



iSupport is funded by the Justice Programme of the European Union (2014-2020)



iSupport Governing Body 20 January 2022 online meeting Minutes

Present were representatives from Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United States of America. The meeting was chaired by Paulo Gonçalves (Portugal). Present for the PB were Philippe Lortie (PL) and Jean-Marc Pellet (JMP).

I. Budgetary discussions (HCCH budget 2022-2023)

1. PL reported that discussions are underway for the HCCH budget for the next financial year (July 2022 to June 2023). The process started on 13 January with an informal meeting involving National Organs and / or representatives of the Standing Committee of the Council of Diplomatic Representatives (the Council of Diplomatic Representatives is the HCCH body that adopts the budget – the Council on General Affairs and Policy is also consulted).
2. PL recalled that several States had expressed a wish in the past for the position of iSupport Coordinator to be part of the “regular budget” of the organisation (now “the budget”), as opposed to a specific iSupport budget. [Addition after the meeting: The iSupport coordinator position has been funded by EU Action Grants since September 2014.]
3. The informal budget presented by the Secretary General (SG) at the 13 January meeting includes the position of iSupport coordinator as part of the budget, as well as a new human resources position. Along with other developments, this has an impact on the budget, with about a 6% increase.
4. PL explained that this move will further help consolidating iSupport, which is now used by two Central Authorities, with 14 States working towards implementation and 10 additional States or territories which have shown an interest. In terms of the overall work programme of the organisation, this would also be beneficial. First, having the position of iSupport coordinator for the past few years has allowed a few developments that would not have taken place without that resource such as the statistical report for the 2007 Convention and the Experts’ Group on International Transfer of Maintenance Funds. This has only been possible because these topics are connected to iSupport.
5. Moving the position to the budget would mean that the coordinator could also work on other 2007 Convention topics, especially as 2022 has brought new responsibilities for PL (jointly with his colleague Secretary, Laura Martinez-Mora): the 1980 Child Abduction Convention and the 1996 Child Protection Convention (in addition to pre-existing responsibilities: the 2007 Convention, the 2000 Protection of Adults Convention, the International Hague Network of Judges and the Judges’ newsletter). [Addition after the meeting: It would also allow the

coordinator to work on horizontal HCCH issues such as statistics across the Conventions and Country Profiles, for instance.]

6. PL concluded that it would send a strong signal, after the European Union has taken steps towards the sustainability of e-CODEX. He invited participants to contact their National Organ¹ if they supported this initiative. He added that at this stage, support from a few large contributors to the budget (France, Germany, the USA), and a few States outside of the EU (Brazil, Norway, the USA) would be welcome (as opposed to the whole Governing Body). The Standing Committee will meet on 17 February.
7. One representative asked if the Permanent Bureau could provide some language to facilitate their contact with their National Organ. PL replied positively.
8. One representative remarked that making voluntary contributions (as opposed to their contribution to the budget) is difficult for their State and enquired about the current cost of the coordinator. PL could not give an exact figure but indicated that it should be less than € 100,000 per year including the contribution of the employee and the organisation to the Pension Fund.
9. One representative enquired about the relation to other budgets such as the EU Action Grants. PL clarified that payments for EU Action Grants can be received at any time before the end of the Grant. That is August 2022 for the current project, and August 2024 for the next project. By contrast, payments to the budget are billed annually in July of each year.
10. One representative enquired about the impact for iSupport if the position could not be transferred to the budget. PL explained that staff rules do not permit to employ staff paid outside of the budget for a period longer than four years (new staff rules came into effect in January 2018).

II. State of play technical work in iSupport

11. JMP provided a brief update. Following vulnerabilities in the Apache log4j software that were identified last year, e-CODEX released new versions of the connector (4.4.x). On 2 February a meeting will take place with Austria, which is managing e-CODEX components, to discuss which versions are recommended for iSupport. The specific middleware that is used between iSupport and e-CODEX components will also be discussed.
12. JMP also invited participants to test the 2021 version that is currently available on the sandbox as much as possible. The first wave of test will end on 28 January, after which Protech will make the necessary amendments. A second (and final) wave of tests will follow.
13. PL added that Austria is installing iSupport in a testing capacity, with a view to demonstrating how e-CODEX components can work in conjunction with iSupport. He welcomed the development.

¹ <https://www.hcch.net/en/states/hcch-members>