

**Annual Report 2024 and Work Programme 2025 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 2024 within the statutory activities - main initiatives

Act as a 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

- ✓ Marking the 35th anniversary of the signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the European Parliament
- ✓ Inclusive education
- ✓ Missing children
- ✓ Young carers
- ✓ Health - physical & mental health of children
- ✓ Child oriented public policies

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

- ✓ Participation in events and conferences on cross-border family disputes
- ✓ Promoting 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 50 enquires 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

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 in six areas at both Union and Member State level to protect and promote children’s rights across the European Union and beyond. Those pillars are: child participation, socio-economic inclusion, health and education, combating violence against children, child-friendly justice, digital and information society and global dimension.

The European Parliament Coordinator on Children’s Rights (the EP Coordinator) 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 central point of contact both within Parliament and externally on Parliament’s work on children’s rights. The position itself evolved from the European Parliament Mediator for International Child Abduction. The EP Coordinator remains as well a central contact point in 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 the EP Coordinator on Children’s Rights until the end of the parliamentary term 2019-2024.

Vice President Ewa Kopacz’s term as the EP Coordinator on Children’s Rights ended in July 2024. Following her re-election as the Member of the European Parliament and, subsequently, as a Vice President of the European Parliament, Ewa Kopacz was asked once again by President Roberta Metsola to carry on with her work in the capacity of the EP Coordinator on Children’s Rights until the mid-term.

As established, the EP Coordinator presented her annual report 2024 and the work programme for 2025 to the Committee on Legal Affairs on [18 February 2025].

This report presents a summary of the main activities and achievements of 2024 and the work programme for 2025 and it is organised into three parts that reflect the main responsibilities within the EP 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. Specific issues related to protection and promotion of children’s rights.

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

2024 activities summary

2024 was a particular year, with the 9th parliamentary term coming to an end, the European election taking place on 6-9 June and the commencement of its 10th legislative term on 16 July. Owing to the electoral recess (between 25 April and 16 July), the Parliament did not hold any meetings of the official bodies, thus the activities of the EP Coordinator and her Office were limited in the area of cooperation with parliamentary committees and other official bodies. Nevertheless, the Office was fully operational during the electoral break and continued to carry on duties assigned under the EP Coordinator mandate.

Despite the particularities of the period in question, the EP Coordinator undertook a number of initiatives and continued to focus her attention on the important topics in the area of child rights, guided also by the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child of March 2021. The EP Coordinator engaged in work on cross-border family law issues, correct implementation of public policies for children, protection of children in armed conflict, mental and physical health of children, access to education for all children and situation of children gone missing. In the last months of the 9th parliamentary term and immediately after her re-appointment in July 2024, the EP Coordinator continued the close cooperation with a number of parliamentary committees, EU institutions and relevant stakeholders and this summary presents the diversity of this collaboration.

The 35th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Signed on 20 November 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the most important international instrument that explicitly recognises children as human beings with innate rights. Ratified by 196 countries, including all EU Member States, it ensures that every child has, among others, the undeniable right to safety, dignity and life in conditions that enable child's healthy development. The Convention sets obligations for the state parties to protect all children against all forms of violence and discrimination and safeguard their rights regardless their age, race, gender, religion or the socio-economic background.

Initiated by the EP Coordinator, the plenary debate on the *Strengthening children's rights in the EU - the 35th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* marked the occasion and took place on 28 November 2024. The debate opened with the Commission's statement followed by the intervention of the EP Coordinator showed that protection and promotion of children's rights in EU and beyond remains high on the agenda of the newly elected Parliament. The EP Coordinator underlined that the UNCRC is more than a set of principles, as it is a promise that adults made to children around the world, declaring that their rights will be protected, their voices will be heard and their needs will be treated with the utmost seriousness. In addition to the plenary debate, the EP Coordinator engaged with the

Subcommittee on Public Health and Subcommittee on Human rights to mark the UNCRC anniversary in Parliament.¹

Cooperation with parliamentary committees

The EP Coordinator engaged directly with some of the key committees with competences in different aspects of children's rights. To support fruitful cooperation, the Office of the EP Coordinator developed and maintains good working relationships with the Secretariats of the relevant parliamentary committees. To this end, its unique position as part of the Secretariat of the Committee on Legal Affairs is particularly beneficial and appreciated². In 2024, the cooperation on the specific topics that started in the 9th parliamentary term with some committees re-established instantly in the new term.

Cooperation with the Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI)

The EP Coordinator, and the Office, continue her special and close relation with the Committee on Legal Affairs as reflected in the ongoing cooperation in the area of legislative competences of the committee, namely family law issues, with a particular focus on cross-border procedures in parental child abduction and custody and access disputes, mediation and alternative disputes resolution and better law making. During 2024, the Office of the EP Coordinator continued to work closely with the Committee on these topics and stands continuously at the disposal of the Committee to collaborate with, and support, its Secretariat on issues related to children's rights, mediation and cross-border family law.

On 19 March, during the JURI Committee meeting, the study on *Parental child abduction to third countries*³ was presented in the presence of the EP Coordinator. The study, requested by the JURI Committee and commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs Directorate-General for Internal Policies⁴ focused on the severe consequences of the parental abduction for the abducted child and possible existing remedies in cases where the child is abducted to the country outside the European Union that does not cooperate under 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.⁵

¹ More information under the part on *Cooperation with parliamentary committees*.

² Following the reorganisation of the DG IPOL, the Office of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights remains in the structure of the Secretariat of the Committee on Legal Affairs, that is now the part of the Directorate for Justice, Civil Liberties and Institutional Affairs within the Directorate - General for Citizen's Rights, Justice and Institutional Affairs (DG IUST).

³ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/759359/IPOL_STU\(2024\)759359_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/759359/IPOL_STU(2024)759359_EN.pdf) .

⁴ The name of the unit as before the reorganisation of the DG IPOL.

⁵ More information on the study under the section II of this annual report.

The JURI/LIBE exchange of views on creating a European centre for missing persons, including children

The EP Coordinator approached the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs with the request to discuss the issue of the enhanced cross-border cooperation in view of missing persons, including children and to explore the possibility to establish the European centre for missing persons. Following this initiative the two committees decided to hold a joint exchange of views on the possibility to create the European centre for missing persons, including children. The event took place on 9 April 2024 in a joint committee meeting. Invited experts presented existing good practices related to prevention and search of missing persons. Special attention was given to missing children and the significance of swift and close cooperation between parents or carers, law enforcement authorities and other relevant stakeholder in successful search of minors.⁶ During the debate the EP Coordinator stressed the particular situation of children abducted by one of the parents, which is one of the most traumatic and painful situations that a family and a child can experience, especially for children involved and the left-behind parent. She underlined that successful search results depend on the immediate launch of appropriate procedures, good cross-border cooperation, efficient communication between key actors, as well as training in best practices and raising awareness of children's rights and needs.

Cooperation with Subcommittee on Public Health (SANT)

At the request of the EP Coordinator, the Subcommittee on Public Health organised a hearing on *Public health challenges in view of children and young people wellbeing*. The hearing took place on 20 November 2024, marking the 35th anniversary of the signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Office of the EP Coordinator supported the SANT Secretariat in organisation of the event. Invited experts presented best practices, policy gaps and recommendations related to preventing and fighting child obesity and promoting healthier lifestyles in the family environment. Members and experts discussed the correlation between social media and general well-being of children and young people. There was also an overview given on the state of play of child rare diseases treatments and public health policy solutions in this area.⁷ In her opening remarks, the EP Coordinator underlined the significance of the right to health and to living in a healthy environment and the right to access to treatments and health systems to all children - as enshrined in the UNCRC. She spoke about different factors that influence physical and mental health of the youngest generations in Europe, focusing on the rising level of child obesity and the decline in sport activities, excessive screen time and mental health challenges that young people face.

⁶ For more information please consult Annex I.

⁷ Please see Annex II and consult the webpage of EP Coordinator under the *Latest Information* section.

Cooperation with the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI)

Following the established good cooperation with the DROI Subcommittee in previous legislative term, the EP Coordinator was invited to address a public hearing on the *Rights of the Child in the EU external policies*. The hearing was organised to mark 35th anniversary of the signing the UNCRC and to take stock of challenges faced by children outside the EU. The representatives of the EU Institutions, the United Nations and the civil society organisations discussed how the EU could promote and protect children's rights worldwide. The hearing focused on the protection of children affected by armed conflicts. Invited experts presented a set of alarming statistics on children in war, including child soldiers, displaced children and those forcibly detained. In her remarks, the EP Coordinator highlighted that children in Ukraine, in Gaza or in Sudan bear a disproportionate burden of suffering and trauma caused by the violence experienced in armed conflicts, which continues into adulthood and impacts the entire societies that today's children will build in the future.⁸

Cooperation with the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)

Back in September 2023, the EP Coordinator turned to the EMPL Committee to ask to look at the situation of young carers in the European Union. The EMPL Committee decided to turn to the Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, DG IPOL⁹ to prepare an in-depth analysis on the subject of young carers in the EU. The EP Coordinator Office cooperated closely with the services and the in-depth analysis prepared for the EMPL Committee entitled "*The situation of young carers in Europe*" was published on 9 February 2024¹⁰. Children who are young carers take on responsibility and care for family members with illness or disability, care that is normally carried out by adults. The in-depth analysis confirmed a limited awareness and recognition of that issue among Member States and wider public and showed that this group of children and adolescents is not specifically addressed in any of the EU policy initiatives. It also underlined that to tackle and adequately answer the needs and challenges that young carers face, we need to first raise awareness and recognise the impact that carrying these duties have on mental and physical health, education and general well-being of this extraordinary group of children and adolescents. In this view, and as the publication of the in-depth analysis took place at the end of the 9th parliamentary term, the EP Coordinator decided to pursue this topic with the newly constituted EMPL Committee. By the end of the 2024, the EMPL Coordinators agreed with the EP Coordinator's on the merits of giving a follow-up to the in-depth analysis by inviting to the Committee the representatives of the young carers for an exchange of views. This is scheduled to take place in March 2025.

⁸ Please see Annex III and the webpage of EP Coordinator under the *Latest Information* section.

⁹ The name of the unit as before the reorganisation of the DG IPOL.

¹⁰ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2024/754204/IPOL_IDA\(2024\)754204_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2024/754204/IPOL_IDA(2024)754204_EN.pdf)

The Committee on Petitions (PETI)

The EP Coordinator and her Office has an established day-to-day cooperation with the Committee on Petitions. On a regular basis, when relevant, the PETI Committee refers petitions concerning children's rights to the EP Coordinator and her Office. At the same time, while responding to individual enquiries received directly by the EP Coordinator and her Office, after assessing their content, the Office may suggest to the citizen to use the petition mechanism to address a particular issue.

Cooperation with and support within the Parliament's administration

The EP Coordinator and her Office increased communication and cooperation within the Parliament's administration, as enshrined in the revised mandate endorsed by the EP Bureau in 2023¹¹, in order to assist the Parliament bodies on specific topics and issues related to child rights and also to support the Parliament in fulfilling its commitment and obligations to promote and protect the rights of the child. In this regard, the Office has strengthened cooperation with:

- *The President's Cabinet*

The EP Coordinator and her Office stay in direct and continuous contact with the President's Cabinet through a dedicated Cabinet member. The Office supports the President's Cabinet on enquiries concerning cross-border family law or other child rights related matters.

- *The Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services*

The Office has an established communication with the EPRS Policy officers on research on child rights related topics. In view of the implementation of the revised mandate, under the part on communication and developing expertise and knowledge sharing, the Office promotes briefings and documents prepared by DG EPRS on the relevant topics by linking them when communicating on the events and activities, under the *Latest Information* section on the EP Coordinator webpage. In 2025, the Office plans close cooperation with ASK EP services, to better address citizens' inquiries related to cross-border family related disputes.

- *The Directorate-General for Communication*

Cooperation with EP InfoHub

The EP Coordinator and the Office engaged with the EP InfoHub¹² colleagues to organise the event on the public policies related to children.¹³ As the EP InfoHub serves as the

¹¹ Please consult the EP Coordinator webpage and the Annual Report 2023 for detailed information on the revised mandate endorsed by the EP Bureau based on the recommendations submitted by the EP Coordinator.

¹² <https://visiting.europarl.europa.eu/en/visitor-offer/brussels/info-hub> .

¹³ For more information on the event, please see the section III of this report.

communication facility to reach out to citizens on the European policies and the activities of the Parliament, the Office is eager to develop this cooperation in view of future initiatives.

Cooperation with European Parliament Liaison Offices

In 2024 the EP Coordinator and her Office collaborated with EPLOs on the matters related to children's rights. Some EPLOs reached out to the Office on the cross-border family disputes that were addressed to them by citizens.

On 26 November 2024, the EP Liaison Office in Athens in collaboration with Embassy of Ukraine to the Hellenic Republic and Embassy of Estonia in Athens organised a seminar to mark 1000 days of Russian aggression in Ukraine. EPLO in Athens reached out to the EP Coordinator to address the audience on the issue of "*Ukrainian children forcibly deported to Russia: State of Play and EP efforts to raise awareness*". The Office shared with participants supporting documents and reports on the matter.

- *The Directorate-General for Logistics and Interpretation for Conferences*

The EP Coordinator and her Office has a good working cooperation established with DG LINC. On a regular basis, the Office collaborates with relevant services, including Conference Coordination Unit, Remote Conference Services Unit and Multilingual Solutions Unit. The support from those services is extremely valuable in view of the conference organisation with remote participation, allowing the EP Coordinator and the Office a better outreach to citizens and experts and creation of forums of exchange for professionals from European Union and beyond¹⁴. It also guarantees multilingual communication using innovative approach and methods.

- *Cooperation with the relevant Parliament's services in view of the EP Coordinator's communication framework*

Following the endorsement of the revised mandate of the EP Coordinator by the EP Bureau on 20 November 2023, the Office in cooperation with DG IPOL Coordination of Editorial and Communication Activities Unit (EDCO Unit)¹⁵ engaged on the implementation of the part of recommendations related to communication and visibility of the EP Coordinator's activities.

In this view, the communication framework of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights was established, mapping steps to take and adjustments to make in cooperation with relevant Parliament's services to raise awareness of the EP Coordinator's competences and unify the message on the EP Coordinator activities across the European Parliament's website.

¹⁴ For more information on the event, please see section III of this report.

¹⁵ After the reorganisation of the Directorate - General for Internal Policies, the EDCO Unit changed its name to Communication Coordination Unit as a part of Directorate for Committee Coordination and Legislative Act (CCLA) placed under the Deputy Secretary General responsible for legislative coordination.

While the EP Coordinator webpage is a valuable communication tool, providing important information to citizens and stakeholders, it has been evaluated as a rather static tool that needs revamping to better communicate on the work of the EP Coordinator. During 2024, the webpage went through the technical and content analysis to gain a better understanding of its performance. Following this assessment, the official title of the EP Coordinator was aligned and links referring to the EP Coordinator's website were added on the EP subpages under relevant sections, studies or briefings related to children's rights. In parallel, the Office is updating the *Latest Information* section of the EP Coordinator webpage on a regular basis to inform citizens and stakeholders effectively and continuously on the EP Coordinator most important activities sharing the relevant documents that are provided by the Parliament's services. Further changes to this webpage are foreseen in course of 2025.

The communication within the Parliament has also been improved. At present, the EP Coordinator can use its functional mailbox to send communications to the whole of the European Parliament to inform Members and staff of her role, competences and regular awareness raising activities. Accordingly, at the beginning of the 10th parliamentary term, in cooperation with EDCO Unit, the flyer on the EP Coordinator's re-appointment, responsibilities and activities was distributed via email to all Members of the European Parliament and to the Parliament's administration. The Office received a positive feedback on its reception both from Members and staff.

After consultation with services responsible for communication, the EP Coordinator decided at this point not to engage on any social media platforms and rather use the official communication channels already established by the Parliament in cooperation with DG COMM responsible for handling them.

In view of external communication, the EP Coordinator's functional mailbox became the only direct communication channel for the citizens who address her with their enquiries. As requests from the parents often contain sensible data, that require protection, this channel remains most secured way of addressing the EP Coordinator with the individual enquires.

In 2025, the Office will continue close cooperation with all relevant EP services to ensure the most effective communication of the Coordinator's activities, including on the competences related to parental child abduction cases and other cross-border family disputes.

Cooperation with the European Commission

The close cooperation with relevant directorates general and services in the European Commission is vital for the EP Coordinator and her Office. Depending on the subject, the EP 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. In this regard, the cooperation with the Office of European Commission Coordinator on the rights of the child that is part of DG JUST (EC Child Rights Team) is vital and the Office of the EP Coordinator

has a well-established and close relations with the EC Child Rights Team resulting in exchange of information and cooperation on topics of mutual interest on a regular basis.

- The EU Network on Children’s Rights - Meeting on 19 November 2024

The EP Coordinator represents the Parliament at the EU Network on Children’s Rights established and managed by the EC Child Rights Team and participates in it through her Office. On 19 November 2024, the Network focused on the implementation of the Commission Recommendation on integrated child protection systems that was published in April 2024, after the public consultations with stakeholders. Representatives of the Member States shared information on initiatives and projects implemented or planned in the area of cyberbullying, education, eradication of child poverty and violence against children. The focus was given also to child participation mechanisms. In addition, an update on the recent developments on the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum was given by the relevant services of the Commission. The Office of the EP Coordinator informed members of the Network on the re-appointment of the VP Ewa Kopacz to the position of the EP Coordinator and shared recent and planned activities of the EP Coordinator.

- The European Child Participation Platform¹⁶

One of the main aims of the 2021 EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child is to establish, with support of the European Parliament and jointly with child rights organisations, an EU Children’s Participation Platform, to connect existing child participation mechanisms at local, national and EU level, and to involve children in a meaningful way in the decision-making processes at EU level.

The EU Children’s Participation Platform Advisory Board Meetings 8 April & 2 December 2024

The Advisory Board consists of children and experts from the Commission Child Rights Team, European Parliament, European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, the Council of Europe, Children’s Rights Action Group and UNICEF working together to develop the platform and work programme for the coming years. The Parliament is represented by the EP Coordinator who participates in it through her Office.

In 2024, the Office attended the 4th and the 5th meeting of the Advisory Board. The meetings were devoted to taking stock of the first years of the functioning of the EU Platform and the preparation of the Work Plan 2025-2026¹⁷, which was validated and approved by the Advisory Board. The Work Plan will focus on four areas - equal opportunities and social inclusion, online safety, mental health and well-being, and climate action.

¹⁶ <https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/home>.

¹⁷ <https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/system/files/2024-12/EU%20Children%27s%20Participation%20Platform-Work%20Plan%202025-2026.pdf>.

- The European Union Visitors Programme

The EP Coordinator's Office continues to participate in the EUVP by meeting with young professionals from countries outside the EU to discuss the activities and duties of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights mostly related to the cross-border family disputes and other child's rights related initiatives at EU level. The Office also assists the EUVP participants with sourcing relevant and reliable information on ongoing work on legislation concerning children's rights.

Cooperation with NGOs, stakeholders and experts active in the field of children's rights

In 2024, the EP Coordinator and her Office continued to expand and strengthen 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.

During the year, the EP Coordinator and/or her Office met and/or collaborated with many stakeholders, including government representatives, organisations and associations from the Member States, and with professionals dealing with specific issues relating to the rights of the child including among others:

- European Network of Ombudsperson for Children (ENOC)

The EP Coordinator and her Office has a close and well established cooperation with ENOC, including the regular working meetings between the Office and the ENOC Secretariat.

On 18 and 19 September the Office of the EP Coordinator took part in the 28th ENOC Annual Conference entitled "*Protecting and promoting the rights of children in alternative care*" held in Helsinki, Finland. The conference focused on the level of implementation of international and regional standards in the child alternative care systems and the role that Child Ombudspersons play in the reporting and redressing violations of children's rights in the context of the alternative care. During the two days meeting, the outcome of research supported by the 34 ENOC members was presented, showing both progress and critical gaps in view of the wide range of practices across Europe, with strong differences in caregiver training, quality of care, and aftercare support under the national alternative care systems. European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) shared their policy recommendations on rights of children who are placed outside the biological families based on their unique experience that was adopted by ENYA Forum in July 2024.¹⁸

The EP Coordinator decided to address this topic and turned to the Committees on Legal Affairs and on Employment and Social Affairs with a request to organise a joint public hearing, also to present the ENYA recommendations at the European level. The hearing will take place in March 2025.

¹⁸ <https://enoc.eu/enya-2024-lets-talk-young-lets-talk-about-promoting-and-protecting-the-rights-of-children-in-alternative-care/> .

The EP Coordinator continues to address individual Child Ombudspersons in the Member States in respect to individual cross-border child related matters.

- United Nations agencies and representatives

➤ UNICEF

On 7 March 2024, the Office of EP Coordinator took part in the round table organised by the office of UNICEF in Brussels on the “*Empowering Children to Empower the Future: Rethinking children's rights governance in the EU*”. The discussion focused on different policy options on the institutional frameworks to strengthen children’s rights at EU level. During the debate the Office presented changes to the EP Coordinator’s mandate that was adopted by the EP Bureau in November 2023.

➤ Special Representative of the Secretary - General for Children in Armed Conflicts

The EP Coordinator met with SRSG CAC Ms Virginia Gamba on 20 November 2024 to discuss the worsening situation of children affected by armed conflicts, especially children in Ukraine, in Gaza and in different conflicts across Africa. A number of initiatives and projects conducted by the SRSG CAC team were presented, focusing on fighting the recruitment of child soldiers.

- Eurochild

On 8 April 2024, the EP Coordinator addressed Eurochild conference on research on children’s views on online child safety that took place in Brussels. The objective of the event was to present the final results from the VOICE research project, which engaged with almost 500 children and over 6 thousand caregivers in 10 EU countries and 5 Asian/Latin American countries on online safety.

The Office continues to have direct and well-established cooperation with Eurochild. The exchanges over the last year focused on the Eurochild’s projects and activities related to early childhood education, care and health, also in view of the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Member States.

- Eurocares

On 9-11 April 2024, the EP Coordinator addressed the 4th International Young Carers Conference, themed “*Inclusion, Empowerment, Support, and Impact*” that took place at Manchester Metropolitan University. The conference gathered young people who care for their relatives, experts, educators, academics and wide range of other professionals to discuss the needs and challenges that young carers face.

- Hope & Homes for Children

The Office cooperates with Hope & Homes for Children in respect to their work across Europe on the transition from institutional to family or community based care for children.

- Happy Kids Foundation

The Office engaged with the organisation to discuss the general situation of foster care system in Poland and the particular situation of the Ukrainian children from institutional care who at

the beginning of the full scale Russian invasion in Ukraine were evacuated to Poland and are supported by the Foundation.

- Amber Alert Foundation

The EP Coordinator and her Office engaged with Amber Alert on the topic of missing children, including during the collaboration on the joint JURI/LIBE exchange of views on missing persons that took place on 9 April 2024.¹⁹

- Missing Children Europe (MCE)

The EP Coordinator and the Office continue the collaboration with MCE on missing children, especially in view of the parental child abduction cases and mediation. On 14 November 2024, the event co-hosted by EP Coordinator and the MCE on “*Closing the gaps in child protection*” took place.²⁰

- Alliance for Childhood

The EP Coordinator and her Office worked closely in 2024 with Alliance for Childhood and their partners on public policies related to children and on the topic of early childhood development. This collaboration resulted in two events dedicated to inclusive education, health and social policies for children.²¹

- Other contacts

Following the collaboration on the conferences organised by the Office and the engagement in various child rights related events, the Office met and discussed with number of other stakeholders that focus their activities on a range of issues related to the protection and promotion of children rights at the international and national level, including the European Social Network, the 5 Rights Foundation and the ITAKA Foundation.

Coordinator’s Agenda 2025 in the field of coordination of the EP activities in the field of children’s rights

The EP Coordinator will continue to cooperate closely with relevant parliamentary committees to facilitate the implementation of the 2021 EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and to raise awareness on the topics important to children and adolescents.

In the first months of 2025, the EP Coordinator plans to continue the work on the situation of young carers in collaboration with the EMPL Committee. Additionally, following the request

¹⁹ For more information on the event, please see section I part dedicated to the cooperation with parliamentary committees.

²⁰ For more information on the event, please see section III of this report.

²¹ For more information on the events, please see section III of this report.

from the EP Coordinator, a joint hearing of EMPL and JURI Committee will take place tackling the topic of protection and promotion of rights of children placed in alternative care.

The EP Coordinator and her Office 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 the Parliament's agenda.

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

2024 activities summary

Individual enquiries 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 EP 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 and beyond, in particular in case of parental child abductions. In 2024, the EP Coordinator continued to react to breaches of EU and international law, including the Council Regulation (EU) 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 abduction ("Brussels IIb Regulation") and the 1980 Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction ("1980 Hague Convention"). Also during the electoral break, the EP Coordinator and her Office continued to serve as an information point for citizens on parental child abduction and other cross-border family disputes replying to enquiries related to cross-border family matters that involve children and other child related matters, including of the domestic nature.

In 2024, the EP Coordinator's Office dealt with **46 enquiries from citizens**. Some of them required extensive research and follow-up exchanges.

In each case, the Office endeavours to provide information to the enquirer on the possible steps to take and on relevant services and authorities in the Member States or in the third countries to contact. In cases of domestic family law disputes, while the EP Coordinator does not have a competence to deal with such cases, her Office, where appropriate, tried to provide information and refer citizens for assistance to relevant authorities and services in the requester's state. On cross-border family law enquiries, the Office acts strictly on the understanding that the information and support provided does not amount to or replace legal advice, which the requesting citizen is strongly encouraged to seek from lawyers with expertise in international

family law, should it be required. Also, strict rules on data protection are applied while handling the enquiries.

Similar to previous years, in 2024, when citizens addressed the EP Coordinator on cross-border family matters, the cases were legally complex, highly conflictual and often long running. As in previous years, the main issues encountered by parents were: the difficulties in seeking a legal remedy and in being involved in number of ongoing court proceedings on several different matters, lengthy legal proceedings and lack of enforcement of the final court decisions by national authorities.

Majority of the enquiries received in the course of 2024 were related to the cases of international child abductions. They were brought to the attention of the Office by both EU citizens and non- EU citizens. In most of the enquiries received during 2024²², those enquiring were the parents, of whom a vast majority were the fathers. Some enquiries were also brought to the Office by other family members and by third parties, like lawyers or associations. Following the implementation of the communication framework, the Office noticed increased awareness among Members of the European Parliament and the EP staff about the work of the EP Coordinator in cross-border family law matters, with a number of cases that were referred internally in 2024.

From all enquiries related to cross-border family disputes, two third of the cases concerned parental child abductions and were raised in a vast majority by the left-behind parents, at various stages of the procedure on the return under the 1980 Hague Convention and Brussels IIb Regulation.

Additionally, the EP Coordinator and her Office observed two significant issues raised in enquiries that appeared as a new phenomenon in 2024. First, there was an increase in enquiries that concerned disputes involving the EU and third countries, of which some cooperated under the 1980 Hague Convention and some were not bound by any of the existing legal framework on cross-border family disputes. It came also to the attention of the EP Coordinator and the Office that if the third country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention but it is not a party to the 1996 Hague Convention on the Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children (so-called 1996 Child Protection Convention), there are certain legal gaps that occur to the detriment of the cooperation between the given jurisdictions on custody disputes. This may lead to situations when, despite the cooperation on the procedure on the child's return after the parental child abduction, the custody case is dealt with by two jurisdictions in parallel resulting in contradictory decisions. That is why, the wider accession to the 1996 Child Protection Convention²³ should be advocated for to ensure legal certainty both for the child and parents involved in the cross-border dispute.

²² Parental child abduction cases, other cross-border child related cases and domestic cases.

²³ There are 103 contracting parties to the 1980 Hague Convention and 56 to the 1996 Child Protection Convention.

The second issue observed was related to the Ukrainian children residing under the Temporary Protection Directive in the European Union. Under international private law, in cases on custody and parental child abduction the jurisdiction is primarily determined based on the child habitual residence. The habitual residence of the child is thus understood as a place of the centre of living of that child. Taking into account that significant number of Ukrainian children who came to the EU either with one parent (usually mother) or were transferred for safety reasons from the institutions to be placed in the alternative care under the child protection systems of the EU countries, the EU courts may face legal dilemma when addressed with custody, parental child abduction or placement cases on how to determine habitual residence of the particular child.

The EP Coordinator and the Office do continue to receive enquiries from parents or family members who request the intervention of the EP Coordinator as they do not agree with the decision of the court. Here, the EP Coordinator informs the enquirer that she does not have competence to intervene, influence or change judgments given by the courts of the Member States and third countries. Where appropriate, and based on the details of the individual case, the Office may be able to provide information on relevant authorities in the particular state to assist the enquirer.

In 2024, the EP Coordinator continued to make use of diplomatic intervention to address the lack of enforcement of a final court decision on the return of the child to the country of habitual residence or in case of alleged breach of international or European law.

The Office continued to receive 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.

The EP 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 and other cross-border family disputes, the EP Coordinator and her Office stay in close cooperation with DG JUST and, where appropriate, other relevant EU bodies.

Promotion of cross-border mediation

The EP 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 EP Coordinator stays in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders on this issue, including with the International Mediation Centre for Family Conflict and Child Abduction (MiKK) and other networks that promote and practise family mediation. In 2024, the EP Coordinator's Office continued to highlight the importance of mediation to parents while dealing with their enquiries on parental child abduction or other cross-border family cases, sharing information on the mediation process and its benefits where appropriate.

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

Requested by the Committee on Legal Affairs, commissioned by the Policy Department and in cooperation with the Office of the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights, the study written by Professor Marilyn Freeman²⁴ on *Parental child abductions to third countries*²⁵ was published and presented in JURI Committee meeting in March 2024. The study is devoted to the situations when the child is illegally taken to or retained in the country outside the European Union by one of the parents. Usually such cases are dealt with under the legal framework of the 1980 Hague Convention but even then, as underlined by the author, the return procedure may be very complex and the enforcement of the decision on the return is not guaranteed. The return of the child is even more complicated when such country is not cooperating under the 1980 Hague Convention. The author gave her analysis and suggestions for possible improvement of the practical functioning and the enforcement of decisions under the 1980 Hague Convention and pointed to the routes opened to the left-behind parents to try and secure the return of their abducted child from the non-Convention state. She also underlined strongly the devastating effects and consequences, short and long-term, of international child abduction for a child involved in such dispute.

The Office engaged with the author of the study to further explore the topic of parental child abduction and in view of the possible future collaboration on the issue.

Training and knowledge sharing

The EP Coordinator's Office continues to engage with academia in the field of international family law through participation in trainings, seminars and other events, such as:

- *Children's Rights and Cross-Border Parenthood in Times of Change*, 28-29 February 2024, interactive online seminar organised by the Academy of European Law in Trier,
- *Annual Conference on European Family Law*, 3-4 October 2024 in Barcelona, organised by the Academy of European Law in Trier.

Coordinator's Agenda 2025 in the field of international child abduction and other cross-border family disputes

Guided by the mandate, the EP Coordinator and her Office will continue to provide requesting parents with information in cross-border family matters and to address the shortcomings in the implementation of the existing rules through diplomatic interventions, where appropriate and

²⁴ Co-Director, International Centre for Family Law, Policy and Practice; Principal Research Fellow, Westminster Law School, University of Westminster, London; Chair, International Association of Child Law Researchers (IACLaR)

²⁵ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/759359/IPOL_STU\(2024\)759359_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/759359/IPOL_STU(2024)759359_EN.pdf)

deemed necessary. The EP Coordinator will continue to promote mediation in both cross-border and domestic family law disputes.

As 2025 marks the 45th anniversary of the signing of the 1980 Hague Convention, the EP Coordinator and her Office plan to engage with the Committee on Legal Affairs to discuss the functioning, effective implementation and the future of the Convention, also in view of the promotion of the cross-border family mediation.

III. Specific issues related to promotion and protection of children's rights

The 2024 EP Coordinator activities

In 2024, the EP Coordinator and her Office continued to engage on wide range of topics related to public policies concerning children, their rights and well-being. Mental and physical health, access to education for all children, social policies designed to protect children and to address their individual needs, those were just some of the areas the EP Coordinator got involved with stakeholders in order to raise awareness and to share tools and best practices.

- ***High-level debate “Building Inclusive Societies through Education - The role of primary schools”***

On 17 April 2024, the EP Coordinator on Children's Rights and the Office organised the High-level debate on inclusive education and the role of teachers, educators and parents in creating safe and inclusive school environment for all children to explore their potential and thrive. Practitioners and stakeholders across the European Union and beyond heard from invited experts on research and best practice tools to eliminate barriers, stereotypes and negative attitudes for children because of disability, social or ethnic background. As learning and comprehension of the surrounding environment begins in the very early years, this conference looked at how primary schools can teach inclusion, empathy and understanding towards differences that make us all unique. The invited experts provided an insightful overview of projects across the EU and initiatives, resources and funding from the European Commission available to Member States to promote equity and well-being for all children. The Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth Iliana Ivanova addressed the conference and the Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education Mrs Sabine Verheyen MEP provided her views on the importance of policy at EU level to promote equal access to education to all children.

The EP Coordinator underlined that the key message of the event was that through understanding and respect, we can learn to first see the unique ability in every child, regardless of their social and economic background or disabilities and at local, national and European

level we must continue to promote equality and inclusion for all children within our society, in our schools and communities and to promote this through ensuring adequate resources and supports to meet the individual needs of all children for them to reach their full potential for a long, fulfilled and happy life.

The event resulted in a closer cooperation with experts who participated as speakers representing the European Schools, the Directorate General on Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission, the Alliance for Childhood and the Czepczyński Family Foundation.

The conference was held in hybrid mode with interpretation to 6 languages and gathered almost 350 participants from 26 countries all over Europe, representing teachers and educators, academics, parents, psychologists, representatives of local and governmental authorities and a wide range of child rights organisations. Participants had also the chance to exchange during the discussion on best practices and projects from their countries. All shared examples and good practices together with presentations and additional materials were distributed to all registered participants as a follow up to the event.²⁶

- ***Public policies for children in Europe***

On 1 October 2024, Vice-President Ewa Kopacz, newly re-appointed for the position of the EP Coordinator, hosted a conference on “*Public policies for children in Europe: The state of art on education, social protection, health and well-being*”.

The event was organised in the European Parliament Info Hub premises jointly with partner organizations Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, EuroHealthNet and Learning for Well-being Foundation and gathered experts and professionals to discuss how mainstream public policies in Europe can contribute to a safer, healthier and quality childhood for youngest Europeans. In her introductory speech, the EP Coordinator stressed that ensuring children’s equal access to healthcare, education, adequate housing and nutrition from early age is key to combat and prevent social exclusion and to give every child a chance to achieve their unique and full potential. The invited speakers presented their research and conclusions on how European countries are currently investing in child policies and how the latter should be adapted to better contribute to children’s well-being. The event was also an occasion to discuss the European Commission Guidelines on supporting well-being in schools and the School4Health Initiative. Presentations were followed by a lively Q&A session with the audience present on-site and online.²⁷

²⁶ For detailed information on the conference, please consult Annex IV.

²⁷ For detailed information on the event, please consult the EP Coordinator webpage under *Latest information* section.

- ***Missing children***

On 14 November 2024 the EP Coordinator on Children’s Rights together with MEP Hilde Vautmans²⁸ hosted an event on “Closing the gaps in child protection”, co-organised with Missing Children Europe.

This seminar was a continuation of discussions on the existing gaps across child protection policies to prevent and address accordingly the reasons for children going missing in the EU. According to the research, a child disappears in the EU every two minutes. Some of them run away, some are being abducted, also by their parents, some other leave their homes under the influence of adults they met online. All of these situations require adults, parents, professionals of child protection services and policy-makers to take concrete steps to protect children and help them recover their lives.

The EP Coordinator underlined that in her experience of working on parental child abductions, successful searches depend on immediate launch of appropriate procedures, good cross-border cooperation and effective communication between key actors, especially parents or guardians. She stressed as well that raising awareness of children’s rights and needs is also extremely important. The roundtable gathered MEPs, experts and practitioners who exchanged on best practices on how to prevent children from going missing. Two members of the MCE Youth Board Members presented their own, difficult life experience of being abducted or neglected by responsible adults and services. The seminar was also an occasion for the Missing Children Europe to present the recommendations in the area to the EU institutions.²⁹

... and plans for 2025

Following the Commissioners’ confirmation hearings and commitments made in view of protection and promotion of children’s rights across EU and beyond, the EP Coordinator is very much determined to focus, beside her statutory competences, on developing public policies at local, national and EU levels that influence daily lives of children. In this respect, the protection of children online and the effect that online world has on child’s development and well-being will become a focal point of the new legislative term. The EP Coordinator sought to bring these and many other issues and related challenges into Parliament’s agenda³⁰ and plans to continue those activities in 2025, engaging with all relevant actors and bodies both inside and outside the European Parliament.

²⁸ After official establishment of the intergroup - MEP Hilde Vautmans is a co-chair of the Intergroup on Children’s Rights.

²⁹ For detailed information, please consult the EP Coordinator webpage under *Latest information* section.

³⁰ Please refer also to the part on cooperation with parliamentary committees and with NGOs and stakeholders.

Annex I

European Parliament

2019-2024



Committee on Legal Affairs

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

CJ03(2024)0409_1

DRAFT AGENDA

Meeting

Tuesday 9 April 2024, 11.30 – 12.30

- 1. Adoption of agenda**
- 2. Chair's announcements**
- 3. Creating a European centre for missing persons, including children - Exchange of views**
with:
 - Ewa Kopacz, Vice-President of the European Parliament and Coordinator on Children's Rights
 - Mr. Marcial Bravo as Coordinator of the Centro Nacional de Desaparecidos (CNDES)
 - Frank Hoen, Chairman of Amber Alert Europe
 - Koen Lemmens, University Professor at the Faculty of Law and Criminology, K.U.Leuven
 - Grażyna Baranowska, Marie Skłodowska Curie Postdoctoral Fellow, Centre for Fundamental Rights, Hertie School of Berlin
- 4. Any other business**

Annex II

European Parliament

2019-2024



Subcommittee on Public Health

Public Hearing

‘Public health challenges in view of children and young people’s wellbeing’

Wednesday, 20 November 2024, 15:00-17:00

Brussels, Room: ANTALL 4Q1

DRAFT PROGRAMME

Introduction: Welcome and opening remarks by

15:00 - 15:10

Adam JARUBAS, SANT Chair

Vice-President Ewa KOPACZ, European Parliament Coordinator for
Children’s Rights

Li ANDERSSON, EMPL Chair

Hristo PETROV, CULT Vice-Chair

15:10 - 16:00

Panel I: State of play of Children and young people’s health

Kati Kuisma, Finnish Heart Association, Finland

Begonya Nafria Escalera, Sant Joan de Déu Research Foundation,
Spain

Questions and Answers

16:00 - 17:00

Panel II: Specific public health challenges

Niamh Nic Carthaigh, Plan International, Belgium

Luisa Fassi, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

Franco Sassi, Imperial College Business School, United Kingdom

Questions and Answers

Concluding remarks by **Adam JARUBAS**, SANT Chair

European Parliament

2024-2029



Subcommittee on Human Rights

Public Hearing

Rights of the Child in the EU external policy: state of play on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

4 December 2024, 14.30-16.00

Room: SPAAK (5B001)

DRAFT PROGRAMME

14.30-14.35 Welcome and introductory remarks by Mounir Satouri, Chair of the DROI Subcommittee

14.35-14.40 Intervention by Vice-President Ewa Kopacz, EP Coordinator on Children's Rights

14.40-15.20 Session 1: The implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in EU external policies

- **Bertrand Bainvel**, UNICEF Representative to the European Union Institutions
- **Benoit Van Keirsbilck**, Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Director of the Belgian section of Defense for Children International
- **Ellis Matthews**, Head of Division for human rights (EEAS)
- **Chiara ADAMO** Head of Unit in DG INTPA G1 (Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance)

Q&A session with Members of DROI
Subcommittee

15.20-15.55 Session 2: EU external action to protect children affected by armed conflicts, including child soldiers, forcibly displaced children and children in place of detention

- **Anne Schintgen**, Head of Office of the United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict in Europe
- **Olivia Mertens**, Senior Advocacy Advisor, Save the Children Europe
- **Ellis Matthews**, Head of Division for Human rights (EEAS)
- **Frederik Schutyser**, Deputy Head of Unit, Humanitarian Policies and International Humanitarian Law, DG ECHO, European Commission

Q&A session with Members of DROI
Subcommittee

15.55-16.00 Concluding remarks by Mounir Satouri, Chair of the DROI Subcommittee

BUILDING INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES THROUGH EDUCATION

The role of
primary schools
High-level
debate



HOSTED BY:

Ewa KOPACZ,

Vice President and European Parliament Coordinator on Children's Rights

Interpretation in EN, DE, FR, IT, ES, PL

WEDNESDAY,
17 APRIL 2024
10:00 – 12:00

MEETING ROOM: SPINELLI 5E2

HYBRID CONFERENCE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
BRUSSELS AND ONLINE



Programme

10.00-10.10

Opening

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

Mrs Iliana Ivanova Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

10.10 - 11.00 **Experts' Panel on inclusivity through education**

Moderation: Vice President **Ewa Kopacz**

Introductory word

Mrs Sabine Verheyen, Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education

“What makes me? Capacities for living and learning” Report

Mrs Chiara Piccolo, Managing Director, Alliance for Childhood European Network Group and Head of European Affairs at the Learning for well-being Foundation

“ABC of Empathy”

Mr Damian Kupczyk, President of Czepczyński Family Foundation

“Strategies for Removing Barriers to Inclusive Education: Organizational Approaches and Practices”

Mr Andreas Beckmann, Secretary General, European Schools

“Pathways to School Success: addressing early school leaving, low achievement and well-being at school”

Mrs Annalisa Cannoni and **Mrs Oana Felecan**, Policy officers, School education: school success, equity and wellbeing, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

11.00 -11.55 **Open discussion Q&A**

Moderation: **Mrs Ally Dunhill** - Director of Policy, Advocacy and Communication in Eurochild

Discussion/exchange of views

The floor is open for comments, questions and suggestions to participants, both those in room and online.

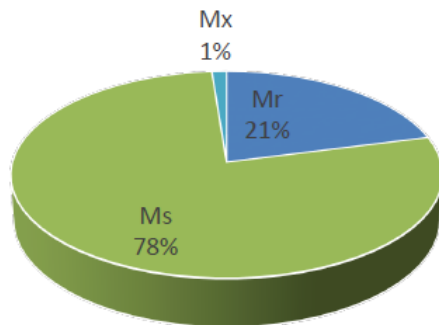
BUILDING INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES THROUGH EDUCATION

The role of primary schools
High-level debate



Status	#	%
Registered	324	93,91%
Incomplete	11	3,19%
Declined	10	2,90%
Grand Total	345	100,00%

Attendance	#	%
Online	259	79,94%
Onsite	65	20,06%
Grand Total	324	100,00%



Country	#	%
BELGIUM	39	12,04%
CROATIA	1	0,31%
CYPRUS	1	0,31%
CZECHIA	1	0,31%
DENMARK	1	0,31%
FRANCE	4	1,23%
GEORGIA	1	0,31%
GERMANY	34	10,49%
GREECE	98	30,25%
GREENLAND	1	0,31%
IRELAND	2	0,62%
ITALY	7	2,16%
JERSEY	2	0,62%
LATVIA	1	0,31%
LUXEMBOURG	3	0,93%
MOLDOVA, REPUBLIC OF	2	0,62%
NETHERLANDS	1	0,31%
POLAND	105	32,41%
PORTUGAL	4	1,23%
ROMANIA	3	0,93%
SLOVAKIA	1	0,31%
SPAIN	5	1,54%
SWEDEN	1	0,31%
SWITZERLAND	3	0,93%
UKRAINE	1	0,31%
UNITED KINGDOM	2	0,62%
Grand Total	324	100,00%

Floor requests	#	%
No, I will not	150	83,80%
Online	111	62,01%
Onsite	39	21,79%
Yes, I would li	29	16,20%
Online	18	10,06%
Onsite	11	6,15%
Grand Total	179	100,00%

Function	#	%
Academic	19	5,86%
EU Official	22	6,79%
Government representat	15	4,63%
NGO/Child Rights Organism	34	10,49%
Other	59	18,21%
Parent	36	11,11%
Psychologist	9	2,78%
Student	9	2,78%
Teacher/Educator	121	37,35%
Grand Total	324	100,00%