

# Press release – Parliament sounds alarm over children in Japan taken from EU parents



In a resolution adopted on Wednesday with 686 votes in favour, 1 against and 8 abstentions, Parliament expressed its concerns over children's wellbeing as a result of children in Japan being abducted by a parent. They call on the Japanese authorities to enforce international rules on child protection and to introduce changes to their legal system to allow for shared custody.

## **Enforcing international law**

Parliament regrets that one of the EU's strategic partners does not appear to be complying with international rules on child abduction. They urge the Japanese authorities to enforce domestic and foreign court decisions on the return of the child and on access and visiting rights after the parents' relationship has ended, in order to bring their domestic laws in line with their international commitments and obligations.

MEPs underline that safeguarding the child's best interest must be the primary concern and abduction cases must be handled swiftly to avoid long-term adverse consequences on the child and the future relationship with the non-custodial parent. They point out that under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), every child has the right to maintain a personal relationship and direct contact with both their parents, unless it is contrary to their interests.

## **Improve cross-border cooperation and information**

Due to the cross-border nature of these legal disputes, Parliament insists that all child protection systems have transnational and cross-border mechanisms in place. They propose that in addition to the Hague Conference,

citizen-friendly European information platforms should be developed to support parents in cross-border disputes. The text also recommends that reliable information on family law and children's rights in non-EU countries like Japan should be made available, as well as difficulties that may arise in cases of divorce or separation.

Parliament calls for more international cooperation among member states and with third countries to implement international legislation on child protection. MEPs urge member states to inform citizens about the risk of child abduction in Japan. To further increase pressure on authorities, MEPs urge member states and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs to include the issue on the agenda of all bilateral and multilateral meetings with Japan.

### **Background information**

Parliament has received a significant number of appeals in the past few years on cases of Japanese parental child abduction and visiting rights, where one of the parents is an EU citizen. Petitioners point out that international court decisions in Japan on the return of the child are not being enforced properly, as Japanese law lacks shared custody provisions.

The issue gained international attention in 2019 after German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte spoke with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on behalf of concerned parents. A formal complaint was also launched last year to the UN Human Rights Council by left-behind parents, arguing that Japan was violating the UNCRC and the Hague Convention.