

Future of the Cross-border Family Mediators network

Proposal for a strategic plan 2016-2018

> Background

The Cross-border Family Mediators (CBFM) network brings together family mediators from Europe and beyond, trained to deal with cross-border family conflicts. The network was launched in 2012 by the Belgian NGO Child Focus and the German NGO Mediation bei internationalen Kindschaftskonflikten (MiKK), with the support of the Dutch Centre for International Child Abduction, in the framework of an EU funded project. The network is based on a training and crossborder family mediation model developed in cooperation with the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

The coordination of the network was handed over to Missing Children Europe in 2014. Missing Children Europe is the European Federation for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children which represents 30 organizations from 24 European countries. Missing Children Europe coordinates a network of hotlines for missing children, now operational in 29 countries through the same telephone number 116 000. 37% of the cases handled by the hotlines for missing children in 2014 were cases of parental abductions. 60% of these cases were cross-border in nature.

As permanent members of the Task Force, MiKK as well as Child Focus, still play an important role in the preparation of the policy and activities of CBFM. Furthermore, MiKK is considered the main partner of CBFM in the creation and organization of trainings in cross-border family mediation.

More information on the network is available at www.missingchildreneurope.eu.

> Aim and objectives of the Cross-border Family Mediators' Network

The **general aim** of the Cross-border Family Mediators' network is to prevent, support and protect children from harm related to cross border family disputes, in particular cases of international parental abductions. The Cross-border Family Mediators' network acts in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular article 3 on the best interest of the child, and article 9 on the right to contact with both parents.

The following **specific objectives** are defined as a priority for the work of the network in 2016 - 2018, building on achievements of previous years:

1. **Embedding** the work of the network in existing systems targeting (cross-border) child disappearances
2. Ensuring high **quality** through offers to members that include training, supervision and monitoring
3. Supporting the development of effective EU policies on mediation
4. Raising **awareness** of mediation in the context of cross-border family conflicts



5. Mid-term, the Network will also undertake efforts aimed at expanding the network of mediators through new training. / Expanding the network of mediators through new training.

Through these objectives, the network aims to contribute to the development of integrated child protection systems, where different stakeholders work together to develop a net of safety and protection for all children. By setting specific priorities, we aim to invest the limited resources available to establish the network as a reliable and sustainable partner in protecting children involved in cross-border family conflicts.

> Envisaged actions to achieve set objectives

1. Embedding the work of the network in existing systems targeting (cross-border) child disappearances

Efforts will be undertaken to integrate the network and allow for more efficient and active cooperation with other stakeholders at different levels. This should help to increase referral of cases to members of the network, and should include work on improving the 'first contact' with parents facing a cross-border family conflict. Specific actions to achieve this objective will include:

- Embedding the CBFM network in the Missing Children Europe network:
 - Systematic reporting on the work of the network at Missing Children Europe events (General Assembly, conferences, round tables)
 - Involving Missing Children Europe members in the training for member-mediators (as trainers, organizers, observers)
 - Updating members of the CBFM Network through the existing communication channels on the achievements of Missing Children Europe that are of direct benefit to the member-mediators.
- Training for 116000 hotlines on the merits of mediation in cross-border family conflicts and on how to refer to mediation in individual cases. In countries where a pre-mediation service does not yet exist this training will have the aim of creating Mediation Bureaus – independent from the CBFM Network - in all European countries. In those countries where pre-mediation is already provided by established mediation NGOs, such as MiKK in Germany, or the Mediation Bureau in the Netherlands, no pre-mediation training for the 116000 hotlines in those countries will be required. Here the 1116000 hotlines will not need to provide a pre-mediation service but will simply refer the relevant cases to the established mediation NGOs which perform this service. These aim for the newly established Mediation Bureaus in the other European countries is for them to facilitate and organize mediations in international child abduction cases and all other cross-border family conflicts involving children with regards to their respective countries.
- Establishing regular contacts and cooperation with other networks active in the field of cross-border family mediation, including ISS and AIFI.

2. Ensuring high quality through offers to members that include training, supervision and monitoring



To consolidate the work of the network, we must work on assuring a high quality offer for all parents who wish to rely on network mediators to help them resolve their conflict. Specific actions to achieve this objective will include:

- Development of criteria to be subscribed to by all members of the Network
- Organization of regular ongoing training and supervision through face-to-face meetings and online meetings / webinars. External experts and trainers will be selected by the Task Force.
- Monitoring of the work and data on caseload of the network.

3. Supporting the development of effective EU policies on mediation

The European Union has, since the launch of the Network, been very supportive. The creation of the mediation model and training was co-financed by the European Commission under the Civil Justice Programme. After the launch of the Network, the European Union, through the e-justice website, has actively supported the use of the network by promoting it to EU-citizens in case of cross-border family conflicts. The Network wishes to consolidate this role by:

- Actively participating as a stakeholder in the EU debate on mediation in relation to cross-border family conflicts as well as cross-border parental child abductions, through representation by the Secretariat of Missing Children Europe.
- Actively collaborating with the EP mediator in an effort to strengthen the complementary role of both organizations in order to ensure the mutual re-enforcement of each other's services. The Network will put its expertise at the disposal of the EP Mediator to intervene and mediate individual cases. The EP Mediator would as such continue to play its diplomatic role in conflicts among Member States or individuals and a Member State. In Hague child abduction proceedings brought before the national courts.

4. Raising awareness of mediation in the context of cross-border family conflicts

Two EP studies have concluded that knowledge and awareness of mediation is essential if conflicting parents are to be motivated to attempt this possibility as a means of resolving their conflicts. The network wishes to cooperate with other partners in raising awareness about the value of mediation. Envisaged actions to achieve this objective will include:

- Cooperation with the EP mediator in raising awareness about mediation.
- Continuous communication on the activities of the Network and examples of individual cases via the existing communication channels of Missing Children Europe (newsletters, social media, events, ...) as well as through the dedicated website of the network.
- Cooperation and ongoing communication with the different Mediation Bureaus (independent from the CBFM Network) to exchange information and good practices, create a common vision and policy, and prepare lobby activities at European level.
- Ad hoc communication campaigns targeting specific stakeholders, such as Central Authorities, lawyers, judges, social workers, police authorities, guardians ad litem, bailiffs.

5. Expanding the network of mediators through new training





**Cross-Border
Family
Mediators**



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Since 2012, the network has continued to expand and now includes several members from non-EU States, in all parts of the world. This natural enlargement of the network should in the future be reflected in the daily work of the secretariat. While the priority for the coming years lies with the first four specific objectives, efforts will be considered in the future to continue expansion of the network through the delivery of training. A clear distinction should hereby be made between collaboration with Hague Convention countries and non-Hague Convention countries.


In the long term, the network should become the privileged European partner for collaboration with other institutions and organizations worldwide in matters regarding cross-border family mediation.




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