

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT COORDINATOR ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

**Annual Report 2022 and Work Programme 2023
of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights
Mrs Ewa Kopacz
Vice President of the European Parliament**

Summary of the EP Coordinator's on Children's Rights work in 2022 within the statutory activities - main initiatives

Act as central contact point to monitor and actively promote children's rights in EU policies, ensuring coherence and visibility of Parliament's actions in this area

- **Russian aggression on Ukraine - focus on children**

- ✓ Intervention to the Commission and the Council on the *Protection of unaccompanied and separated children and children in institutional care fleeing from Ukraine to the European Union* - in cooperation with European Network on Ombudspersons for Children on 16 March 2022
- ✓ Initiator of and among responsible for the resolution of 7 April 2022 on *EU Protection of children and young people fleeing the war against Ukraine*
- ✓ Initiator of an exchange of views *on the risk of illegal adoption concerning Ukrainian children from institutional care fleeing the war* - JURI/EMPL extraordinary meeting on 21 April 2022
- ✓ Cooperation with internal and external actors on the Ukrainian children forcibly adopted and/or deported to Russia

- **Health - focus on children**

- ✓ Public hearing on *Challenges for mental health of new generation across the EU* - PETI meeting on 25 October 2022
- ✓ Public hearing on *Socio-economic impact on children* - Special Committee on Covid -19 pandemic (COVI) meeting on 8 December 2022

Act in the field of international child abduction, cross-border family issues and child friendly justice

- ✓ Organisation of a *High - level conference on Brussels IIb Regulation. What's new in EU family law* - in cooperation with Commissioner Didier Reynders and DG JUST on 08 September 2022
- ✓ Participation in events and conferences on child friendly justice
- ✓ Promoting cross-border mediation and encouraging and informing individual enquirers on the possible use of mediation in their particular cases

Be a central information point for citizens of the Member States in international parental child abduction or other cross-border family disputes

- ✓ Dealt with almost 40 inquires coming from the citizens concerning cross-border child related issues, including interventions at the diplomatic level
- ✓ Addressed the systematic breaches of EU and international rules concerning cross-border family matters

Annual Report 2022 and Work Programme 2023 of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights

Background

The obligation to protect and promote children's rights is enshrined in Treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which all Member States ratified. Published in March 2021, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child presents a detailed and comprehensive roadmap for steps to take at both EU and Member State level to protect and promote children's rights across the European Union and beyond.

The European Parliament Coordinator on Children's Rights mandate was established by a decision of the Bureau in 2018 to enable Parliament to have a comprehensive and coordinated approach on issues affecting children through the creation of a single point of contact both within the Parliament and externally in Parliament's work on children's rights. The position itself evolved from the European Parliament Mediator for International Child Abduction. The Coordinator remains a central contact point in the Parliament on parental child abduction and cross-border family matters, thereby keeping the link with its historical mandate and her particular relations with the Committee on Legal Affairs.

In July 2019, President David Maria Sassoli appointed Vice President Ewa Kopacz to the position of EP Coordinator on Children's Rights. In January 2022, Ewa Kopacz was re-elected as a Vice President of the European Parliament and requested by President Roberta Metsola to continue in the role of EP Coordinator on Children's Rights until the end of the parliamentary term 2019-2024.

The Coordinator presented her annual report 2022 and the work programme for 2023 to the Committee on Legal Affairs on 21 March 2023.

This paper presents a summary of the main activities and achievements of 2022 together with the work programme for 2023 under the three headings reflecting the main responsibilities within the Coordinator's mandate.

Heading I. Coordination of the EP activities in the field of children's rights.

Heading II. International child abduction and other cross-border family disputes.

Heading III. Focusing on specific issues in the field of children's rights.

I. Coordination of the EP activities in the field of children rights

2022 activities summary

As the European Union and the world started to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, the horrific events of war, unseen in Europe for decades, occurred. The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 defined and shaped the activities of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights in this period. Cooperation with parliamentary committees and individual Members intensified this year on issues related to the well-being of Ukrainian children, their safety, health, education and future.

At the same time, the Coordinator continued to focus her attention on other important topics in the area of child rights guided by the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child of March 2021. The Coordinator engaged in work on cross-border family law issues, child - friendly justice, impact of Covid-19 on children's rights, child safety online and general condition of mental and physical health of children. This engagement brought cooperation with a number of parliamentary committees.

Horizontal cooperation on issues related to situation of Ukrainian children

From the early days of the war in Ukraine, the scale of the cross-border and internal displacement of Ukrainian citizens is unprecedented in Europe since World War II. More than half of those fleeing from the war to date were minors. In many cases children were deprived of their families, their homes, familiar neighbourhood, access to education and health and their everyday normal activities. The Russian invasion and subsequent displacement exposes Ukrainian children to many dangers.

The Coordinator and her Office engaged immediately in work and issues related to the war in Ukraine in order to bring to light and to focus on the situation of children from Ukraine. The Coordinator was directly involved in a number of adopted resolutions¹. The most significant, taking into account the situation and rights of the Ukrainian children were:

- European Parliament resolution of 1 March 2022 on *the Russian aggression against Ukraine*². In the first days of Russian army shelling of the cities in

¹ The Coordinator has regrettably no competence to put forward proposals for resolutions in her capacity of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights. Her competence stemming from the Bureau mandate and giving a status of the only quasi formal body of the European Parliament that encompasses all questions related to children's rights, lacks in this respect a more formal recognition in that respect in the Rules of Procedure. The Coordinator could only use Rule 143 applicable to motions for resolution by individual Members. Therefore, as most of the resolutions regarding Russian aggression on Ukraine were submitted and negotiated directly at the political groups' level as the aggression escalated, the Coordinator put forward her suggestions via the political group she is a member of.

² https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0052_EN.html

Ukraine (mainly the capital Kiev), it was of the utmost importance to try to evacuate all vulnerable children, especially those undergoing hospital treatments, to safe places also directly on territories of the EU Member States. In this view, the Coordinator acted to bring this issue to the spotlight in the first resolution the Parliament adopted after the Russian aggression in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 where “...*the need to place a special emphasis on vulnerable groups, minorities, and women and children, since they are particularly affected in conflict situations and need special protection and support, in particular children in institutional care, unaccompanied children, and children with disabilities and other serious illnesses, including childhood cancers, and highlights the need to ensure that they continue to receive the necessary care and life-saving treatment and are immediately evacuated to safety...*” was stressed

- European Parliament resolution of 7 April 2022 on *the EU’s protection of children and young people fleeing the war in Ukraine*.³ This resolution was dedicated entirely to the situation of Ukrainian children displaced due to the Russian invasion. The Coordinator initiated and was responsible, on behalf of the political group she is a member of, for the resolution.
- European Parliament resolution of 15 September 2022 on *human rights violations in the context of the forced deportation of Ukrainian civilians to and the forced adoption of Ukrainian children in Russia*.⁴ The resolution condemned deportations to Russia and adoptions of Ukrainian children by Russian families. The Coordinator, in her capacity as a Vice President, chaired this debate.

Following the unprecedented flow of Ukrainian nationals into the European Union there was a growing concern over the safety of the most vulnerable groups of children. In this view, on 16 March 2022, the Coordinator addressed the European Commission and the Council in a letter co-signed by the European Network of Child Ombudspersons (ENOC) on the special protection required by unaccompanied and separated children and children in institutional care fleeing from Ukraine to the EU. The Coordinator and ENOC called on the European Commission and Member States to cooperate with the Ukrainian authorities and relevant international and non-governmental organisations to establish immediately a mandatory screening, registration and monitoring system for unaccompanied and separated children and children from institutional care in Ukraine who enter the European Union. They called as well for the immediate inclusion of these children in the monitoring systems of social and child protection services in receiving Member States to oversee the provision of their care in order to ensure their safety and protection as the only way to prevent abuse and exploitation that these children may be exposed to. This was one of the first initiatives taken in this field.

Furthermore, the Coordinator engaged on issues related to Ukrainian children with a number of relevant parliamentary committees in view of their particular competences in the field⁵. She

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0120_EN.html

⁴ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0320_EN.html

⁵ For details, please see the Chapter on “Cooperation with parliamentary committees”.

also cooperated on the issue of access to education in EU Member States for Ukrainian children who entered the EU after the 24 February aggression⁶.

Additionally, the Coordinator and her Office held regular meetings and cooperated with international organizations and NGO's on various questions concerning children impacted by the war in Ukraine⁷.

Cooperation with parliamentary committees

In 2022, the Coordinator engaged directly with some of the key committees with competences in different areas of children's rights. To support those cooperation efforts, the Office of the Coordinator develops and maintains working relationships with the Secretariats of relevant parliamentary committees. To this end, its unique position as part of the Secretariat of the Committee on Legal Affairs is particularly beneficial and appreciated.

Cooperation with Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI)

The Coordinator and her Office continued her special and close relations with the Committee on Legal Affairs as reflected in the ongoing cooperation on the legislative competences of this committee, namely family law issues, with a particular focus on cross-border procedures on custody and parental child abduction, mediation and alternative disputes resolution and better law making. During 2022, the Office of the Coordinator continued to work closely with the Committee on these topics and stays continuously at the disposal of the Committee to collaborate and support its Secretariat on issues related to children's rights, mediation and cross-border family law.

Cooperation with Committee on Petitions (PETI)

The Coordinator and her Office has an established day-to-day cooperation with the Committee on Petitions. On a regular basis, the Committee refer petitions concerning children's rights to the Coordinator and her Office. In 2022, in a referred petition, the Coordinator used her competence to address the authorities of a Member State via a diplomatic intervention. The matter related to the lack of enforcement of a decision to return a child in a cross-border parental child abduction case. At the same time, while responding to individual inquiries, after assessing their content, the Office may suggest to the citizen to use the petition mechanism to address a particular issue.

⁶ <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/events/support-ukrainian-children-and-youth-access-to-education>

⁷ For details, please see the Chapter on "Cooperation with institutions/bodies active in the field of children rights", in particular on cooperation with NGO's, stakeholders and experts.

It is now also an established practice that in matters concerning children's rights the Committee on Petitions invites the Coordinator to dedicated events organised by the Committee. On 25 October 2022, during the public hearing on *challenges for mental health of new generation across EU*⁸ the Coordinator highlighted the dire condition of psychological support and psychiatric care for children and adolescents across the EU, which are under enormous pressure after the Covid-19 pandemic. She also underlined that the worsening condition of child mental health is a result of many factors that needs to be addressed in parallel by local, national and European authorities and in cooperation with young people.

Cooperation with the Special Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future (COVI)

When established, the COVI Committee was tasked with analysing how the European response to the pandemic and the lessons learned can contribute to future action in the areas of health, coordinated approach with respect for democracy and fundamental rights, societal and economic impact, both in the EU and worldwide. The Coordinator became a full member of the Committee and was elected its second Vice Chair.

One of the many hearings organised in view of evidence and expertise sharing and gathering was dedicated solely to the question of the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children⁹. During this hearing, that took place on 8 December 2022, the Coordinator underlined the undeniable negative consequences that measures introduced to prevent the spread of Covid-19 had on children's well-being and on their rights, including access to education and other essential services, increased risk of harm as a result of domestic violence and online abuse and sexual abuse. She also commented on the lowering levels of physical and mental health in children.

Extraordinary DEVE/LIBE joint committee meeting on 4 April 2022

The Coordinator was invited to address the Committee on Development and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs at their joint meeting on the implementation of the temporary protection directive and humanitarian assistance to the displaced population, in particular children.

Extraordinary EMPL/JURI joint committee meeting on 21 April 2022

In view of the ongoing war in Ukraine, the Coordinator turned to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Committee on Employment and Social Affairs to organise an extraordinary joint

⁸[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/255352/PROGRAMME%20Mental%20Health%20Hearing%20\(final\).pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/255352/PROGRAMME%20Mental%20Health%20Hearing%20(final).pdf)

⁹https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/COVI/OJ/2022/12-08/1268353EN.pdf

meeting to tackle the issue of the *risk of illegal adoptions of Ukrainian children from the institutional care fleeing from war*¹⁰. The meeting took place on 21 April 2022 gathering experts who work on the issue at international and national levels, setting a scene for particularities of institutional care in Ukraine, discussing the issues of cross-border relocation, registering and monitoring of children and legal framework for intercountry adoption during the crisis such as armed conflict or natural disaster. During the meeting, the Coordinator raised, among other issues, changes in Russian law simplifying the procedure for adoptions of children deported from Ukraine to Russia.

Cooperation with institutions/bodies active in the field of children rights

In 2022, the Coordinator and her Office expanded and strengthened cooperation with institutions, bodies and stakeholders across the EU that focus on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child in a number of different fields.

Cooperation with the European Commission

The close cooperation with relevant directorates and units in the European Commission is vital for the Coordinator and her Office. Depending on the subject, the Coordinator reaches out to her counterparts in the Commission to act in view of promoting and protecting the rights of the child within and outside the European Union.

- Cooperation with DG Justice in the field of cross-border family law. In September 2022, the EP Coordinator co-hosted a High-level Conference with the Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders on the Brussels IIb Regulation¹¹. The Office collaborated closely with DG JUST on the organisation of the conference and on other issues relating to cross-border family law, especially on cases of parental child abduction.
- Cooperation with the Office of European Commission Coordinator on the rights of the child. The Office of the EP Coordinator established close relations with the EC Coordinator resulting in exchange of information and cooperation on the planned activities.

¹⁰ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/JURI/OJ/2022/04-21/1254332EN.pdf

¹¹ Detailed information on the event under the subheading: *Promotion of the international and EU legal frameworks and their proper implementation in cross-border family law*.

Participation in European Union Visitors Programme

The Coordinator's Office continues to participate in EUVP, meeting young professionals from countries outside the EU to discuss the activities and duties of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights and child related initiatives undertaken by the parliamentary committees in the European Parliament.

Cooperation with NGO's, stakeholders and experts

- Ongoing collaboration with:
 - European Network of Ombudsperson for Children (ENOC)
 - The Coordinator and her Office continue to have a very well established cooperation with ENOC. On 16 March 2022, the Coordinator and ENOC jointly addressed the European Commission and the Council to request the special protection required by unaccompanied and separated children and children in institutional care fleeing from Ukraine to the EU. The Chair of ENOC was also invited to give testimony during the extraordinary JURI/EMPL joint committee meeting on the risk of illegal adoptions of Ukrainian children from the institutional care fleeing from war that was organised following the initiative from the Coordinator.
 - The Office took part in the 26th Annual Conference *Shaping the Future: Children's Rights in a Climate Change* that took place on 19-20 September 2022;
 - The Coordinator and her Office continue to promote the work of ENOC within the Parliament.
 - Missing Children Europe:
 - The Coordinator and her Office continued cooperation with the organization on child rights and parental child abduction, including the iCARE project;
 - In view of the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine the Office cooperates with MSE on the issue of Ukrainian children missing due to war, including those deported to Russia and occupied territories and those placed by the Russian authorities for adoption with Russian families.
 - UNICEF
 - The Office has a well-established cooperation with UNICEF. 2022 was particularly marked with exchanges and cooperation in view of the situation of children from Ukraine fleeing war.
 - European Society for Paediatric Oncology (SIOP Europe)
 - The Coordinator and her Office continues to support the SIOPE's Gold September project on childhood cancer awareness month.
- Meetings and engagements with:
 - UN Special Representative to the Secretary General on Violence against Children Ms Najat Maalla M'jid - Covid-19 pandemic consequences and situation of Ukrainian children.

- Child Focus - unaccompanied children from Ukraine.
- Eurochild - early childhood care and protection of Ukrainian children.
- Fondazione Child - contribution to the conference on *How to Ensure and Promote Mental Health During War: Assessing and Responding to the Impact of Trauma on Child and Adolescent Development* 27 May 2022, Warsaw.
- Hope & Home for Children - children places outside the family.
- Save the Children - Health Week 2022, November 2022.
- Magnolia - Ukrainian children deported to Russia.
- Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę - EC proposal to fight child sexual abuse online.

In addition, the Coordinator's Office attended a number of conferences, trainings and events both online and in person on topics relevant to the work of the Coordinator. The Office continued to expand its network of professionals dealing with child rights related issues.

Coordinator's Agenda 2023 in the field of coordination of the EP activities in the field of children's rights

The Coordinator will continue to cooperate closely with relevant parliamentary committees to facilitate the implementation of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. She will also continue to focus on the needs and safety of Ukrainian children affected by the Russian invasion. In this respect, she intends to address some particular issues, including those concerning children deported to Russia and subjected to forced family separation and illegal adoptions. She is going to engage on this subject both inside and outside the Parliament, including with Commissioner Dubravka Šuica, responsible for the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

The Coordinator will continue to engage with experts and organisations in the field of children's rights to ensure that the issues relevant to the promotion and protection of children's rights will remain high on Parliament's agenda.

Possible review of the mandate of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights

Taking into account the experience gained in recent years and in view of the wider EP reform exercise that is ongoing, the Coordinator and her Office will review the competences vested to them in 2018 by the EP Bureau. She will reflect on the future role of the EP Coordinator towards strengthening and supporting the relevant parliamentary committees in their activities within the framework of their respective competences under the Annex VI of Rules of Procedure concerning children's rights. In this view, the Coordinator may wish to make recommendations to the EP Bureau to update the scope of the mandate and the associated toolbox of the future EP Coordinator on Children's Rights and the Office.

II. International child abduction and other cross-border family disputes

2022 activities summary

Promotion of the international and EU legal frameworks and their proper implementation in cross-border family law

On 1 August 2022, the long awaited changes to the rules on cross-border parental responsibility and child abduction cases came into force. So called “Brussels IIb Regulation” - the Council Regulation 2019/1111 of 25 June 2019 on jurisdiction, the recognition and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility, and on international child abduction¹² repealed the previous Regulation (EC) No 2201/2003. In this regard, and in line with her mandate, the Coordinator and her Office engaged in activities to promote the new rules among legal professionals, scholars and other interested stakeholders.

What’s new in EU family law? High-level Conference on the Brussels IIb Regulation

On 8 September 2022, the Coordinator together with Commissioner on Justice Didier Reynders co-hosted a conference entitled “What’s new in EU family law? High-level Conference on the Brussels IIb Regulation”. This event brought together experts in EU family law to address the novelties and important changes introduced by the Brussels IIb Regulation, in particular related to the right of the child to be heard, use of mediation and closer cooperation of courts and central authorities. Participants took part in a moderated discussion on the topic through Q&A session with simultaneous interpretation provided in 10 languages¹³. The main aim of the conference was to reach out to judges, lawyers, mediators, academics, Central Authorities, child protection officials, NGOs and children’s rights organisations engaged in cross-border family cases in EU and beyond.

The event gathered legal practitioners and stakeholders from all over the world and proved the need to create a space for sharing knowledge and experience on the complex cross-border custody and child abduction cases. The Conference was hailed as an important awareness raising event and discussion forum and, thanks to facilities offered by the Parliament, it provided access in person and online to almost 600 participants from almost 50 states from across the EU and worldwide¹⁴. All presentations, the recording and further details of the conference can be found on the official EP website of the Coordinator on Children’s Rights¹⁵.

¹² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019R1111>

¹³ EN, DE, FR, ES, IT, PL, PT, EL, BG, RO.

¹⁴ For more information please consult programme and detailed statistics under Annex I.

¹⁵ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/coordinator-on-children-rights/latest-information>

Child-friendly justice

In view of promoting and safeguarding the rights of the child in court proceedings, the Coordinator and her Office continued to engage on the topic of child-friendly justice with different stakeholders, including addressing different forums on this topic:

- *Project 12 - Justice for Children* - closing seminar on the project co-financed by European Commission under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, 18 May 2022, University of Lisbon;
- EFJ-EN - Child Friendly Justice Network - the Annual Seminar of the network entitled “*A 360° view on Child Friendly Justice*” 14 October 2022, Brussels.

The Coordinator’s Office continues to engage with academia in the field of child-friendly justice through participation in trainings (eg. European Academy of Law training on *Family law and human rights* January 2022) and seminars. In 2022, the Office established a good collaboration with European Judicial Training Network, in the course of the organization of the High Level Conference on Brussels IIb.

Modernisation of the website

Following the entry into force of the revised rules on parental responsibility in cross-border cases and international child abduction, the Coordinator’s Office updated its official website with all relevant information, documents and guidelines on the Brussels IIb Regulation for both parents and professionals.

Individual inquiries on parental child abductions, cross-border family cases and child related issues

Through her Office’s direct contact with European citizens and with stakeholders in the Member States, the Coordinator is uniquely positioned to understand and react, within her mandate, to the difficulties faced by parents and children in cross-border family disputes across the European Union, in particular parental child abductions. In 2022, she continued to react to breaches of EU and international law, including the 1980 Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and Brussels IIa Regulation and new rules under the Brussels IIb Regulation.

Similar to previous years, in 2022, when citizens addressed the Coordinator on the cross-border family matters, the cases were legally complex, highly conflictual and often long running. In such cases, the requesting parent had difficulty in seeking legal remedy, experienced long delays of legal proceedings or faced the lack of enforcement of the final decision of the court on the return of the child by national authorities. Some of those cases are already pending for many years and inquiring parents keep the Office informed on any developments concerning their legal situation or the lack of such.

Like in previous year, the Office observed the steady decline in the number of inquiries related to parental child abduction and other cross-border cases but with a new phenomenon of increased number of requests coming from abducting parents who do not agree with the court decision to return the child/children to the place of the habitual residence. At the same time, the number of diplomatic interventions undertaken by the Coordinator in individual cases remains at a similar level to previous years. The main issues raised by the inquirers continue to remain the same:

- long delays in cross-border procedures;
- difficulties in seeking the enforcement of the final court decisions to return the child to his/her habitual residence following a parental abduction;
- difficulties in finding legal representation experienced in cross-border family disputes often resulting in insufficient or even incorrect legal advice received by the parent;
- insufficient financial means at the parent's disposal, or exhausted legal aid, meaning that the parent could no longer afford to pay for a lawyer and the associated costs involved in pursuing redress in cross-border family disputes;
- denial of access rights (granted by the court) by the parent with whom the child lives resulting in little or no contact for the other parent with his/her child;

In 2022, the Coordinator's Office dealt with 43 inquiries and requests coming from citizens. Some of them required extensive research and follow-up exchanges.

In every case, the Office tried to provide information on the possible steps to take and on relevant services and authorities in the Member States or third countries to contact. Also in cases of domestic family law disputes, while the Coordinator does not have competence to deal with domestic family law matters, where appropriate, her Office tried to provide information and refer citizens to the relevant authorities or services in the requester's state for support or further advice. On every inquiry, the Office acts strictly under the understanding that the information and support provided does not amount to, or replace the provision of legal assistance, which the requesting citizen is advised to seek independently, should it be required.

The Office continued to receive inquiries and requests for information on the work and activities of the EP Coordinator from academics, researchers, journalists and national/local non-profit organisations and networks of legal professionals. There has been also an established collaboration with the Ask EP services within the European Parliament, who turn to the Office in case of cross-border family situations or child rights related inquiries.

The Coordinator continued to raise awareness about the EU and international legal framework in the field of cross-border family law and to address the outstanding issues concerning the proper implementation of the existing rules. On the parental child abduction cases, the Coordinator and her Office stay in close cooperation with DG JUST and, where appropriate, other relevant EU bodies.

Promotion of cross-border mediation

The Coordinator continued to advocate for the use of mediation in disputes involving children in cross-border family cases, in particular among those most closely involved in such disputes, i.e. judges, lawyers and national central authorities. The Coordinator stays in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders on this issue, including with International Mediation Centre for Family Conflict and Child Abduction (MiKK) and other networks. In 2022, the Coordinator's Office continued to highlight the importance of mediation to parents while dealing with their inquiries on parental child abduction or other cross-border family cases. The High-level conference on Brussels IIb Regulation (September 2022) also provided an opportunity to highlight the important changes in the Regulation on the role of mediation in cross-border family law disputes concerning children.

Coordinator's Agenda 2023 in the field of international child abduction and other cross-border family disputes

Building upon the success of the High-level Conference on Brussels IIb Regulation, the Coordinator and her Office will continue to develop and strengthen the collaboration with DG JUST, academia and external stakeholders on the promotion of child - friendly justice and on effective implementation of cross-border rules on family dispute resolution.

Guided by her mandate, the Coordinator and her Office will continue to provide requesting parents with information in cross-border family matters and address the shortcomings in the implementation of the existing rules through diplomatic interventions, where appropriate and deemed necessary. She will continue to promote mediation in both cross-border and domestic family law disputes.

III. Special issues to be addressed by the Coordinator in the field of children's rights

2022 activities summary and plans for 2023

As outlined in her 2020 Strategy paper, besides her statutory obligations the Coordinator continued to highlight certain issues relating to children's rights and wellbeing. The focus of the Coordinator's activities is on:

- the physical and mental health of children and adolescents, and
- child rights and safety in the online environment.

In 2022, both topics continued to be in the spotlight of public attention due to the Covid-19 pandemic and even more in view of the consequences of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The Coordinator sought to bring these issues and challenges into Parliament's agenda¹⁶ and plans to continue those activities in 2023, engaging with all relevant actors and bodies both inside and outside the European Parliament.

¹⁶ Please refer to the part on cooperation with parliamentary committees and with NGOs and stakeholders.

ANNEX I

- Poster

WHAT'S NEW IN EU FAMILY LAW?

**High-level
conference on
the Brussels IIb
Regulation**



HOSTED BY:
Ewa KOPACZ,

Vice President and the European Parliament Coordinator on Children's Rights
and **Didier REYNERS**

Commissioner for Justice

Interpretation in DE, EN, FR, IT, EL, ES, PT, PL, BG, RO

**THURSDAY,
8 SEPTEMBER 2022
13.00 TO 16.00**

MEETING ROOM: SPAAK 7C50

HYBRID CONFERENCE,
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
BRUSSELS AND ONLINE



- **Programme**



**What's new in EU family law?
High-level conference on Brussels IIb Regulation**

Draft Programme

8 September 2022, 13.00-16.00
The European Parliament, Brussels
with on-line participation via Interactio
EN, DE, FR, IT, ES, PL, EL, PT, BG, RO

13.00 - 13.15

Opening keynote speeches

Mrs. Ewa Kopacz, Vice President and European Parliament
Coordinator on Children's Rights

Mr. Didier Reynders, Commissioner for Justice

13.15 - 14.30

Experts' Panel on Brussels IIb Regulation

- The road to Brussels IIb and the key changes introduced by the Regulation
Dr. Miloš Hat'apka, *Justice and Home Affairs Counsellor, Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the EU*
- Applying Brussels IIb - The updated Practice Guide to the Regulation

Dr. Boriana Museeva, *Associate professor of Private International Law at Sofia University and Attorney-at-law at Musseva and Ivanov Attorney Partnership*

- The view from the Bench - Perspective from a practicing judge on the new Regulation

Ms. Martina Erb-Klünemann, *Family judge in Germany, liaison judge in European Judges Network and International Hague Network of Judges*

- Mediation in the spotlight - the role of mediation in cross-border family disputes under Brussels IIb

Ms. Ishtar Khalaf-Newsome, *Mediator and trainer, International Mediation Centre for Family Conflict & Child Abduction (MiKK)*

14.30-15.50

Open Floor Q&A

Introduction and Moderation

Mr. Arnaud Gillard, Family Law Committee, Council of Bars & Law Societies of Europe

Discussion and exchange of views

The floor will be open for comments, questions and suggestions from the participants.

15.50-16:00

Closing remarks

Mr. Markus Brückner, Secretary General of the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN)

- Statistics on registered participants

WHAT'S NEW IN EU FAMILY LAW?

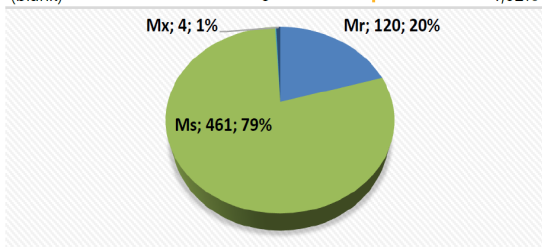
High-level conference on the Brussels IIb Regulation



THURSDAY,
8 SEPTEMBER 2022
13.00 TO 16.00

Status	#	%
Incomplete	8	1,37%
Registered	571	97,44%
Declined	5	0,85%
Added	2	0,34%
Grand Total	586	100,00%

Attendance	#	%
Online	516	88,05%
Onsite	64	10,92%
(blank)	6	1,02%



Function	#	%
Academic	54	9,22%
EU Official	11	1,88%
Government repres	49	8,36%
Judge	153	26,11%
Lawyer	160	27,30%
Mediator	41	7,00%
NGO / Child Rights	18	3,07%
Notary	7	1,19%
Other	81	13,82%
Student	10	1,71%
(blank)	2	0,34%

Floor requests	I would like to attend:	#
Yes, I would like	Online	37
	EN	19
	FR	3
	IT	1
	PL	3
	DE	3
	ES	2
	EL	3
	PT	1
	BG	2
	Onsite	12
	EN	8
	IT	2
	RO	1
	DE	1

COUNTRY	#	%
ALBANIA	5	0,86%
ARMENIA	2	0,34%
AUSTRALIA	2	0,34%
AUSTRIA	6	1,03%
BELGIUM	36	6,16%
BULGARIA	31	5,31%
CANADA	1	0,17%
CHINA, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF	1	0,17%
CROATIA	9	1,54%
CYPRUS	4	0,68%
CZECH REPUBLIC	7	1,20%
ENGLAND	7	1,20%
ESTONIA	16	2,74%
European Union	2	0,34%
FINLAND	20	3,42%
FRANCE	44	7,53%
GEORGIA	1	0,17%
GERMANY	49	8,39%
GREAT BRITAIN	11	1,88%
GREECE	7	1,20%
HUNGARY	11	1,88%
ICELAND	1	0,17%
INDIA	1	0,17%
IRELAND	11	1,88%
ITALY	24	4,11%
JERSEY	1	0,17%
KOREA, REPUBLIC OF	1	0,17%
LATVIA	50	8,56%
LITHUANIA	23	3,94%
LUXEMBOURG	10	1,71%
MALTA	7	1,20%
MEXICO	1	0,17%
NETHERLANDS	21	3,60%
NORWAY	2	0,34%
PAKISTAN	1	0,17%
PERU	1	0,17%
POLAND	32	5,48%
PORTUGAL	44	7,53%
ROMANIA	16	2,74%
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	2	0,34%
SCOTLAND	1	0,17%
SLOVAKIA	6	1,03%
SLOVENIA	5	0,86%
SPAIN	29	4,97%
SWEDEN	13	2,23%
SWITZERLAND	2	0,34%
TURKEY	2	0,34%
UKRAINE	4	0,68%
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	1	0,17%