



European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children

Luxemburg, 20.V.1980

The member States of the Council of Europe, signatory hereto,

Recognising that in the member States of the Council of Europe the welfare of the child is of overriding importance in reaching decisions concerning his custody;

Considering that the making of arrangements to ensure that decisions concerning the custody of a child can be more widely recognised and enforced will provide greater protection of the welfare of children;

Considering it desirable, with this end in view, to emphasise that the right of access of parents is a normal corollary to the right of custody;

Noting the increasing number of cases where children have been improperly removed across an international frontier and the difficulties of securing adequate solutions to the problems caused by such cases;

Desirous of making suitable provision to enable the custody of children which has been arbitrarily interrupted to be restored;

Convinced of the desirability of making arrangements for this purpose answering to different needs and different circumstances;

Desiring to establish legal co-operation between their authorities,

Have agreed as follows:

Article 1

For the purposes of this Convention:

- a *child* means a person of any nationality, so long as he is under 16 years of age and has not the right to decide on his own place of residence under the law of his habitual residence, the law of his nationality or the internal law of the State addressed;
- b *authority* means a judicial or administrative authority;
- c *decision relating to custody* means a decision of an authority in so far as it relates to the care of the person of the child, including the right to decide on the place of his residence, or to the right of access to him;

- d *improper removal* means the removal of a child across an international frontier in breach of a decision relating to his custody which has been given in a Contracting State and which is enforceable in such a State; improper removal also includes:
 - i the failure to return a child across an international frontier at the end of a period of the exercise of the right of access to this child or at the end of any other temporary stay in a territory other than that where the custody is exercised;
 - ii a removal which is subsequently declared unlawful within the meaning of Article 12.

Part 1 – Central authorities

Article 2

- 1 Each Contracting State shall appoint a central authority to carry out the functions provided for by this Convention.
- 2 Federal States and States with more than one legal system shall be free to appoint more than one central authority and shall determine the extent of their competence.
- 3 The Secretary General of the Council of Europe shall be notified of any appointment under this article.

Article 3

- 1 The central authorities of the Contracting States shall co-operate with each other and promote co-operation between the competent authorities in their respective countries. They shall act with all necessary despatch.
- 2 With a view to facilitating the operation of this Convention, the central authorities of the Contracting States:
 - a shall secure the transmission of requests for information coming from competent authorities and relating to legal or factual matters concerning pending proceedings;
 - b shall provide each other on request with information about their law relating to the custody of children and any changes in that law;
 - c shall keep each other informed of any difficulties likely to arise in applying the Convention and, as far as possible, eliminate obstacles to its application.

Article 4

- 1 Any person who has obtained in a Contracting State a decision relating to the custody of a child and who wishes to have that decision recognised or enforced in another Contracting State may submit an application for this purpose to the central authority in any Contracting State.
- 2 The application shall be accompanied by the documents mentioned in Article 13.
- 3 The central authority receiving the application, if it is not the central authority in the State addressed, shall send the documents directly and without delay to that central authority.
- 4 The central authority receiving the application may refuse to intervene where it is manifestly clear that the conditions laid down by this Convention are not satisfied.

- 5 The central authority receiving the application shall keep the applicant informed without delay of the progress of his application.

Article 5

- 1 The central authority in the State addressed shall take or cause to be taken without delay all steps which it considers to be appropriate, if necessary by instituting proceedings before its competent authorities, in order:
 - a to discover the whereabouts of the child;
 - b to avoid, in particular by any necessary provisional measures, prejudice to the interests of the child or of the applicant;
 - c to secure the recognition or enforcement of the decision;
 - d to secure the delivery of the child to the applicant where enforcement is granted;
 - e to inform the requesting authority of the measures taken and their results.
- 2 Where the central authority in the State addressed has reason to believe that the child is in the territory of another Contracting State it shall send the documents directly and without delay to the central authority of that State.
- 3 With the exception of the cost of repatriation, each Contracting State undertakes not to claim any payment from an applicant in respect of any measures taken under paragraph 1 of this article by the central authority of that State on the applicant's behalf, including the costs of proceedings and, where applicable, the costs incurred by the assistance of a lawyer.
- 4 If recognition or enforcement is refused, and if the central authority of the State addressed considers that it should comply with a request by the applicant to bring in that State proceedings concerning the substance of the case, that authority shall use its best endeavours to secure the representation of the applicant in the proceedings under conditions no less favourable than those available to a person who is resident in and a national of that State and for this purpose it may, in particular, institute proceedings before its competent authorities.

Article 6

- 1 Subject to any special agreements made between the central authorities concerned and to the provisions of paragraph 3 of this article:
 - a communications to the central authority of the State addressed shall be made in the official language or in one of the official languages of that State or be accompanied by a translation into that language;
 - b the central authority of the State addressed shall nevertheless accept communications made in English or in French or accompanied by a translation into one of these languages.
- 2 Communications coming from the central authority of the State addressed, including the results of enquiries carried out, may be made in the official language or one of the official languages of that State or in English or French.

- 3 A Contracting State may exclude wholly or partly the provisions of paragraph 1.b of this article. When a Contracting State has made this reservation any other Contracting State may also apply the reservation in respect of that State.

Part II – Recognition and enforcement of decisions and restoration of custody of children

Article 7

A decision relating to custody given in a Contracting State shall be recognised and, where it is enforceable in the State of origin, made enforceable in every other Contracting State.

Article 8

- 1 In the case of an improper removal, the central authority of the State addressed shall cause steps to be taken forthwith to restore the custody of the child where:
 - a at the time of the institution of the proceedings in the State where the decision was given or at the time of the improper removal, if earlier, the child and his parents had as their sole nationality the nationality of that State and the child had his habitual residence in the territory of that State, and
 - b a request for the restoration was made to a central authority within a period of six months from the date of the improper removal.
- 2 If, in accordance with the law of the State addressed, the requirements of paragraph 1 of this article cannot be complied with without recourse to a judicial authority, none of the grounds of refusal specified in this Convention shall apply to the judicial proceedings.
- 3 Where there is an agreement officially confirmed by a competent authority between the person having the custody of the child and another person to allow the other person a right of access, and the child, having been taken abroad, has not been restored at the end of the agreed period to the person having the custody, custody of the child shall be restored in accordance with paragraphs 1.b and 2 of this article. The same shall apply in the case of a decision of the competent authority granting such a right to a person who has not the custody of the child.

Article 9

- 1 In cases of improper removal, other than those dealt with in Article 8, in which an application has been made to a central authority within a period of six months from the date of the removal, recognition and enforcement may be refused only if:
 - a in the case of a decision given in the absence of the defendant or his legal representative, the defendant was not duly served with the document which instituted the proceedings or an equivalent document in sufficient time to enable him to arrange his defence; but such a failure to effect service cannot constitute a ground for refusing recognition or enforcement where service was not effected because the defendant had concealed his whereabouts from the person who instituted the proceedings in the State of origin;
 - b in the case of a decision given in the absence of the defendant or his legal representative, the competence of the authority giving the decision was not founded:
 - i on the habitual residence of the defendant, or
 - ii on the last common habitual residence of the child's parents, at least one parent being still habitually resident there, or

- iii on the habitual residence of the child;
 - c the decision is incompatible with a decision relating to custody which became enforceable in the State addressed before the removal of the child, unless the child has had his habitual residence in the territory of the requesting State for one year before his removal.
- 2 Where no application has been made to a central authority, the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article shall apply equally, if recognition and enforcement are requested within six months from the date of the improper removal.
 - 3 In no circumstances may the foreign decision be reviewed as to its substance.

Article 10

- 1 In cases other than those covered by Articles 8 and 9, recognition and enforcement may be refused not only on the grounds provided for in Article 9 but also on any of the following grounds:
 - a if it is found that the effects of the decision are manifestly incompatible with the fundamental principles of the law relating to the family and children in the State addressed;
 - b if it is found that by reason of a change in the circumstances including the passage of time but not including a mere change in the residence of the child after an improper removal, the effects of the original decision are manifestly no longer in accordance with the welfare of the child;
 - c if at the time when the proceedings were instituted in the State of origin:
 - i the child was a national of the State addressed or was habitually resident there and no such connection existed with the State of origin;
 - ii the child was a national both of the State of origin and of the State addressed and was habitually resident in the State addressed;
 - d if the decision is incompatible with a decision given in the State addressed or enforceable in that State after being given in a third State, pursuant to proceedings begun before the submission of the request for recognition or enforcement, and if the refusal is in accordance with the welfare of the child.
- 2 In the same cases, proceedings for recognition or enforcement may be adjourned on any of the following grounds:
 - a if an ordinary form of review of the original decision has been commenced;
 - b if proceedings relating to the custody of the child, commenced before the proceedings in the State of origin were instituted, are pending in the State addressed;
 - c if another decision concerning the custody of the child is the subject of proceedings for enforcement or of any other proceedings concerning the recognition of the decision.

Article 11

- 1 Decisions on rights of access and provisions of decisions relating to custody which deal with the right of access shall be recognised and enforced subject to the same conditions as other decisions relating to custody.
- 2 However, the competent authority of the State addressed may fix the conditions for the implementation and exercise of the right of access taking into account, in particular, undertakings given by the parties on this matter.
- 3 Where no decision on the right of access has been taken or where recognition or enforcement of the decision relating to custody is refused, the central authority of the State addressed may apply to its competent authorities for a decision on the right of access, if the person claiming a right of access so requests.

Article 12

Where, at the time of the removal of a child across an international frontier, there is no enforceable decision given in a Contracting State relating to his custody, the provisions of this Convention shall apply to any subsequent decision, relating to the custody of that child and declaring the removal to be unlawful, given in a Contracting State at the request of any interested person.

Part III – Procedure

Article 13

- 1 A request for recognition or enforcement in another Contracting State of a decision relating to custody shall be accompanied by:
 - a a document authorising the central authority of the State addressed to act on behalf of the applicant or to designate another representative for that purpose;
 - b a copy of the decision which satisfies the necessary conditions of authenticity;
 - c in the case of a decision given in the absence of the defendant or his legal representative, a document which establishes that the defendant was duly served with the document which instituted the proceedings or an equivalent document;
 - d if applicable, any document which establishes that, in accordance with the law of the State of origin, the decision is enforceable;
 - e if possible, a statement indicating the whereabouts or likely whereabouts of the child in the State addressed;
 - f proposals as to how the custody of the child should be restored.
- 2 The documents mentioned above shall, where necessary, be accompanied by a translation according to the provisions laid down in Article 6.

Article 14

Each Contracting State shall apply a simple and expeditious procedure for recognition and enforcement of decisions relating to the custody of a child. To that end it shall ensure that a request for enforcement may be lodged by simple application.

Article 15

- 1 Before reaching a decision under paragraph 1.b of Article 10, the authority concerned in the State addressed:
 - a shall ascertain the child's views unless this is impracticable having regard in particular to his age and understanding; and
 - b may request that any appropriate enquiries be carried out.
- 2 The cost of enquiries in any Contracting State shall be met by the authorities of the State where they are carried out.
- 3 Request for enquiries and the results of enquiries may be sent to the authority concerned through the central authorities.

Article 16

For the purposes of this Convention, no legalisation or any like formality may be required.

Part IV – Reservations

Article 17

- 1 A Contracting State may make a reservation that, in cases covered by Articles 8 and 9 or either of these Articles, recognition and enforcement of decisions relating to custody may be refused on such of the grounds provided under Article 10 as may be specified in the reservation.
- 2 Recognition and enforcement of decisions given in a Contracting State which has made the reservation provided for in paragraph 1 of this article may be refused in any other Contracting State on any of the additional grounds referred to in that reservation.

Article 18

A Contracting State may make a reservation that it shall not be bound by the provisions of Article 12. The provisions of this Convention shall not apply to decisions referred to in Article 12 which have been given in a Contracting State which has made such a reservation.

Part V – Other instruments

Article 19

This Convention shall not exclude the possibility of relying on any other international instrument in force between the State of origin and the State addressed or on any other law of the State addressed not derived from an international agreement for the purpose of obtaining recognition or enforcement of a decision.

Article 20

- 1 This Convention shall not affect any obligations which a Contracting State may have towards a non-Contracting State under an international instrument dealing with matters governed by this Convention.

- 2 When two or more Contracting States have enacted uniform laws in relation to custody of children or created a special system of recognition or enforcement of decisions in this field, or if they should do so in the future, they shall be free to apply, between themselves, those laws or that system in place of this Convention or any part of it. In order to avail themselves of this provision the State shall notify their decision to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Any alteration or revocation of this decision must also be notified.

Part VI – Final clauses

Article 21

This Convention shall be open for signature by the member States of the Council of Europe. It is subject to ratification, acceptance or approval. Instruments of ratification, acceptance or approval shall be deposited with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Article 22

- 1 This Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of three months after the date on which three member States of the Council of Europe have expressed their consent to be bound by the Convention in accordance with the provisions of Article 21.
- 2 In respect of any member State which subsequently expresses its consent to be bound by it, the Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of three months after the date of the deposit of the instrument of ratification, acceptance or approval.

Article 23

- 1 After the entry into force of this Convention, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe may invite any State not a member of the Council to accede to this Convention, by a decision taken by the majority provided for by Article 20.d of the Statute and by the unanimous vote of the representatives of the Contracting States entitled to sit on the Committee.
- 2 In respect of any acceding State, the Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of three months after the date of deposit of the instrument of accession with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Article 24

- 1 Any State may at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, specify the territory or territories to which this Convention shall apply.
- 2 Any State may at any later date, by a declaration addressed to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, extend the application of this Convention to any other territory specified in the declaration. In respect of such territory, the Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of three months after the date of receipt by the Secretary General of such declaration.
- 3 Any declaration made under the two preceding paragraphs may, in respect of any territory specified in such declaration, be withdrawn by a notification addressed to the Secretary General. The withdrawal shall become effective on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of six months after the date of receipt of such notification by the Secretary General.

Article 25

- 1 A State which has two or more territorial units in which different systems of law apply in matters of custody of children and of recognition and enforcement of decisions relating to custody may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, declare that this Convention shall apply to all its territorial units or to one or more of them.
- 2 Such a State may at any later date, by a declaration addressed to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, extend the application of this Convention to any other territorial unit specified in the declaration. In respect of such territorial unit the Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of three months after the date of receipt by the Secretary General of such declaration.
- 3 Any declaration made under the two preceding paragraphs may, in respect of any territorial unit specified in such declaration, be withdrawn by notification addressed to the Secretary General. The withdrawal shall become effective on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of six months after the date of receipt of such notification by the Secretary General.

Article 26

- 1 In relation to a State which has in matters of custody two or more systems of law of territorial application:
 - a reference to the law of a person's habitual residence or to the law of a person's nationality shall be construed as referring to the system of law determined by the rules in force in that State or, if there are no such rules, to the system of law with which the person concerned is most closely connected;
 - b reference to the State of origin or to the State addressed shall be construed as referring, as the case may, be to the territorial unit where recognition or enforcement of the decision or restoration of custody is requested.
- 2 Paragraph 1.a of this article also applies *mutatis mutandis* to States which have in matters of custody two or more systems of law of personal application.

Article 27

- 1 Any State may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, declare that it avails itself of one or more of the reservations provided for in paragraph 3 of Article 6, Article 17 and Article 18 of this Convention. No other reservation may be made.
- 2 Any Contracting State which has made a reservation under the preceding paragraph may wholly or partly withdraw it by means of a notification addressed to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. The withdrawal shall take effect on the date of receipt of such notification by the Secretary General.

Article 28

At the end of the third year following the date of the entry into force of this Convention and, on his own initiative, at any time after this date, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe shall invite the representatives of the central authorities appointed by the Contracting States to meet in order to study and to facilitate the functioning of the Convention. Any member State of the Council of Europe not being a party to the Convention may be represented by an observer. A report shall be prepared on the work of each of these meetings and forwarded to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for information.

Article 29

- 1 Any Party may at any time denounce this Convention by means of a notification addressed to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.
- 2 Such denunciation shall become effective on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of six months after the date of receipt of the notification by the Secretary General.

Article 30

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe shall notify the member States of the Council and any State which has acceded to this Convention, of:

- a any signature;
- b the deposit of any instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession;
- c any date of entry into force of this Convention in accordance with Articles 22, 23, 24 and 25;
- d any other act, notification or communication relating to this Convention.

In witness whereof the undersigned, being duly authorised thereto, have signed this Convention.

Done at Luxembourg, the 20th day of May 1980, in English and French, both texts being equally authentic, in a single copy which shall be deposited in the archives of the Council of Europe. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe shall transmit certified copies to each member State of the Council of Europe and to any State invited to accede to this Convention.