guardians knew of at least one child sexually abused in care.

**UNICEF Hungary therefore calls on the Government to:**

- Adequately fund preventive child-welfare services, housing support and intensive family assistance, ensuring that no child is separated from a loving family simply because of poverty or a lack of services.
- Urgently provide safe, family-based placements for children in hospitals or unsafe environments and expand professional foster and specialized care.
- Establish independent monitoring of all alternative-care settings, confidential and child-friendly complaint mechanisms, effective investigations, accountability, and trauma-informed support and remedy for victims.

## The next critical issue is inclusive and equitable education.

Hungary ranked 13th among 41 countries in UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 19, but the national average masks severe inequalities.

- More than 115,000 children have special educational needs, including almost one in ten primary-school pupils. Inclusion is undermined by staff shortages and the absence of enforceable minimum standards.
- In Heves County, Roma children with special educational needs were two and a half times more likely than non-Roma peers to be diagnosed with mild intellectual disability.
- Sixty-two per cent of Roma children attend predominantly Roma schools, and only 43 per cent complete upper-secondary education, compared with 87 per cent of the general population.

**UNICEF Hungary recommends that the Government:**

- Adopt a time-bound national desegregation strategy with measurable targets and independent monitoring.
- Guarantee inclusive quality education through enforceable standards, adequate funding and sufficient specialist staff.
- Ensure culturally fair and independent special educational needs assessments, nationwide monitoring of disproportionate diagnoses and accessible appeal mechanisms.

## Finally, I will address the mental health of children and adolescents.

More than half of school-aged children report multiple weekly psychosomatic symptoms, including 77 per cent of 15-year-old girls and 49 per cent of boys.

According to ur own survey School psychologists report increasingly severe problems:

- Ninety-two per cent regularly encounter anxiety, 61 per cent depression and 51 per cent self-harm.
- Child-helpline contacts concerning self-harm rose more than sixfold between 2020 and 2025; suicide was discussed in 2,469 cases in 2025 alone.
- In 2024, more than 20,000 children were treated in only 16 psychiatric outpatient institutions. Inpatient care was available in only eight of Hungary's 19 counties and Budapest.

**UNICEF Hungary calls on the Government to:**

- Adopt and adequately fund a cross-sectoral national strategy for child and adolescent mental health, focusing on prevention, early intervention and measurable outcomes.
- Progressively increase mental-health spending from the current estimated 3 to 4 per cent of the health budget towards the EU benchmark of 6 per cent.
- Expand school psychology, introduce age-appropriate mental-health education, **address and reduce mental-health-related stigma**, and strengthen psychiatric, psychological and community-based services, supported by national monitoring and the meaningful participation of children and young people.

## To conclude, this UPR takes place at a moment of exceptional responsibility and opportunity.

We hope that these recommendations will help turn the current political commitment into measurable and lasting systemic reform, with particular attention to children living in the most vulnerable situations.

**Every child in Hungary must be protected, heard and given a genuine opportunity to thrive.**

Thank you.