

THE ABANDONED CHILDREN OF THE BANAT IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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The State Children's Asylums of dualist Hungary offered care for the abandoned children from infancy until 15 years.¹ Because the institution was new to the Hungarian society, and as such misunderstood by many parents, the dualist period can be characterized by its consolidation and improvement. Sándor Szana was one of the paediatricians who left his mark on the Hungarian child welfare system. His career started in Timișoara/ Temesvár.² As a young and ambitious physician he initiated the establishment of a local branch of the National White Cross Foundling Home Association in Timișoara.³ In the year-book he revealed the first hardships as the director-physician of the foundling home: "The death of the first [child] made us sad. [...] At the second we've panicked. [...] In short, we felt sorry for every individual death. In a foundling home active for years this is impossible; the individual is lost in the routine of working with high numbers. In our small newly founded institution we have been working with individuals. In big institutions this is impossible, they work only with numbers".⁴ In a few years' time as the director-physician of the Timișoara State Children's Asylum, he was responsible for over 2000 aban-

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² For simplicity I use the current official name of the localities. The official Hungarian name from the dualist period is mentioned at first appearance.

³ National White Cross Foundling Home Association ("Fehér Kereszt" Országos Lelencház-Egyesület)

⁴ A "Fehér Kereszt" Országos Lelencház-Egyesület temesvári fiók-egyesületének első évi jelentése, 1900 (Temesvár: Unió, 1901), 41.

doned children, a figure that rose significantly once he was transferred to the central institution in Budapest.

In this study I present the beginnings and the evolution of the state child welfare system in the Banat through the State Children's Asylum of Timișoara and its collaboration with other institutions, preceded for a short period by the foundling home of the White Cross. I follow the asylum's activities from its establishment in 1903 until the First World War. The Child Protection Laws of 1901 placed children declared abandoned between ages 0–15 under the supervision of the state through the 18 asylums of Hungary.⁵ The law was applied from 1903 when the Regulation for the protection of abandoned children (Regulations) was issued, detailing how state children should be taken care of.⁶ Once admitted into state care, they were placed with foster parents in so-called colonies, where more families accepted fosterlings for monthly payments. Placing the abandoned children in the countryside was used for a long time by foundling hospitals in many European countries to relieve the overcrowded big urban centres and at the same time to increase infants' chances of survival.⁷ Foster care enabled the asylums to raise a lot more children than orphanages, where the space was limited and unhealthy due to overcrowding. Parents facing financial difficulties or incapable of raising their children in decent conditions could also rely on state care if the child were declared abandoned by the Guardianship Authority, and thus child would be placed with a foster family. From 1907 children exposed to moral decay in their environment or those who were already "corrupted" were also eligible for state protection.⁸ Child protection was also subjected to the nationalist intentions of the state and the abandoned children were placed with Hungarian families. After the First World War the asylums on the annexed territories continued to function under Romanian administration but adapted to the new political circumstances.⁹

⁵ Acts 8/1901 and 21/1901.

⁶ Ordinance 1/1903, Ministry of interior.

⁷ Barbara A. Revuelta-Eugercios, "Who should be placed in the countryside? Changing practices of rural placement for abandoned infants in La Inclusa de Madrid, 1890–1935," in *Orphans and Abandoned Children in European History: Sixteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Nicoleta Roman (London: Routledge, 2018), 251–278; David L. Ransel, *Mothers of Misery: Child Abandonment in Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Isabelle Grenut, "Children admitted to public care in the Basses-Alpes department (France) in the late nineteenth century (1874–1904)," in *Orphans and Abandoned Children*, 152–61.

⁸ Gábor Gyáni, "Könyörületesség, fegyelmezés, avagy a szociális gondoskodás genealógiája," *Történelmi szemle* 41, no. 1–2 (1999): 57–81; Susan Zimmermann, *Divide, Provide, and Rule* (Budapest – New York: CEU Press, 2011), 48–56.

⁹ In the interwar period the asylums were renamed Centers for the Protection of Children (*Centre pentru ocrotirea copiilor*).

Sources and methods

The present study is based on official reports, statistical yearbooks and the works of doctors and child protection activists. The beginnings of the child protection in Timișoara and the transitional period towards state care are reconstructed from the White Cross Association's yearbooks. The official reports edited by the national inspector of the asylums Pál Ruffy contain detailed statistical data about the children (age, nationality, religion, provenance, mortality), foster parents and the administration of the institutions, covering the period between 1903–1910.¹⁰ The rest of the data was gathered from the official reports of the city of Timișoara and national statistical yearbooks.¹¹ After the state asylums took over the supervision of assisted children, the White Cross and a lot of newly founded associations sought to complete the expanding child welfare system.

Asylum officials published a lot of articles with the intention to propagate the institution and familiarize the general public with it. Director-physicians confronted with the insufficiencies of the system came up with various innovative solutions. Sándor Szana had a great influence on the Hungarian child welfare system throughout his career, started at the White Cross.¹² For example, as the director of the Timișoara asylum, he initiated the training and employment of colony supervisors. In 1909 he was transferred to the central institution in Budapest in the same position. He published many studies on infants, foster parents, youth delinquency – some destined for the medical community, while others for the general public.¹³

Szana and other future director-physicians like Gusztáv Genersich (Cluj/Kolozsvár asylum) were well known in the circle of activists, doctors and politicians involved in child protection even before the laws were issued. For example, they attended the International Child Protection Congress held in Budapest (September 1899), where, during the conference exposition Szana presented the informative leaflet about children's healthcare which had been disseminated

¹⁰ *Jelentés az állami gyermekmenhelyeknek ... évi munkásságáról*. 1903 (Budapest: Schmidl, 1905); 1904 (1906); 1905 (Budapest: Pátria, 1907); 1906 (1908); 1907–1910 (1913).

¹¹ *Városi Közlöny* [Temesvár] 6–20 (1903–1917); *Jelentés és statisztikai évkönyv a m. kir. kormány [1903–1918] évi működéséről és az ország közállapotairól*. Budapest, Athenaeum: [1904–1914].

¹² Sándor Szana, *A gyermekvédelem szervezése Temesvárott* (Budapest: Pallas, 1902); Sándor Szana, *Az állami gyermekvédelem fejlesztéséről* (Temesvár: Uhrmann, 1903); Sándor Szana, Jenő Győrbíró, *Az árvaszék ügyvitele az elhagyott gyermekek védelme körül* (Temesvár, 1904).

¹³ Zsófia Pók Körmendiné, "A Budapesti Magyar Királyi Állami Gyermekmenhely története és irodalma," *Kaleidoscope* 7, no. 13 (2016), 576–642.

among the population in 25 000 copies.¹⁴ Before the opening of the local White Cross facilities in Timișoara he had personally consulted with and asked for advice from Mór Szalárdi, the promoter of the child protection movement and the founder of the White Cross in the late nineteenth-century Budapest.¹⁵ The creators of the child protection laws often discussed the national intention of the Hungarian state in these circles frequented by these young doctors, which is reflected in many of their publications.¹⁶

Sándor Szana and the beginnings of the state child protection in Timișoara

Although from a legal perspective, in dualist Hungary the municipality of origin was supposed to provide for poor children and foundlings of the community, in practice local officials rarely intervened in such cases except for entrusting the infants to the cheapest wet-nurse available.¹⁷ While some older children were raised in orphanages, these institutions were never intended or equipped to deal with child abandonment, usually occurring in infancy. Foundling homes in many European countries functioned near maternities and accepted only small children, who were placed with wet-nurses in the countryside.¹⁸ In Hungary many young, unwed mothers placed their unwanted infants to wet-nurses in the countryside surrounding the big cities, but the inadequate feeding often led to their early deaths. This uncontrolled mercenary wet-nursing received the name of “angel-making” and caught the attention of doctors and activist like Mór Szalárdi, who started to raise public awareness in the press. From 1885, the White Cross Foundling Home Association (*Országos Fehér Kereszt Lelchenház-Egyesület*) in Budapest endeavoured to professionally organise the care and supervision of the foundlings, and at the end of the century it extended its activities through local agencies in many parts of the country, including Timișoara.

According to Sándor Szana, no child protection existed until 1899,

¹⁴ *Nemzetközi Gyermekvédő Kongresszus Naplója*, ed. István Scherer (Budapest: Pesti Könyvnyomda, 1900), 414.

¹⁵ A “Fehér Kereszt” Országos Lelchenház-Egyesület temesvári fiók-egyesületének első évi jelentése, 1900 (Temesvár: Unió, 1901), 8.

¹⁶ Sándor, Györbíró, *Az árvaszék ügyvitele*.

¹⁷ Gyáni, “Könyörületesség, fegyelmezés,” 57–81; Marianne Kaszás, “Az egyesületi karitáztól az állami gondoskodásig. Szociális gyermekvédelem a századfordulón Budapesten,” *Szociológiai Szemle* 4, no. 1 (1994): 127–145.

¹⁸ Ransel, *Mothers of misery*; Bárbara A. Revuelta Eugercios, “Releasing Mother’s Burdens: Child Abandonment and Retrieval in Madrid, 1890–1935,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 42, no. 4 (Spring 2012): 645–72.

and society's "primitive charity games" could not be called as such.¹⁹ An important step in the intervention of the state was the establishment of the State Healthcare Fund (*Országos betegápolási alap*) in 1898, which covered the childcare costs of foundlings and abandoned children under 7 years of age. Provisionally, the White Cross was entrusted with their supervision at the expense of the state, which facilitated its geographical expansion, establishing 11 local offices. The creators of child protection laws of 1901 deliberately intended to take over the local White Cross facilities until its new premises were finished.²⁰ In Timișoara the local White Cross foundling home started its activity in February 1900, and in this rather short period, it prepared the grounds for the state asylum which took over the supervision of the abandoned children in 1903.

The White Cross foundling homes placed children in external care to wet-nurses and foster parents, just like most European institutions. Because artificially fed infants had the lowest chances of survival, the White Cross tried to convince the mothers to breastfeed their infants for a monthly subsidy. The unwanted newborns of young women employed in domestic service in the big cities represented the highest share of abandoned children.²¹ In the Timișoara facility over half of the assisted children were born out of wedlock. Although foundlings in the true sense of the word – without any known relatives – were rare (only 6 in 1902), many mothers couldn't accept breastfeeding their infant. In 1902, 41.5% of the children were placed with their own mother, 14.9% were fed by a wet nurse and only 6.5% were artificially fed by a foster mother. The mother and child were placed together to a family for the breastfeeding period (usually 14–16 months),²² and the hosts received a payment from the association. Mothers were encouraged to go to a relative if possible, during this period (117 infants or 13.2% in 1901).

The causes of abandonment denote the situation of the mothers: 37.3% were unable to work while breastfeeding, 15.8% were housemaids, 5.8% had been abandoned by the father of the child, and 12.1% were single mothers with more children. In big industrial centres like Timișoara, poor married women employed in factories were often forced to seek the help of similar institutions in order to support their family. The association also accepted a few so-called "private foundlings", whose sustenance was paid for by a relative – presumably

¹⁹ Sándor Szana, "Szociálpszichológiai vizsgálatok a dajkaságba adott nagyobb gyermekek ellenőrzése körül," *Orvosok lapja* 24, no. 36 (September 4, 1913): 567–569.

²⁰ Kaszás, "Az egyesületi karitátszól."

²¹ Kaszás, "Az egyesületi"; Gyáni, "Könyörületesség," 76.

²² A "Fehér Kereszt" Országos Lelencház-Egyesület temesvári fiók-egyesületének második évi jelentése, 1901 (Temesvár: Unió, 1902), 18.

the illegitimate children of the wealthy.²³ Besides the protection of children, they also intervened in the protection of mothers. Already since December 1901, it supported a maternity lead by Jenő Tauffer with 20 beds, of which 6 were reserved for poor pregnant women who had no lodgings and couldn't work because of the advanced stage of their pregnancy. They also offered free legal aid for poor women in child protection matters (usually against the deserting father).²⁴

The White Cross foundling home was taken over by the state in 1903. Its premises were used until the new building of the central institution was finished. The changes in the admission and placing policy resulted in the decrease of the total number of children in 1904 compared to the previous period (Figure 3). Not all children fulfilled the asylum's requirements of abandonment; 5.6% were refused and returned to the care of the association. For another 5.3% of the proteges, the breastfeeding period ended and the mother regained her ability to work and sustain herself, although caring for a small child still raised an issue. Others weren't declared abandoned by the authorities or remediated their situation in the meantime (4.1%), while 11.1% were voluntarily retrieved by the mother. In Cluj for example, after the implementation of the Regulations, misinformed mothers who thought that they would care for their child and receive the subsidy, refused the assistance upon realising that the child would be placed in foster care.²⁵ While similar cases are likely to have happened in Timișoara, because the White Cross offered aid for many children older than two raised by the mother (6.2%) or grandmother (3.4%), such practices were denied by the new asylum. The association even offered to cover the childcare costs in order to protect the mother if the authorities' investigations on abandonment endangered her "moral existence".²⁶

Inspired by foundling homes in several European countries, Szana quickly realised that the success of the fosterage program depended on supervision. He had a free hand in organising child protection in the White Cross foundling home, but initiated many innovations in the Timișoara state asylum as well. He individualized supervision, and as a result the time and method of control were determined individually for each child, depending on his or her development, as assessed by the doctor at the last control. For example, children placed

²³ 13 children were kept for payment in 1902. A "Fehér Kereszt" Délvidéki Gyermekvédeő Egyesület harmadik évi jelentése, 1902 (Temesvár: Csendes Jakab, 1903), 9.

²⁴ A "Fehér Kereszt" 1901, 24–25; Kun, Marschalkó, Rottenbiller, A *fiatalkorúak*, 453.

²⁵ *Jelentés* 1904, 178.

²⁶ The statutes of the White Cross Child Protection Association of Délvidék, Serviciul Județean Timiș al Arhivelor Naționale ale României, Primăria Municipiului Timișoara F2, Inventory 184, Folder 21/1905.

with their own mother needed less rigorous control than those placed with a wet-nurse or fed artificially. Supervision in the colony was entrusted to female volunteers from the local intelligentsia, in order to lessen the duties of the overwhelmed district physicians. The ladies received printed forms and envelopes addressed to the foundling home with some common complaints to be underlined (e.g., unsatisfactory clothing) to facilitate the communication with the institution.²⁷ They were usually responsible for 4 to 7 children and according to Szana, supervision was functioning properly, but one must note that they supervised a relatively small number of children in the beginning, compared to the years to come (see Figure 3).

A voluntarily-based supervision proved insufficient for the rising number of fosterlings in the colonies and specially trained employees were needed. In 1906 he initiated the employment of the first professional colony supervisor at the Timișoara asylum, who received a six-week-long training course on the care of infants at the expense of the White Cross. She was appointed to supervise the infants and the small children under two, who were placed with wet-nurses in the Novi Itebej/ Magyarittebe colony (132 in total). She was also responsible for seeking out prospective wet-nurses from the colony in order to breastfeed more infants admitted without a mother and also for disseminating knowledge on correct feeding practices in the community. Szana's attempt proved successful and in 1909, as the newly appointed director of the Budapest asylum, he organised a large-scale training programme with 170 attendees. Colony inspectors had to be educated and respectable women; many of the participants were daughters of teachers, priests and physicians.²⁸ Szana was very interested in perfecting the supervision system, even editing a journal supplement dedicated for colony supervisors which was distributed to each one of them.²⁹

The diversification of child protection institutions

The state asylums were designed from the beginning to collaborate with the private association and the local communities, mainly because they were initially established only for a certain group of children that needed external help: those who couldn't be raised in their natural family. Nemoianu later argues that state asylums were a step too far, and attributes the system's shortcomings to the intervention of the state which took place too soon and wasn't based on already existing similar private association, except for the rather short activity

²⁷ A "Fehér Kereszt" Országos Lelencház-Egyesület temesvári fiók-egyesületének első évi jelentése, 1900 (Temesvár: Unió, 1901), 33–52.

²⁸ Sándor Szana, "A telepfelügyelőnői tanfolyam a budapesti állami gyermekmenhelyben," *Gyermekvédelmi lap* 5, no. 4 (April 1909): 49–51.

²⁹ *Gyermekvédelem és gyermekápolás* 10–12 (1911–1913). Supplement of *Jó egészség*.

of the White Cross.³⁰ The fact that the asylums turned out to house a very heterogeneous group of children was the result of (1) the incapacity of the municipalities to assist the poor families with children who ultimately sought the help of the asylum and (2) the moral neglect decrees which entrusted this group of children to the care of the asylums. Asylums relied on private associations and the local communities to protect those children who didn't fulfil the requirements of abandonment, but needed financial support nevertheless. Although the society and private associations did intervene in similar situations, their funds and capacity were limited. Some parents with financial problems found themselves forced to admit their child to state care, even though they could have remained in the family with some support. Because such cases were quite numerous, the rule of separation from the natural family triggered a lot of debates among doctors, politicians, and child protection activists.³¹ During the first years of its existence, the White Cross foundling home placed a considerable number of infants and children with their mother outside the colonies (13.2% in 1901). However, the asylums were very strict in placing them inside a colony with foster parents, allowing very few exceptions. By 1912 the proportion of those placed outside the colony had dropped below 2%, but more and more children (10.71%) were placed in one of the emerging – or previously established – child protection facilities.

The National Child Protection League (*Országos Gyermekvédő Liga*) was the largest association to intervene in child protection matters. The League also received a considerable state subvention which significantly increased its efficiency. There were several local initiatives too in the Banat which focused on certain groups of children or activities (e.g., Gizella city orphanage, protection of teenage housemaids, apprentice homes, deaf-mute institution, sending poor children to summer camps).³² In Timișoara the League didn't establish a local branch, but was substituted by the White Cross which had become an independent association in the meantime.³³ After the asylums took over the supervision of state children, the League engaged in a wide range of complementary child

³⁰ Iosif Nemoianu, *Contribuțiuni la problema copiilor în Banat* (Lugoj: Tipografia Națională, 1928), 64–66.

³¹ Gyula Bellyei Rickl, Jenő Berczeli Berczelly, eds., *III. Országos Patronage-kongresszus naplója* (Kassa: "Szent Erzsébet" Könyvnyomda, 1912), 76–107.

³² Béla Kun, János Marschalkó, Fülöp Rottenbiller, *A fiatalkorúak támogatására hivatott jótékony célú intézmények Magyarországon* (Budapest: Wodianer, 1911), 452–65.

³³ Nemoianu, *Contribuțiuni*, 5. From 1902 the Timișoara branch became an independent association and was renamed White Cross Child Protection Association of Délvidék (*Fehér Kereszt Délvidéki Gyermekvédő Egyesület*). The geographical delimitation of the "Délvidék" is controversial and it cannot be accurately translated. During dualism it referred to the South-Eastern regions of the Hungarian Kingdom, mostly the historical Banat.

protection activities. Despite Nemoianu's statement that it was reduced to an auxiliary role "soon to disappear altogether," during the dualism it continued to support a series of facilities.³⁴ Their main attention however turned towards poor children's healthcare. Although to witness the death of a child without consulting a doctor was punishable by law, poor families couldn't afford the costs of medical treatment. For example, a bottle of medicine for infants' diarrhoea cost as much as a day labourer's daily wage, which was unaffordable for a family with several children. The lack of a free familiar treatment for the employees of the cigar factories employing thousands of women resulted in the death of hundreds of children each year.³⁵ As a result, the White Cross established a polyclinic from the donations of Antal Sailer, where children from poor families were consulted, treated and received medicine for free. The city council donated the land for the hospital (near the asylum) and bricks from the demolished city walls.³⁶ Sándor Szana was entrusted to go on a field trip to visit children's hospitals across Europe and make recommendations on the equipment, layout and the furnishings of the future clinic.³⁷

The institutional diversification can also be attributed to the widening of the asylum's clientele. From 1907 onwards the "morally abandoned" children or those who had been exposed to moral decay in their environment were also eligible for state care.³⁸ Practically abandoned newborns and teenagers with behavioural problems became the responsibility of the same institution. The asylum designed to temporary assist infants was not prepared for it and neither were the foster parents. Foster families from the Târgu Mureş/ Marosvásárhely asylum reported that some of these children were stealing, a few families even refused to accept state children altogether.³⁹ In Vienna, for example, separate associations engaged in protecting the street children.⁴⁰ In Hungary, the League and a network of patronage associations fulfilled this task and established several special facilities across the country. From 1909 the Timișoara Patronage Association (*Temesvári Patronage Egylet*) – just like other patronage association emerging all over the country – focused mainly on juvenile offenders younger

³⁴ Nemoianu, *Contribuțiuni*, 65.

³⁵ Szana, *A gyermekvédelem szervezése*, 22–24.

³⁶ A "Fehér Kereszt" Délvidéki Gyermekvédő Egyesület negyedik évi jelentése, 1903 (Temesvár: Moravetz, 1904), 5–11.

³⁷ Sándor Szana, *Tanulmányút a temesvári állami gyermekmenhely s gyermekpoliklinika berendezése ügyében* (Budapest: Pallas, 1903).

³⁸ Zimmermann, *Divide, provide*, 49–55; Gyáni, "Könyörületesség, fegyelmezés".

³⁹ *Jelentés 1907–1910*, 85.

⁴⁰ Maria Papatthanassiou, "Play, work and petty crime: Children on the streets and public spaces of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Vienna," in *Orphans and Abandoned Children*, 162–180.

than 18 years old, but intervened in child abandonment cases as well.⁴¹ The asylums still accepted the morally neglected children or those exposed to moral decay in their environment, but cooperated with the emerging associations in finding them the most adequate placement.

Morally neglected children, just like the abandoned, were mostly an urban phenomenon. Parents often couldn't look after their children because they were away working all day, leaving their children unsupervised. In Vienna – similarly to other urban centres – the street was the playground, while some resorted to wandering and petty crimes.⁴² In Budapest for example, many of these teenagers were brought in by their parent(s), who couldn't discipline them anymore. According to Szana, some were “the bad children of good parents,” while others started wandering in order to escape the abuses at home. He was particularly interested in the behaviour of the delinquent youth admitted in the asylums, publishing some of his observations in an essay. He attempts to typologize the deviant children admitted in the asylums based on his experiences.⁴³ Finding the right environment, foster parent or a craft that raised the interest of the child was crucial but also difficult, and many ran away. One of them was a 13-year-old boy who ran away from Timișoara, stole along the way to Vienna and avoided the police multiple times before finally being caught in Szeged.⁴⁴

In 1907, already 2.2% of the new nationwide admissions were morally abandoned children, the figure tripling during the next year (6.6%). The moral abandonment decree of 1907 also changed the age-distribution of the new admittances (or transfers from other asylums), and more older children and teenagers were placed under state assistance (Figure 1). Previously, infants had been admitted in higher proportions, but in 1908 the 7–15-year-old age-group in Timișoara almost reached that of the infants and children between ages 1–7. The League founded many apprentice homes and established special facilities for ‘corrupted’ children. The most renowned was the Árpád Home in Szeged, designed to educate children with bad behaviour who needed strict supervision and couldn't be placed either in fosterage or in juvenile detention centres, for the latter would have had a negative effect on them.⁴⁵ The League

⁴¹ Lóránd Balla, *Temesvár egyesületei a dualizmus korában, különös tekintettel a regionális identitást előmozdító egyesületekre*, PhD dissertation (Budapest: 2017), 193–198.

⁴² Papathanassiou, “Play, work,” 162–180.

⁴³ Sándor Szana, *A züllött gyermekek socialhygieniájának magyar rendszere* (Budapest: Pallas, 1910), 66.

⁴⁴ “Az ország legfiatalabb szélhámosa Szegeden,” *Szeged és vidéke* 14, no. 179 (August 4, 1915): 3.

⁴⁵ “Jelentés az Árpád-otthon 1908–1909 évi működéséről,” *Gyermekvédelmi lap* 5, no. 11 (November 1909): 153.

also took great pride in the seaman apprenticeship programme for corrupted children.⁴⁶

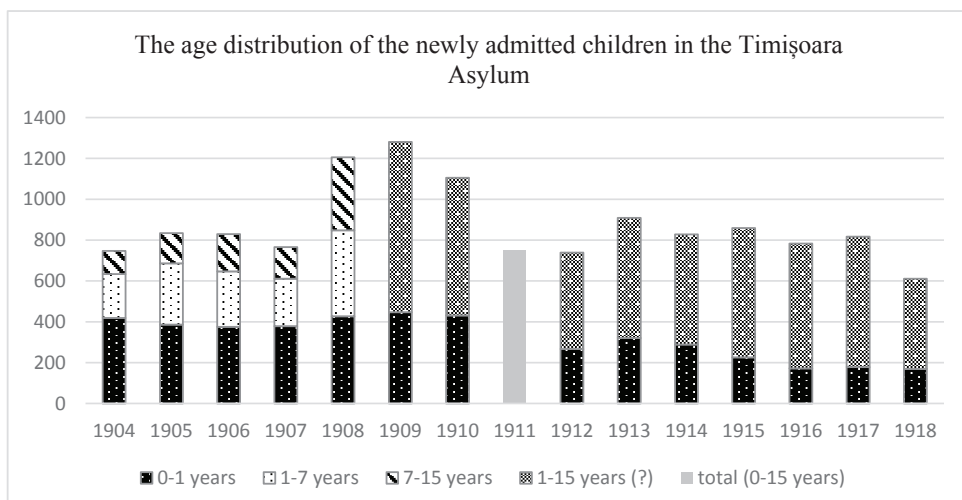


Fig. 1. Source: Nemoianu, *Contribuțiuni*, 118–119.

About half of the total 1410 morally abandoned children admitted between 1907–1909 were placed in foster care or to craftsmen, and only 13.8% were sent to special facilities.⁴⁷ In Timișoara such an institution was sustained by the White Cross for the examination of the morally abandoned. The Andrásy Home (*Andrássy szeretetház*), founded in 1907, was intended to separate and examine the morally neglected children in order to determine the most appropriate education and placement individually for each one of them.⁴⁸ The institution stood at the outskirts of the city, where 10 boys were supervised by a teacher. In December 1911 the institution housed 18 boys from the asylum, but disappeared from the sources the next year. In the Timișoara asylum, the corrupted children represented 6.6% among the new admittances in 1908, which the next year dropped to 0.1% to rise again to 9.1% in 1910. The presence of the Andrásy home likely influenced the child transfers from the capital, therefore the Timișoara asylum received an unprecedented 137 children from Budapest, which distributed 274 corrupted children in the provincial asylums all over the country in 1908. Compared to the previous year when 36% of the children

⁴⁶ “Magyar fiúk a Fekete-tengeren,” *Az Újság* 5, no. 257 (October 30, 1907): 10.

⁴⁷ Sándor Szana, *A züllött gyermekek*, 113.

⁴⁸ “A rossz és züllött gyermekek orvosi szempontból,” *Gyermekvédelmi lap* 4, no. 12 (December 1907): 158–160.

came from the city of Timișoara, in 1908 31.1% of the newly admitted children originated outside of the Banat or from Budapest.

A special colony was also set up in Cerna/ Temescserna for the corrupted children at the private initiative of Dervera [Devera?] József, who benefitted from their labour force while introducing them to agricultural work. Dervera rented an estate and housed 50 morally abandoned 12–15-year-old boys from the Timișoara asylum. Besides fieldwork and taking care of the livestock (horses and cattle), the boys were also introduced to the basics of craft by a blacksmith, saddler, shoemaker and wheelwright. The first boys arrived in February 1910, but this undertaking lasted only for two years.⁴⁹ Later Nemoianu ironically commented that it was probably closed down because “the ethnic surroundings [of the colony] were inimical”.⁵⁰

Geographical strategy

In Timișoara the White Cross prepared the grounds for the future colonies, which were established in villages where more families agreed to raise foster-lings. The first colony was Dumbrăvița/ Újszentes in the vicinity of Timișoara, where Sándor Szana and the vice-president of the White Cross joined a meeting to inform the community about the importance of child protection and foster care.⁵¹ The association established nine colonies, including the city of Timișoara. Four out of the eight rural colonies were inhabited in majority by Hungarians while the other four by Germans – presumably for the placement of the German children. When the asylum took over the supervision of the assisted children the colonies were reinspected in order to assess whether they met the requirements of the new state child welfare system. The Hungarian colonies were used henceforward and later expanded, while the colonies in the German villages were closed. Pál Ruffy, the supervisor of the state asylum, argued that the White Cross placed the children randomly and the colonies which didn’t comply with the “hygienic, cultural, social and ethnographical requirements” for placing children were gradually closed. As a result, some children were taken away from the foster parents they had already attached themselves to and re-placed with another family.⁵²

⁴⁹ “Menhelybeli gyermekek alkalmazása és fölnevelése a mezőgazdaságban,” *Köztelek* 21, no. 64 (August 16, 1911): 2010.

⁵⁰ Nemoianu, *Contribuțiuni*, 96.

⁵¹ A “Fehér Kereszt” 1900, 13.

⁵² *Jelentés* 1904, 37.

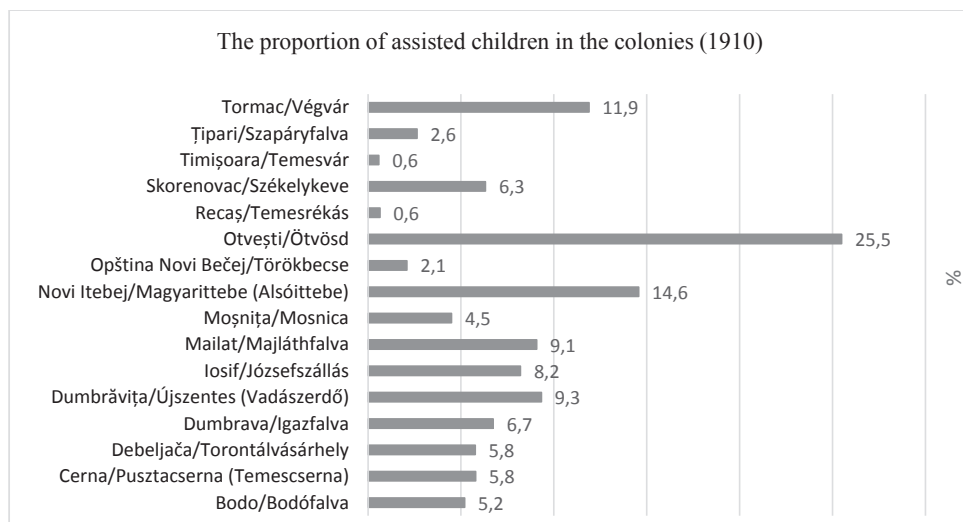


Fig. 2. Sources: *Városi közlöny [Temesvár]* 14, no. 1 (January 1911): 62; *A Magyar Szent Korona országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása*. Budapest, Magyar Kir. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal: 1912.

The geographical strategy of the child placements mirrors the political intentions of the state. The asylums were harshly criticized for the Magyarization of the children under their protection, which was achieved through the colony-system. In the case of the 19th century Russian foundling homes the dynamic of the child-placements was determined by economic factors like the auxiliary employment opportunities in the region. In certain districts placements had periodically risen because of a bad harvest and families needed money or credit, but fosterlings were rare in Russian districts with many employment possibilities such as mills, workshops and village crafts.⁵³ In Hungary the geographical distribution of the fostering system was shaped from above. Colonies were initiated by director-physicians and needed the approval of the national inspector, Pál Ruffy. Grouping children in certain villages first of all made supervision easier, cheaper and more efficient, therefore it is far-fetched to attribute them only to nationalist intentions of the state, which were more visible in multi-ethnic regions. Hygienic knowledge also spread in the community to the benefit of the local children thanks to the frequent visits of colony supervisors, however it spread slowly and rarely passed the boundaries of the village.

In the Banat in 1910, the Hungarian population was only 15.3%, and they

⁵³ Ransel, *Mothers of misery*, 41–44.

lived mostly in towns and scattered villages.⁵⁴ Many colonies, like Dumbrăvița (1891), Dumbrava (1893), Bodo (1893), Otvești (1868), Iosif (1868), Țipari (1881) or Recaș (1899) were newly founded settlements (or additions to existing ones) colonized with Hungarian families only in the second half of the 19th century.⁵⁵ Others like Novi Itebej (1786), Debeljača (1794) Mailat (1819), Tormac (1794) were populated by Hungarian settlers from an earlier period.⁵⁶ Almost all the colonies were established in one such locality. Due to the limited number of Hungarian villages the colonies in the Banat were usually overcrowded (Figure 2).⁵⁷ It was recommended that the proportion of state children placed into a colony should not top 3% of the inhabitants in order to facilitate the integration of the fosterlings in the community.⁵⁸ In 1910 however only 4 of the 16 active colonies were between the recommended figure, and in some the share of state children reached even 25.5% (Otvești). Most of them varied around 6–9%. Iosif Nemoianu, the director in the interwar period, also noticed the overpopulation of the colonies, arguing that the majority of the fosterlings were not integrated in the community, but the time spent in foster care was enough for their denationalization.⁵⁹

Figure 3. shows the ethnic distribution of the assisted children based on the mother-tongue of the mother from 1900 to 1915. During the administration of the White Cross the majority of children were German, while Romanian children were underrepresented compared to the general population of the Banat. There were Serbian (around 8%), Slovakian, Czech and Croatian children too among the assisted. From 1904 onwards the proportion of Hungarian children had been continuously rising, which can be explained partly by the geographical provenance of the children. Between 1904–1907 on average 32.7% of the newly admitted children came from the city of Timișoara with a considerable number of Hungarian inhabitants. The Timișoara asylum also received many children from the central asylum in Budapest, also raising the number of Hungarian children. On the other hand, only 11–12% of the children came from Caraș-Severin/ Krassó-Szörény county prior to the war, a county with a predominantly Romanian population (72% in 1910). Later this was often explained as

⁵⁴ Sándor Kókai, *A Bánság történeti földrajza (1718–1918)* (Nyíregyháza: Nyíregyházi Főiskola Turizmus és Földrajztudományi Intézete, 2010), 95, 167, 178.

⁵⁵ Elemér Jakabffy, György Páll, *A bánsági magyarság húsz éve Romániában, 1918–1938* (Budapest: Studium, 1939), 205–206.

⁵⁶ Samu Borovszky, ed., *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai*. Available online at <https://mek.oszk.hu/09500/09536/html/index.html> (Accessed 8 March, 2021).

⁵⁷ Nemoianu, *Contribuțiuni*, 84–86.

⁵⁸ *Jelentés 1907–1910*, 41.

⁵⁹ Nemoianu, *Contribuțiuni*, 87–88.

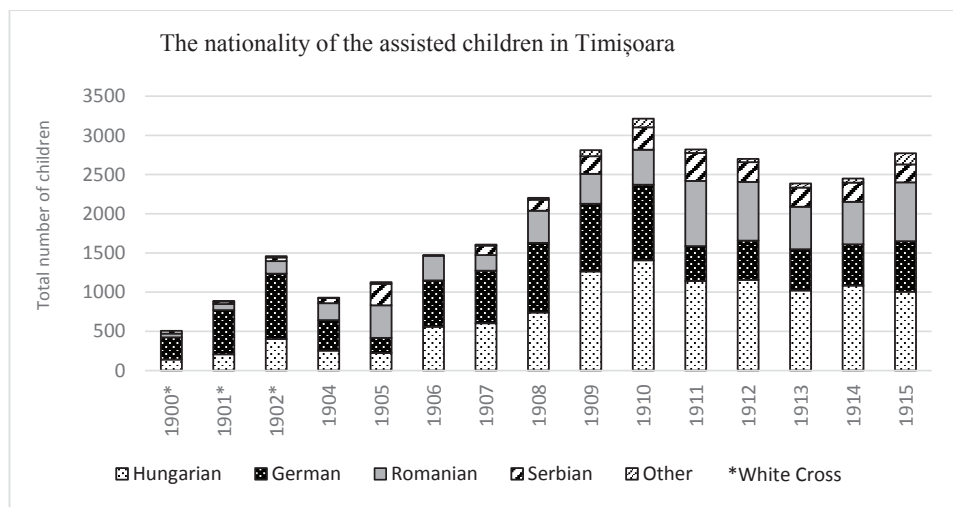


Fig. 3. Sources: A "Fehér Kereszt" [1900–1902]; *Jelentés és statisztikai évkönyv* [1903–1914].

deliberately neglecting the Romanian children, however this implied they were less affected by Magyarization.

In the Banat religion and nationality were closely entangled, therefore non-Hungarian children often mismatched the foster family from a confessional point of view as well. According to the Regulation one should be placed with a family of the same religion but if there weren't any available, exceptions were allowed.⁶⁰ In the Banat some of the largest rural colonies were inhabited by Calvinist Hungarians (Tormac, Țipari, Novi Itebej, Dumbrava, Bodo, Debeljača), housing 38.3% of the assisted children in 1910, but only 6.8% of the total number of children were Calvinists. The religious and national identity of the Jewish children (about 3.4% in the Timișoara asylum) and the involvement of the Jewish community in their religious education exceeds the boundaries of the present study. The other active colonies were inhabited in majority by Roman Catholics (e.g., Skorenovac, Mailat, Otvești).⁶¹ According to *Figure 4*, most of the assisted children were Roman Catholic (49.5% in 1910) with a considerable proportion of Greek Orthodox faith (20%), meaning that many children from the Timișoara asylum were likely placed in foster families belonging to other denominations.

Religion played an important part in the education of children. In early modern France up until the late 19th century, foundlings were presumed to come

⁶⁰ Ordinance 1/1901, § 27.

⁶¹ Borovszky, ed., *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai*.

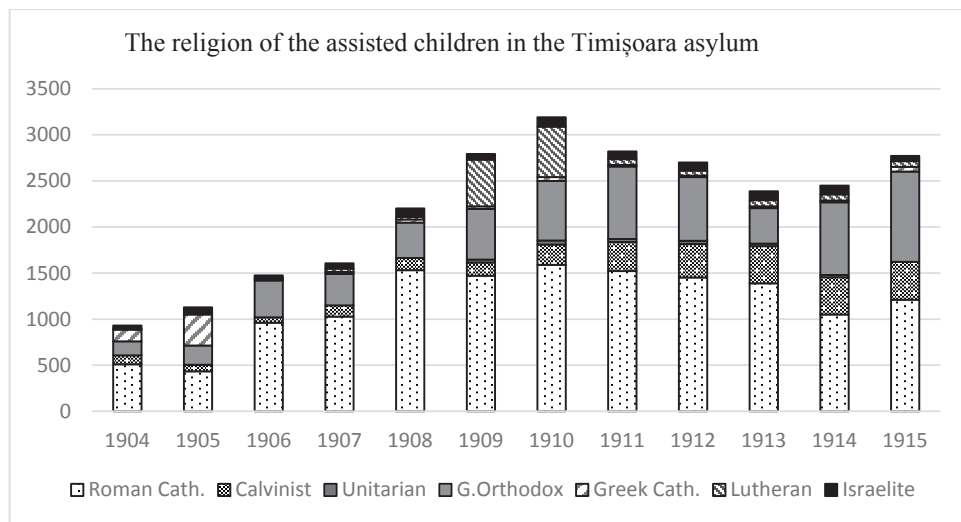


Fig. 4. Sources: *Jelentés és statisztikai évkönyv [1903–1914]*.

from Catholic families and were baptised by the institution which received them. Secularization however brought debates regarding the religious affiliation of the biological parents, questioning the right to administer a baptism altogether at the end of the century.⁶² In the late Ottoman Empire, the religion of the foundlings also triggered conflicts between certain communities and the state.⁶³ Nicoleta Roman's study reveals that in 19th century Bucharest religion also played a crucial role in the identity of abandoned children and their integration in the family/society. Before placing them in fosterage, they were baptised with a (formal) godparent and gained a new identity. The ritual of baptism was performed even if the child was already baptised in another faith, as notes sometimes suggested alongside the babies found on the streets. Biological parents of the infants abandoned in Bucharest relinquished their rights to the child, and very few were reunited with the natural family.⁶⁴ In Hungary, foundlings were to be delivered to the local authorities, and were usually baptised according to the majority confession of the locality he or she was found in⁶⁵, however foundlings without any trace to their origin were rare and many parents admitted them

⁶² Vincent Gourdon, "Should abandoned children be baptised? The French case, the sixteenth to the early twentieth century," in *Orphans and Abandoned Children*, 39–60.

⁶³ Nazan Maksudyan, "The fight over nobody's children: Religion, nationality and citizenship of foundlings in the late Ottoman Empire," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 41 (Fall 2009): 151–179.

⁶⁴ Nicoleta Roman, "Constructing a social identity: State, abandoned children and family in mid-nineteenth-century Bucharest," in *Orphans and Abandoned Children*, 64, 71.

⁶⁵ Act 53/1868, § 18.

with the intentions of reuniting later. Furthermore, there were strict rules on the conversion of minors. Unlike in Bucharest, where new identity started with the baptism, the state children in Hungary already had a (religious) identity that could not be erased, but rather altered through upbringing and education.

The available data is not detailed enough to estimate the proportion of the “denationalized” children who were placed in a family of another nationality, because there is very few information on the outgoing children. The term “denationalized” was used by the Romanian physicians in the interwar period in the sense that the child had developed a different national identity compared to his or her birthmother. The development of a different national identity in foster care was highly age-dependant, for children comprehended certain aspects of cultural otherness differently throughout their childhood.⁶⁶ All fosterlings were raised in Hungarian culture and learned the language during foster care, but this didn’t necessarily result in a total alienation from their nationality of origin. (1) Firstly, many had spent only a short period in foster care and later reunited with their natural family. In these cases, the biological parent(s) had temporary difficulties and never intended to permanently abandon their child. For example, Nemoianu’s findings based on the personal files of the proteges show that from the 1213 infants admitted between 1906–1908 only 3.4% remained in state care until age 15. Secondly (2), the statistics contain many infants with their mothers, who received aid only during the breastfeeding period and didn’t actually abandon their child. From the infants admitted between 1906–1908 in the Timișoara asylum 30.1% died within a year and another 38.6% was retrieved within a year – most likely by the mother.⁶⁷ As a result, the number of those alienated from their nationality of origin is assumed to be less than the number of admitted children of a certain nationality.⁶⁸ Regarding the denationalization of the Romanian children, I agree with Nemoianu’s conclusion that the Romanian population was the least affected by Magyarization through the asylums due to the small number of the proteges. He attributed their unproportionally small admittance-rate during the dualism to the fact that as predominantly rural and conservative commu-

⁶⁶ A study on modern-day Catholic and Protestant pre-school children from Northern Ireland show that by age 6 children were able to indicate an awareness of ethnic identity and associated themselves with one of the groups. Paul Connolly, Berni Kelly, Alan Smith, “Ethnic habitus and young children: a case study of Northern Ireland,” *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (June 2009): 217–232.

⁶⁷ Nemoianu, *Contribuțiuni*, 58.

⁶⁸ Edina Gál, “The Denationalized Children of Transylvania: The State Children’s Asylum in Cluj after 1918,” in *Postwar Continuity and New Challenges in Central Europe, 1918–1923: The War that Never Ended*, eds. Tomasz Pudłocki, Kamil Ruszała (New York: Routledge, 2021), 329–46.

nities they were less exposed to the phenomenon of child abandonment characteristic to big urban centres.⁶⁹

Conclusions

The increasing interest in Hungary toward the protection of children in the public debate resulted in the intervention of the state in order to save the abandoned infants who often didn't survive the first years of life. In Timișoara this started with the establishment of the local branch of the White Cross Association, which undertook the care and supervision of the abandoned children at the expense of the state, preparing the grounds for the asylums. The Hungarian child welfare system was based on foster care, which made possible to assist a large number of children who were raised in families.

After the State Children's Asylum took over this task, the association still maintained its importance by engaging in child protection activities that the asylums couldn't take up, and established a polyclinic for poor children in Timișoara. The ambitious and hard-working doctor Sándor Szana made his mark on the Hungarian child welfare system with innovations in the supervision of the children placed in foster care, adjusted to the rising number of children. Although it was infants that initially triggered the intervention of the state, the target audience soon enlarged and took up the protection of the morally neglected children and young offenders. The Timișoara asylum received many of them from Budapest. With the widening of the clientele the asylum needed the support of the civil society, therefore associations like the National Child Protection League and the White Cross sustained a series of special institutions for children who couldn't be placed in foster care.

The geographical distribution of the colony-based fosterage system in the multi-ethnic Banat mirrored the nationalist politics of the state, and the assisted children were placed in overcrowded Hungarian villages. In the case of non-Hungarian children this resulted in the alteration of their national identity, but it is difficult to estimate their real proportions. From a retrospect, asylums managed to care efficiently only for the group of abandoned children they were initially designed for and not yet prepared for a general child protection in the dualist period. In that aspect however they were so efficient that asylums continued to function after the war and became model child protection institutions in interwar Romania.

⁶⁹ Iosif Nemoianu, "Organizarea Centrelor pentru ocrotirea copiilor," in *Conferința pentru studiul problemei ocrotirii copiilor*, ed. Maria Antonescu (București: Eminescu, 1942), 34; Nemoianu, *Contribuțiuni*, 117.

COPIII ABANDONAȚI DIN BANAT LA ÎNCEPUTUL SECOLULUI AL XX-LEA

Rezumat

La începutul secolului al XX-lea, statul ungar și-a asumat protecția copiilor abandonați pentru a reduce mortalitatea infantilă. Lucrarea de față examinează începutul și evoluția sistemului public pentru binele copilului și relațiile acestuia cu alte instituții din Banat. Înainte de constituirea Azilului de stat pentru copii, Asociației Crucea Albă i-a fost încredințată supravegherea copiilor asistați. Aceasta a ridicat în Timișoara o maternitate, o poli-clinică pentru copiii săraci, iar după ce statul și-a asumat grija pentru copiii abandonați, asociația a susținut mai multe facilități complementare pentru protecția copilului, pentru a ține pasul cu extinderea clientelei azilului. Din 1907, azilul de stat a primit mulți copii așa-numiți “abandonați moral”, a căror educație a devenit scopul principal al Ligii Naționale pentru Protecția Copilului, în colaborare cu azilurile. Sándor Szana, care și-a început activitatea la Asociația Crucea Albă, a influențat major sistemul emergent de protecție a copilului, devenind primul director-medic al azilului timișorean, iar ulterior al azilului din Budapesta.