



Transnational child protection cases: exploring how to fulfil safeguards for children

Promise Soteria

May 6, 2025



Co-funded by
the European Union



Welcome from Promise Soteria

Introduction to the Guidance & our Agenda today





Key aims of Guidance

- ✓ Raise awareness of types of cases, issues & challenges which arise
- ✓ Highlight EU and international laws & policies involved
- ✓ Propose key steps to take
- ✓ Consider specific cases
- ✓ Reflect on future action to improve how children's rights are fulfilled

What cases does the Guidance concern?

- Involving protecting children from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- During administrative and justice proceedings
- Where the case has a transnational element
- Where action in more than one country is required
- Where cases are shaped in particular by EU law



Some examples of different cases

Asylum seeking child

Child who has been a victim of a crime in another country

Child who has been abducted by a parent to another country

Trafficked child

Emergency displacement of child in war

A child who has gone missing



Increasingly important subject

- Growing mobility of persons & children within Europe
- Rise in movement of people into Europe
- Rise in online activities which take place in essentially a borderless space

2023 in numbers

254 900 first time asylum applicants registered in Europe were children, nearly a quarter were unaccompanied

1.3 million reports of child sexual abuse in the EU (including 3.4 million images and videos)

Over 1100 cases of international child abductions are reported each year

A quarter of trafficking victims are children (but many victims remain undetected)

1.4 million children fled Ukraine

250,000 children a year are reported missing every year in Europe

Examples of why transnational cooperation is needed

Information on child's situation

- Get the full picture of the child's own situation, if they have come from another country

Information on country situation

- Get information on circumstances relevant to their care in different countries

Information on location of family

- Locate family or relatives

Identifying missing children

- Find a child where they have gone missing from care in one country

Putting in place protection measures

- Provide protection to a child when a child is a victim and a crime was carried out/investigated in another country

Transfer between countries

- Transfer a child to another country

Why is transnational cooperation sometimes complicated?

Legal processes & actors involved may differ

Step by step cross border procedures may not be developed

Language and cultural differences

Procedures may take longer and be more complicated

Specialized competence may not be available

Different approaches to assessing & fulfilling best interests

At the centre: safeguards for children

Information support and assistance

Individual assessments

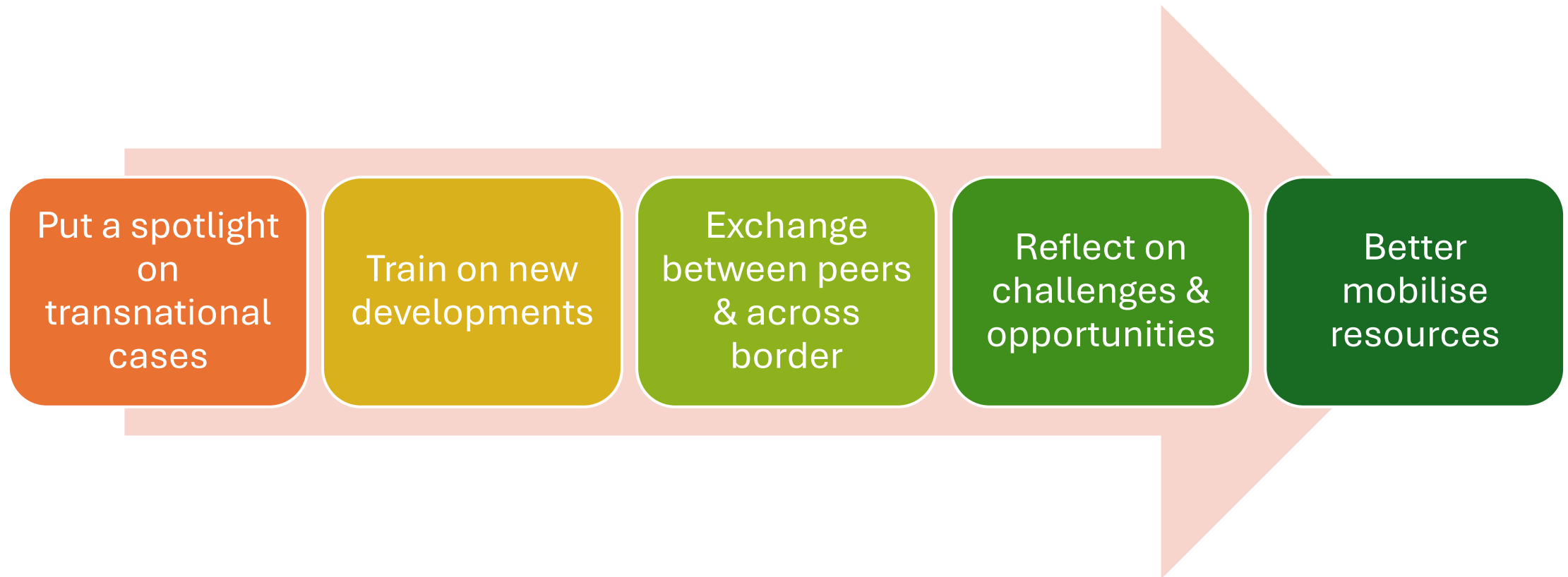
Access to services for their protection


Right to be heard

Adapted Procedures

Best interests need to be considered

How can the Guidance be used?





Agenda in the morning

9.30-11 Exploring the Guidance

11.00-
11.15 Break

11.15-
12.30 Expert Insights: safeguards for children in practice

12.30-
13.15 Lunch Break

Agenda in the afternoon

13.15-14.45

Expert insights: safeguards in practice (continued)

14.45- 15.00

Break

15.00 – 15.40

Collaborative exchange: reflections on how better to fulfil child rights in transnational cases (break out groups)

15.40-16.00

Reflections & closing words

What can you expect?



Introduction to
Guidance – practical
tools



Polls: questions to
think about



Hearing from experts



Small group
exchange



Offer food for thought

Mentimeter

Expert insights: who will we hear from today?

- Guardians
- Lawyers
- National authorities
- Barnahus services
- Law enforcement
- European networks

Why connect experiences in different cases?

A child may be involved in several kinds of public law proceedings & private law proceedings

Some of the same actors may/should be involved

Some actors will be familiar with specific types of procedures but not others

Resources in one area of law may be helpful to another

Poll: What kind of actor are you?

- Policy maker
- Involved in agencies/services
- Professional involved in proceedings
- Professional supporting children
- Advocate for children's rights
- Other

Poll - What kinds of children's cases are you involved in?

- Asylum & migration
- Criminal cases
- Family law cases
- Trafficking cases
- Children from Ukraine
- Children who go missing
- Other

**Where are we
now and what
opportunities
lie ahead**



At the heart of the
matter: fulfilling
children's rights

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) establishes a broad set of rights for all persons under 18 years of age.

The rights in the CRC are indivisible and interdependent. A series of General Comments from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child provides detailed guidance on how these rights should be fulfilled

**General
measures of
implementation**

**General
principles**

**Definition
of the child**

**Civil
rights and
freedoms**

**Violence
against
children**

**Disability, basic
health and
welfare**

**Family
environment
and alternative
care**

**Education,
leisure and
cultural
activities**

**Special
protection
measures**

What children's rights are at stake in child protection cases?

UNCRC General Principles



Non-discrimination (Article 2)



Right to life, survival and development (Article 6)



Best interests of the child (Article 3)



Right to participation (Article 12)

Word cloud: What do you
think about when you
think about rights of
children to protection?



UNCRC Protection Rights



Rights to protection from violence

Children should be **protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse (Article 19).**



Family environment and alternative care measures

These concern assistance and protection to **children deprived of parental care; family reunification provisions;** arrangements made for children in **alternative care, parental abduction cases,** as well as **children with imprisoned parents** (Articles 5, 9–11, 18, paras. 1 and 2, 20, 21, 25 and 27, para. 4).

UNCRC Protection Rights (cont.)

Special protection measures



(a) **Children outside their country of origin seeking refugee protection** (Article 22)

(b) **Children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group** (Article 30);

(c) **Children in street situations** (General Comment 21 (2017));

(d) **Children victims of exploitation and abuse:**

- (i) Economic exploitation, including child labour (Article 32)
- (ii) Use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (Article 33);
- (iii) Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Article 34);
- (iv) Sale, trafficking and abduction (Article 35);
- (v) Other forms of exploitation (Article 36);

(e) **Children alleged as, accused of or recognised as having infringed criminal law** (Article 37 and 40; General Comment 24 (2019))

(f) **Child victims:** Children who have been exposed to acts of violence, exploitation or abuse have a right to be recognised as victims of crime (Article 39)

(g) **Children in armed conflicts** (Article 38)

EU & international law & policy

Overview of sources of law

Children's Rights:

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
European Convention of Human Rights
EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

Asylum & Migration

UN Convention on Refugee Rights, 1951
UN Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights, 1990
EU Asylum and Migration Instruments

Criminal Justice

Child Procedural Safeguards Directive, 2016
Victims' Rights Directive, 2012
Child Sexual Abuse Directive, 2011
Directive on violence against women and domestic violence, 2024
Lanzarote Convention, 2007

Family law/ Civil law

Brussels II-Ter Regulation, 2019
HCCH 1996 Child Protection
HCCH 1980 Child Abduction

EU Temporary Protection Directive, 2001

Temporary Protection

Anti-Trafficking Directive, 2024
Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, 55/25, 2000
CoE Anti-Trafficking Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, 2005

Trafficking

HCCH 1996 Child Protection
HCCH 1980 Child Abduction
Brussels II-ter Regulation
Regulations for a strengthened Schengen Information System (SIS), 2018

Missing children

Overview of the role laws play



Establish common obligations for States as regards fulfilling children's rights



Determine which State should exercise jurisdiction over a particular case and which law applies to the case



Ensure that States will recognize certain legal arrangements made in other countries



Ensure that States will enforce judgments from other countries



Provide for cooperation from one State to another in particular proceedings



Provide for cross border procedures



Establish international databases



Provide clear roles for international agencies

Examples of roles



Establish common obligations for States as regards fulfilling children's rights. Where States have the same obligations towards children under the same international instrument, this provides a solid basis for mutual trust and cooperation between them in transnational proceedings.

Example in the spotlight – common obligations to child victims of trafficking

The EU Anti-Trafficking Directive provides a common definition of trafficking, including trafficking of children, for EU Member States and provides common obligations to assist and support child victims.

Examples of roles continued

Determine which State should exercise jurisdiction over a particular case and which law applies to the case.

International laws establish rules to avoid conflicts of national laws in specific situations. Under these rules, where a child is present in one country, another State may have jurisdiction to deal with a particular dimension of their situation. Equally, certain issues concerning the situation of a child who is not habitually resident in a State may be dealt with by proceedings in the State in which they are present. In some situations, a court may have jurisdiction to deal with a case but may need to apply the law of another State.



Ensure that States recognise certain legal arrangements made in other countries. This can be a crucial issue for children in transnational cases. For example, it will assist States in recognising parental responsibility arrangements made under the law of the country of origin.

Ensure that States will enforce judgments from other countries.

This can prove a crucial step in child protection proceedings to provide a child with certainty and stability in relation to care and custodial arrangements put in place for their safety.



Examples of role ctd



Provide for cooperation between States in some proceedings.

Some international conventions provide that State actors should cooperate with each other during proceedings involving a child. Such cooperation may be vital to getting information about the child and their family, for the assessment of the child's situation and for making decisions relevant to protecting them. They may also relate to cooperation in proceedings.

Example in the spotlight - Brussels IIb Regulation and the HCCH Conventions

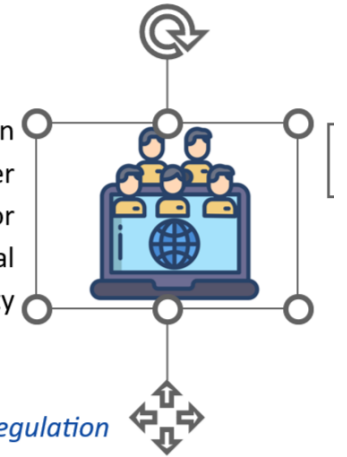
The rules settling cross border matters on parental responsibility and child protection are set out in the Brussels IIb Regulation¹⁵ the HCCH 1996 Child Protection Convention and HCCH 1980 Child Abduction Convention. They provide legal frameworks which allow national authorities and courts to avoid conflicts in proceedings in cases with cross-border implications, recognise and enforce each other's decisions, and cooperate in certain matters. These instruments collectively concern matrimonial matters and matters of parental responsibility, including international child abduction and measures for the protection of children.

These instruments do not have as their objective to harmonise the underlying civil family and child welfare laws applicable to these cases. Instead, their provisions concern which country has the power to take decisions (jurisdiction), how countries should recognise decisions and the authenticity of documents from another country, and enforce such decisions, as well as how authorities should cooperate on matters of parental responsibility. They have substantially the same application, however the HCCH 1996 Child Protection Convention additionally contains rules relating to choice of law in any proceedings. In general terms, the Brussels IIb Regulation applies in the EU where the child concerned is habitually resident in an EU country, to cases with cross-border implications (see its Recitals 2 and 3). Proceedings

Examples of roles continued



Establish cross-border procedures, whereby States will cooperate in decision-making and implementing decisions. Cross border procedures (under which States work together to determine or implement decisions) are particularly relevant to international protection cases under EU asylum instruments, as States have a duty of solidarity to each other.



Example in the spotlight: EU Asylum and Migration Management Regulation

States may need to consider together the best interests of a child in cases where a child is relocated from one country to another during international protection proceedings under the EU Asylum and Migration Management Regulation. Article 23 (4) provides that “In assessing the best interests of the child, Member States shall closely cooperate with each other...” Article 23 (5) provides that “Before transferring an unaccompanied minor, the transferring Member State shall notify the Member State responsible or the Member State of relocation, which shall confirm that all appropriate measures referred to in Articles 16 and 27 of Directive (EU) 2024/1346 and Article 23 of Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 will be taken without delay, including the appointment of a representative in the Member State responsible or the Member State of relocation. Any decision to transfer an unaccompanied minor shall be preceded by an individual assessment of the best interests of the child...”

Sources of European policies

Children's Rights:

Commission Recommendations on strengthening integrated child protection systems, 2024
EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, 2021
CoE Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2022–2027)

Asylum & Migration

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the protection of children in migration, 2017

CoE Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021–2025)

Criminal Justice

CoE Child Friendly Justice Guidelines, 2010

EU Strategy on Victims' Rights (2020–2025)

EU Child Sexual Abuse Strategy (2020–2025)

Family law/ Civil law

Children's Rights and Protection instruments

EU Solidarity with Ukraine: 10-Point Plan, 2022

Children's Rights and Protection instruments

Trafficking instruments

Criminal justice instruments

Temporary Protection

EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021–2025)

Trafficking

Children's Rights and Protection instruments

Trafficking instruments

Criminal justice instruments

Missing children

What role do policies and practical resources play?



Examples of roles



International policy commitments: these prioritise and dedicate resources to key issues.

Spotlight on key examples – child friendly justice and integrated child protection systems



Child friendly justice

In transnational child protection cases, applying the Council of Europe (CoE) Child-Friendly Justice Guidelines (2010) is of key importance. These guidelines provide a comprehensive framework to ensure that justice systems are adapted to the needs and rights of children. They are built on the principles enshrined in international instruments like the CRC, and they emphasise that justice should be accessible, age-appropriate, and respectful of the child's rights and dignity. They refer to key procedural safeguards which should be undertaken to ensure that these procedures are child-friendly and that children are informed, supported and assisted during administrative and judicial proceedings involving them, including cross-border ones. The Guidelines note in particular that in the case of cross-border civil law and family disputes, “depending on maturity and understanding, the child should be provided with professional information relating to access to justice in the various jurisdictions and the implications of the proceedings on his or her life. Children face particular challenges where there is a history of family conflict and/or abuse”.



Child protection

The European Commission issued a Recommendation on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child in 2024. The European Commission recommends that authorities “put children at the centre of integrated child protection systems by adapting protection systems to children's needs and including children when taking decisions that impact them” and “establish comprehensive and coordinated support actions in cases of violence against children, from prevention and early identification to reporting and cross-sectorial support.” It specifically emphasises opportunities to enhance cooperation in child-protection cases with cross border implications. It notes that this includes “through the assistance of Central Authorities of the relevant Member states designated under the Council Regulation (EU) 2019/1111, such as by stepping up prevention efforts, by sharing good practices among the Member States, specifically in the context of the European Judicial Network in civil and commercial matters [...]”. Importantly it also notes that cross border cooperation should be enhanced “... by facilitating and strengthening transnational cooperation between the actors supporting children.”

Examples of roles (cont.)

International guidance: these support proper implementation of laws and procedures for those involved in both policy and practice.



Spotlight on a key example – protecting child victims of violence

General Comment No 13 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on protection of children from violence provides extensive guidance on action needed to prevent and respond to violence against children.

International guidance exists also in relation to particular groups of children, such as the guidance developed by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency concerning “Children deprived of parental care found in an EU Member State Other than their own: A guide to enhance child protection focusing on victims of trafficking”.

Examples of roles (cont.)



Handbooks: these handbooks typically provide guidance to professionals concerned in establishing or operating under particular procedures.

Spotlight on a key example – guardianship

A leading example in this context is the FRA Handbook to reinforce guardianship systems for children deprived of parental care.

Actors & steps involved

Many different actors involved



Key steps

1

Identify when there are transnational elements to a child protection case

2

Identify what transnational child protection action is involved or should be involved or initiated

3

Ensure safeguards for children are fulfilled throughout transnational cases



1. Identifying transnational elements of a child's case





Summary checklist of key questions

- ✓ Is the child a national of another country or have they a connection with another country (e.g. presence of family member in another country)?
 - ✓ Does the child's family need to be traced in another country?
 - ✓ Has the family and/or child recently resided in another country?
 - ✓ Does the child wish to move to another country?
-



Summary checklist ctd

- ✓ Does the transfer of the child to another country need to be considered?
 - ✓ Has the child been the victim of a crime which took place in another country or is the perpetrator in another country?
 - ✓ Is the child a suspect or accused of a crime in another country?
 - ✓ Is the child involved in family law or child welfare proceedings in another country which might affect their protection?
 - ✓ Is a missing child suspected of having gone to another country, independently or under the influence of another party?
-



2. Identifying transnational actions





Summary checklist of key issues

- ✓ Asylum/migration: does the child need a residence permit or do they have international protection rights which should be addressed? Does the return of a child to another country need to be considered?
 - ✓ Criminal case with a child as a victim: how should evidence be obtained either from a child located in another country or about their circumstances in another country? How is their access to victim support services assured?
 - ✓ Criminal case with a child as a suspect: should information on the circumstances of a child suspect or accused be sought from another country? Should the transfer of a child suspect or accused be requested from another country?
 - ✓ Transfer of criminal cases to another jurisdiction: what does this involve for a child victim or accused?
-



Summary checklist ctd

- ✓ Family and child welfare law: Should information relevant to the family be sought from another country, where a child protection issue is at stake? Should authorities forward a letter of concern to another country to which a family has moved, where a child protection is at risk?
 - ✓ Trafficking investigation: has a child been trafficked across borders? Are they separated from their families and communities?
 - ✓ Children who receive temporary protection in another country: who takes decisions and how do authorities cooperate on child protection risks?
 - ✓ Missing children alerts: should an international missing children alert be issued? What assistance should be provided to locate a child believed to have gone missing across borders?
-

3. Fulfilling safeguards





Information, support and assistance – some examples

- ✓ Children have a right to be fully informed about proceedings in which they are involved, in a language which they understand
- ✓ Children should receive legal assistance where necessary
- ✓ Children should be appointed a guardian, where this is necessary.



Ensuring individual assessments of the child's circumstances

To take proper account of their situation, children's circumstances should be individually and comprehensively assessed. This assessment should provide a holistic view of their situation and should feed into the ongoing best interests assessment that should inform all actions in their regard.

Examples of specific issues to be considered in transnational child protection cases:

- Identify what information may be necessary to seek abroad, to assess the situation of the child and inform the actions taken (identity of the child, location of their families, medical history, home circumstances in their country of origin, procedures concerning them, ...)
- For example, guardians in the host country may need to access guardianship organisations in other countries; social services in another country need to be contacted to gather information;
- Central Authorities may be the key channel; Consular authorities; International or EU agencies; national focal points on key issues such as trafficking



Ensuring that children access their rights to services necessary for their protection during proceedings

- ✓ This may involve, for example, putting in place child safeguarding measures, such as orders relating to supervision of contact in certain family situations; ensuring access to medical services when needed as a result of the violence, neglect, abuse and exploitation; and ensuring access to therapeutic services, to respond to trauma and serve their psychological needs.



Hearing the child

- ✓ A child who is capable of forming his or her own views should have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, with the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- ✓ A child should have access to timely appeals against decisions and access to complaint mechanisms about agencies, bodies, guardians etc.

Examples of specific issues to be considered in transnational child protection cases:

- Coordination between actors supporting the child and the decision-making procedures; proper access to language support and careful coordination between the authorities in both countries.
- The reasons and effects of any decision on the child should be explained to them
- Access to effective remedies against decisions in other jurisdictions, as well as against decisions to transfer them to other countries.
- Ability to complain about procedures or actors in other countries, supported by child friendly information and complaint mechanisms.



Ensuring that procedures are adapted for children

- ✓ This may involve for example ensuring child friendly reporting mechanisms and adapted interview procedures such as limiting the number of interviews undertaken with a child. It will involve ensuring child friendly settings are in place for processes such as screening, assessments and interviews. It should involve medical examinations only as necessary and use of video-recorded testimony or video links to court proceedings.

Examples of specific issues to be considered in transnational child protection cases:

- Authorities and actors in different countries should agree and plan how cross border procedures are adapted for children. *For example, if a child located in one jurisdiction needs to be examined by law enforcement officials from another jurisdiction, the two authorities should work together to assess how this can best be achieved in a way that fulfils their rights.*
- Access conditions and procedures to be used by court agencies in national child friendly settings
- Courts may need to consider how to use video-recorded testimony or video links provided in other countries



Best interests procedures

- ✓ Ensuring a formal best interests procedure is in place which takes a multi-disciplinary, inter-agency approach and considers the whole of their situation. The assessment of the best interests forms part of a reasoned decision. As needed, Member States will need to cooperate to ensure that the best interests of the child is considered in measures implementing decisions.

In transnational child protection cases, specific issues to be considered include:

- The whole of the child's circumstances should be assessed, and all of their rights and needs should be comprehensively addressed, including through access to services. Children may have a wide range of needs for protection and care. It is important to consider and plan, to address both the child's short-term and longer-term needs and their needs for longer term assistance, social inclusion and durable solutions.

Word cloud: What issues arise for how the best interests of the child might be considered in transnational cases?



Break

Back at 11.15

Case experiences: hearing from experts

**Nothing worth having
comes easy?**

Session “Expert Insights: Safeguards for children in practice”

Germa Lourens, Nidos
6th May 2025



Introduction

- Nidos – national guardianship for all unaccompanied minors in The Netherlands
 - Prompt appointment by a juvenile judge
 - Responsibility based on the Dutch Civil Code
 - Guardianship in practice
 - Numbers
-

Need for transnational cooperation

From a legal perspective

- Migration decisions: art. 3 CRC/ art. 24(2) EU-Charter
- Civil law: ending the guardianship

From a pedagogical perspective

- Child's well-being is stimulated with speedy future perspective
- Taking a child along the process stimulates involvement



Back in 2012

- Transfer of an unaccompanied minor to another EU MS under Dublin II Regulation
 - Concrete indications on threats to his safety
 - Following guardianship responsibility: accompanying the child to the other EU MS
 - Making arrangements
 - Response of the head of the juvenile court in the other EU MS
-



Back in 2012

- Good ending?
 - Response of the minor two years later:
 - *It was painful that you went away and left me alone*
 - **Informing the child**
-

European cooperation

- European guardianship organization (EGN)
- Find each other more easily
- Sharing information
- Working groups
- Learning from each other

9 year old child

- In The NL with aged out siblings
 - Application of the Dublin III Regulation
 - Parents reluctant and in panic
 - No cooperation despite efforts
 - What to do?
 - What did we do?
-
- **Better safe than sorry vs. Well-informed decision**



Another case

- Call from a worried-sick mother
 - Child of 6 years old in another EU MS in detention
 - Smooth cooperation between MS's and NGO's
 - Results in the end
 - Response of the mother
 - **Time is of the essence**
-

Questions?

Thanks for your attention

Further contact? My email is g.lourens@nidos.nl

Individual assessments for child suspects or accused of a crime

Insights from Mariama Diallo, Child Friendly Justice European Network coordinator and Coosje Peterse, Dutch Youth Lawyer



Case scenario discussion

- Claudio is a 17 years old boy who comes from Country A, where he is born from father from Country A and mother from Country B.
 - He has experienced domestic violence from the father, both against himself and against the mother, during his childhood.
 - When he was 15, the prosecution against his father for domestic violence had started and the mother had decided to move, for safety reasons, to her home country - Country B - with Claudio, and join the rest of her family.
 - Claudio leaves behind, in Country A, the fathers' family, with whom there is a strong connection and from whom he and his mother had received support during the whole process.
 - Claudio also leaves behind a group of close friends with whom he stays in touch, through social media.
-



What happens next

- About a year after moving to the Country B, when he is 16, Claudio is caught and accused of sextortion against a girl from Country A.
 - He is brought to the prosecutor in the country where he resides now - Country B - and the criminal proceeding is initiated there.
 - In the meantime, the investigation reveals that two of his friends are involved too, but they are in Country A. Another criminal proceeding is initiated there, where the young victim also lives.
-



What should/could happen?

- In Country A, after thorough assessment of the circumstances of the case and of the children involved, Claudio's friends are given diversion (suspension of the proceeding with probation) and the restorative justice services are activated to initiate and include in the diversion programme a restorative response that involves the victim as well.
 - On the other side, Claudio is currently being prosecuted in Country B, where the crime is not eligible to diversion, and given a sanction to be spent in an educational centre (deprivation of liberty).
 - ***Should/could a different pathway be envisaged?***
-



**Missing
Children
Europe**

Missing Children Europe Protecting Missing Children Across Borders: Strengthening Cooperation and Response

Presented by:

Alyona Samar, Senior Programmes Officer

Alyona.samar@missingchildreneurope.eu



**Co-funded by
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Who we are:



Missing Children Europe is the **European Federation for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children** that connects **35 grassroots organisations in 28 countries across Europe**.

- We work with professionals who assist missing children, children at risk of going missing and their families. We support them to better protect and empower children through research, training, advocacy, and awareness, facilitating exchange and cross-border cooperation.
- We coordinate the network of **116000 missing children hotlines** and **facilitate cross border cases**.

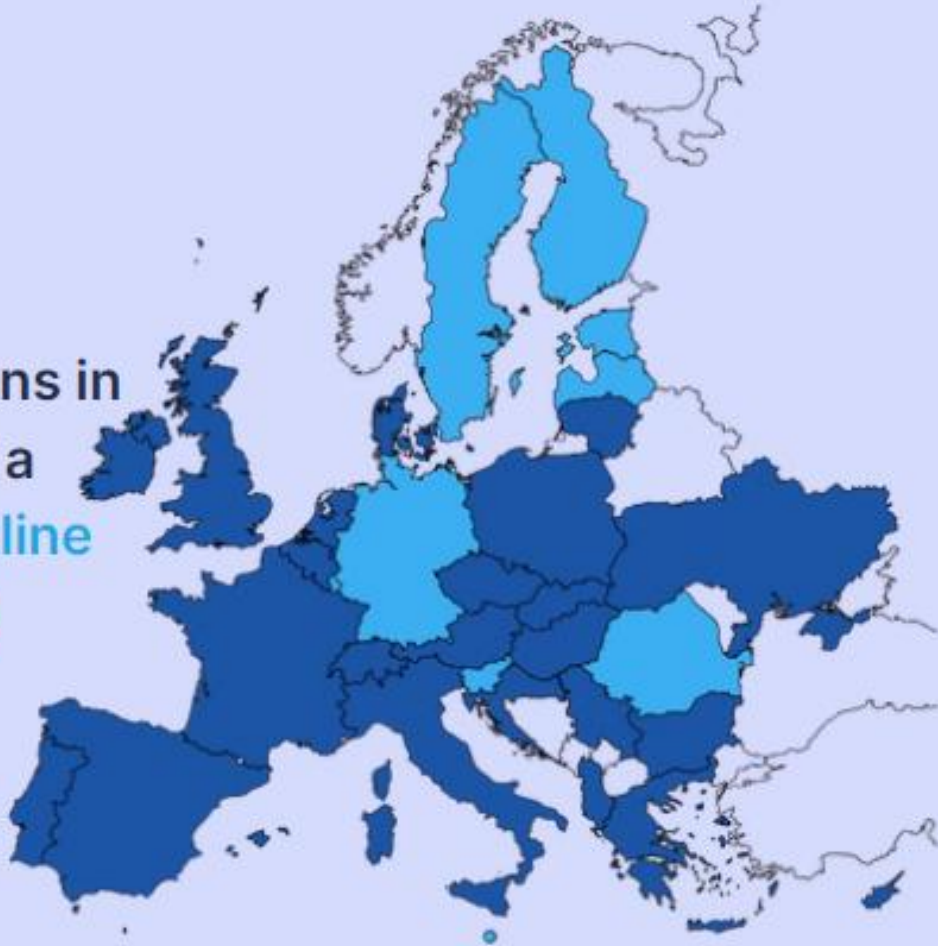


116 000 

data and statistics from hotlines for
missing children in 2023

32

organisations in
Europe run a
116000 hotline
for missing
children



67,345

points of contact were recorded by
21 hotlines in 2023

7,274

new cases dealt with in 2023 and
837 ongoing cases



42%

of persons contacting
the hotlines are
children



14%

of cases of missing
children had a cross-
border dimension

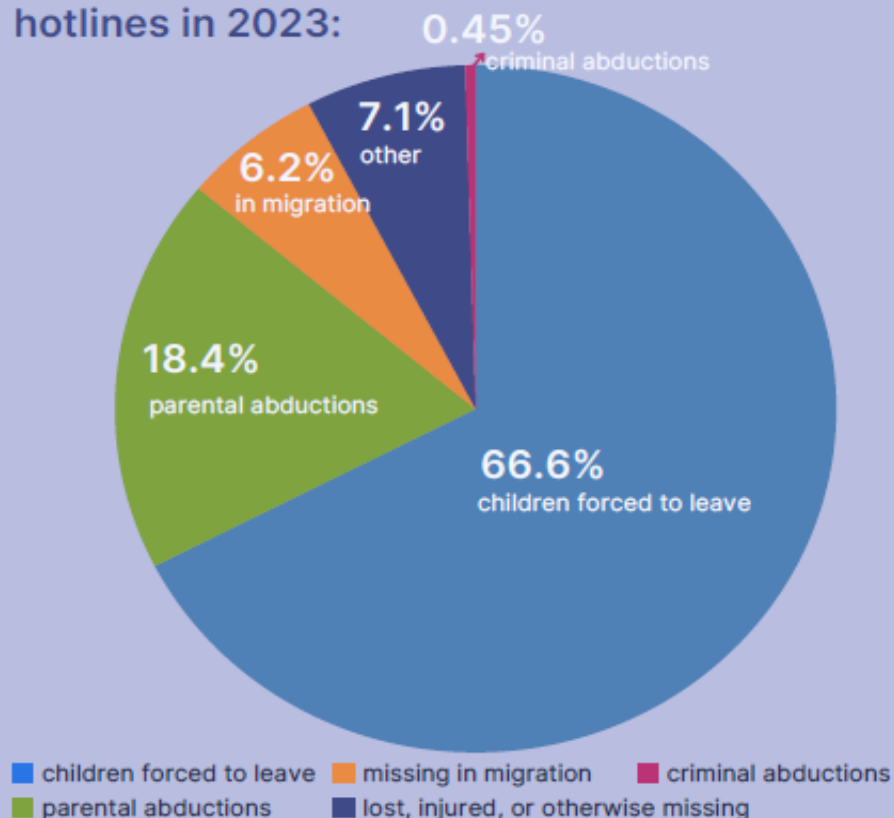


1 in 5

points of contact was done
through the use of texts, chats
and/or WhatsApp message

Figures and trends 2023


Types of missing cases handled by 116 000 hotlines in 2023:




Missing cases of children by gender:



53% girls



47% boys



1 non-binary (<0%)

Increasing concerns about online grooming:

111 cases of online grooming led to a child going missing

Violence against children linked to risks of going missing:

70% of cases of missing children contained an element of violence or abuse

Case Background:



Profile Summary:

- 16 years old boy - moved to Belgium in 2015 from the country in MENA region to reunite with his father)
- History of running away abroad (5 times in the past two years)



Timeline:

- 2021–2023: Multiple disappearances
- May 2023: Disappears during transfer



Challenge:

- Late intervention





Case Coordination








Coordination Flow

Hotlines: Child Focus (Belgium) → Enfants Disparus (France) → Fundación ANAR (Spain)

 Child Focus (Belgium) ↔ Belgian Law Enforcement Authorities (LEA) ↔ Judicial Authorities ↔ Child protection authorities






 Enfants Disparus (France) ↔ French LEA ↔ Child protection authorities & youth center

 Fundación ANAR (Spain) ↔ Spanish LEA (regional police) ↔ Child protection authorities & youth center ↔ Judicial authorities

 **Publicity Appeals launched**  **SIS alert activated**  **Social media (location-sharing feature)**
 **Recognition of Belgian court decision by Spanish authorities (Brussels IIb)**

Ongoing Challenges and Lessons Learned



Challenges	Lessons Learned
 Difficulty understanding reasons behind disappearances	→ Engage all key stakeholders early (social workers, judicial authorities, child protection, civil society)
 Running away treated as behavior, not a signal	→ Recognise running away as a child protection issue
 Lack of child participation in the decisions affecting them	→ Actively listen and involve the child in decision-making about their care
 Cross-border communication gaps	→ Strengthen consistent cooperation between judicial systems, law enforcement, child protection, and 116000 hotlines
 Limited involvement of civil society actors	→ Formalise cooperation with the organisations like 116000 hotlines and Missing Children Europe to facilitate response and comprehensive support



 Questions,
 Reflections,
 Insights?



THANK YOU!

Lunch break

Back at 13.15