What is International parental child abduction (IPCA)?
The term “child abduction” refers to a wrongful removal from, or a non-return to, a child’s country of “habitual residence” by one of the child’s parents. A relocation across borders is wrongful when the taking parent does not have, or does not have alone, the right to change the child’s place of residence. IPCA is different from extra-family child kidnapping. Research\(^1\) and ISS casework demonstrates the following main forms of IPCA trends:

- Wrongful removal or non-return of the child in situations of shared custody (implying shared relocation rights)
- Flight of the custodial parent with the child in a context of alleged family/domestic violence (“protective abductions”)
- Wrongful return of the child with the custodial parent to that parent’s home country. Here, the child is separated from the non-custodial parent
- Removal or non-return of the child by a non-custodial parent. Here, the child is separated from the custodial parent


Why do parents “abduct” their children?
There are as many reasons as there are individual situations. Most often we find one, or several, of the following motivations such as a parent:

- no longer seeing any realistic future with his/her child in the country of residence, and searching for support from family and friends in the country of origin
- not having had access to lawful and speedy relocation procedures
- fleeing a context of physical or psychological family violence
- not accepting a legal visiting/custody decision, and determining that they know better than the local judge what is in the best interest of the child
- feeling dishonoured and/or humiliated in a legal procedure and therefore making his/her “own justice”
- losing his/her residence permit and taking “his/her” children back with them
- fearing removal of his/her children by child protection authorities (e.g. foster care)

Guiding international standards and ISS internal documents:
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 1980 Hague Convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction
- ISS-Guide to International Family Mediation
- Brussels IIbis
- ISS Casework manual
- HccH Guide to Good Practice - Mediation
- Principles for the Establishment of Mediation Structures in the Context of the Malta Process
- Charter for International Family Mediation Processes (The Charter)
ISS-Casework services include:
- Child-focused psycho-social and legal counselling of left-behind and/or taking parents
- Counselling parents about legal ways to relocate to another country
- Prevention of IPCA through counselling about the harmful effects of IPCA and possible remedies: legal (domestic and international); and through negotiation/mediation
- Home visits and assessments through ISS network members
- Facilitation of contact/visit between a child(ren) and the left-behind parent
- Follow-up after return of the child
- International family mediation
- Cooperation with Central Authorities in Hague member states
- Cooperation with diplomatic authorities in Non-Hague states
- Advocacy and awareness raising include:
  - Conferences on IPCA
  - Training on IPCA for child-protection professionals, lawyers, mediators, social workers, universities etc.
  - Publications and research on the causes and effects of IPCA
  - Promotion of International family mediation to resolve IPCA cases
  - Cooperation with the HCCH