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# Introduction

This publication, concerning four European models of child and childhood protection, was developed slowly and over a long time. It arose from discussions and sharing of practical experiences at international symposia. We draw on the strengths of these models and aim to inspire the search for new ways to support children on their journey of personal development.

Over the last 200-plus years, we have seen sudden and rapid changes in the lives of families, changes in the roles of children in families, and especially the rise of interest in the childhood of our children. During that time, the optimal solution for helping vulnerable children was sought for within the field of child and childhood protection. The dilemma of choosing between institutional care and upbringing in the family has been known since the 18th century.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, helping orphans became the main source of income for some families,<sup>2</sup> which is still the case today.

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<sup>1</sup> The question of placing children in institutional care and finding another solution for them had been an issue for a long time. The pressure had to be distributed evenly between orphanages and other forms of alternative care (e.g. foster care, adoption, poorhouses). This problem was addressed for the first time in 1779 by the Society of Arts and Manufactures in Hamburg, which organised a public debate on the topic: "Should priority be given to raising orphans in institutions or in families" (Červinková-Riegrová, 1887, p. 12).

<sup>2</sup> Until the end of the 18th century, the use of wet nurses was a common practice. After birth, babies were given to a wet nurse, who was paid for taking care of them. In 1775, 278 children were raised in this way at the Wallachian Hospital in Prague (Lenderová, Rýdl, 2006). This was sometimes turned into an industry; such was the case in the village of Bulanky, where 270 inhabitants took care of 420 foundlings (Červinková-Riegrová, 1887, pp. 82 ff.).

Despite advances in knowledge about children's needs and the increase in global prosperity, the number of children in need of help from the state and social workers is still high. There are several ways in which this number can drop, such as reduction of the fertility rate, lack of interest of the state and social workers in the fate of children, or preventive work. Our publication aims to help vulnerable children but at the same time to ensure that social workers' procedures are preventive in a broader context.

This book is divided into five independent chapters. Four of them discuss the development of the child and childhood protection systems in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and England and Wales. The authors of these chapters are specialists who not only deal with this issue in theory but also address the situation of vulnerable children and families in practice.

The final comparative chapter examines the strengths of the various models presented and their usefulness for working with vulnerable children. The authors based the comparison on Neil Gilbert's (Gilbert, Parton, Skivenes, 2011) paradigmatic view and sought to use the child focus model with proven elements of each system so that they can be applied in practice even without the necessary changes in legal norms in each country.

We hope that social workers and other professionals will derive inspiration for their work from this publication.

## References

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