

The International Family Mediation Project

Creating an international family mediation profession

Expert Group launches initiative for international family mediation, June 2024

The International Family Mediation Project, 'IFMP', is an international initiative formally launched this week by a group of experts, led by Co-Chairs Prof. David Hodson OBE (UK) and Dr Róisín O'Shea (Ireland). The Steering Group for the project, will on a voluntary basis, work with mediators and stakeholders globally to create a support framework for international family mediation.

In speaking about the initiative Prof David Hodson commented on the huge number of international families seeking resolution of parental, relationship and financial disputes. International families, financially independent and mobile, many of whom have several nationalities, domiciles and residencies, moving by reason of employment or lifestyle. When there are relationship difficulties and consequential disputes, these can be some of the most difficult to be resolved by family justice systems.

These families find themselves subject to expensive and often highly contentious litigation, quite frequently in forum disputes or arguments about the appropriate and applicable law. What is happening is often disjointed, specifically related to one area of family law such as child abduction and certainly is not known to lawyers and judges, the primary referral sources. For a family seeking an international family mediator, there is no common criteria for; training, experience, code of practice, model of working, standard documentation, unanimity of outcome or understanding of how and where any agreement might be enforced.

This situation cannot continue, commented Dr Róisín O'Shea. There are now many tens of millions, perhaps hundreds of millions of internationally mobile families, moving across borders by reason of work, romance or life choice. On relationship breakdown or difficulties, they deserve better than highly conflictual litigation, sometimes with lawyers in different countries each tactically seeking to improve the position of their client, with often national and international laws themselves in conflict or producing very different outcomes. Yet in parallel around the world, family mediation is relatively successful and significantly promoted by many governments and justice systems to resolve family disputes fairly and reasonably and, crucially, out-of-court.

Many of these families want to find solutions outside of the court structure, with the assistance of professionals such as mediators who will help them find a satisfactory solution and way forward.

The IFMP will draw on the collective expertise of the global Steering Group to deal with international family law issues; by creating good practices and providing resource documents and guidelines, to meet the needs of international families and their children post the break-down of a relationship.

The Steering Group seek to serve the international family community and those already working with them such as justice systems, court services, judges, lawyers, mediators and others. This will be by producing documents such as a precedent Agreement to Mediate, an International Codes of Conduct, standards of training and other areas of work. Although the master version of each completed resource document will remain with the Project, it is a crucial part of this work that it will be made available, free of charge, around the world for use in day-to-day situations and

The International Family Mediation Project, 'IFMP', is a voluntary project and initiative established in late 2022 by a group of international experts
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for consideration by national organisations. However, the Group asks for feedback on any product created, to include suggestions for improvement and change. The project website is at, www.internationalfamilymediation.com, and will be updated periodically. Anyone with relevant expertise/knowledge who wishes to volunteer to assist various working groups should contact the Group via the contact form.

Steering Group

Prof. David Hodson OBE solicitor, mediator, arbitrator, part-time family court judge (UK); Dr. Róisín O'Shea, mediator, legal academic, Chair of the IPMO (Ireland); Andrew Davies, solicitor, mediator, arbitrator (Australia); Pascal Comvalius, mediator, visiting faculty member in mediation at MNLU Mumbai (Netherlands); Dr Margaret Connors, Washtenaw County Peacemaker and family law lecturer University of Michigan Law School (United States); Shabana Saleem, Barrister, mediator, arbitrator (Middle East); Colm Branigan, Chartered Med-Arbitrator ADR Institute of Canada and guest lecturer Queen's University, Osgoode Hall Law School and University of Toronto; Dr Chinwe Egbunike-Umegbolu, mediator, solicitor, barrister, part-time lecturer Law Dept. University of Brighton (UK) and the Hon. Judge Timothy P. Connors State Court Judge Washtenaw County, Michigan, United States. www.internationalfamilymediation.com