General figures

In Europe, a child is reported missing every 2 minutes. Who do you call for help in this dire situation? To support children and families at this crucial time, a hotline for missing children is available through the same number in 32 countries across Europe: 116 000. This hotline provides free emotional, psychological, social, legal, and administrative support to callers. The figures and analysis of missing children cases collected from this network of hotlines annually help us understand the issues facing children and the support that can better help them and their families. The majority of the data illustrated in this report comes from these hotlines corresponding to cases from 2017 and from the network of Cross-Border Family Mediators. Both networks are coordinated and supported by Missing Children Europe.

In 2017, the network of hotlines received 189 054 calls. Hotlines for missing children provided support to calls and cases relating to 5621 missing children. 19% of the missing children reported to hotlines faced violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

While most of the missing children hotlines are run by members of Missing Children Europe ([24], some hotlines are run by law enforcement and public service organisations (such as in Malta, Sweden, Latvia, Luxembourg and Finland). Not all organisations running these hotlines collect data and several do not share data publicly. 22 hotlines contributed data on missing children cases for this report.

Among the cases handled by hotlines, runaways have consistently remained the largest group of missing children reported. This resembles trends from other geographical areas, such as the US, Canada and Australia, where runaways are also considered the most common category of missing children.

Types of missing children cases reported to hotlines in 2017

- **Runaways** (including children thrown out of their home or care institution): 23.2%
- **Parental abductions (national and cross-border/international)**: 14.3%
- **Missing in migration (all types, incl. unaccompanied children in migration)**: 57.3%
- **Lost, injured or otherwise missing** (including children who have died): 0.2%

The number of runaways reported to hotlines has remained consistent at 57%, same as in 2016. Cases of children abducted by a parent have also remained the same, at 23%, in both 2016 and 2017.

In 2017, cases of missing children in migration reported to hotlines decreased to 5% compared with 7% in 2016. While national authorities still quote thousands of migrant children who have continued to go missing, the decrease in cases demonstrates the lack of reporting of these children to hotlines. Cases of lost, injured or otherwise missing children have meanwhile increased by 2% since 2016 and criminal abductions constituted less than 0.2% of cases, with 12 cases being reported to hotlines in 2017.

On average, 46% of the children reported missing in 2017 were found within the year, an increase of 4% from 2016. However, 1% of the children were found deceased. The majority of deaths were among cases of runaway children.

**Comparison of missing children cases dealt with over the years**

- **Runaways**
- **Parental abductions**
- **Missing children in migration**
- **Criminal abductions**
- **Lost, injured or otherwise missing**

The types of missing children cases reported to hotlines have stayed relatively consistent in the last several years.

* Data from 19 hotlines

**Cross-border cases of missing children**

- **National**
- **Cross-border**

In 2017, 16% of the cases reported to the 116 000 hotlines were cross-border in nature. Most cases of parental abductions and children in migration who go missing are cross-border with 55% and 47% of cases being reported as cross-border, respectively.

Hotlines mainly cooperated with each other on cases related to parental abductions.

This figure shows the variety of services provided by hotlines to a range of stakeholders. The most common support was provided to parents/legal guardians and children. The main services provided to parents/legal guardians were emotional support, assistance in contacting authorities, family support, prevention and updates related to the disappearance. The most common services provided to children were emotional support, referrals, prevention of disappearance campaigns and assistance in contacting authorities. The most common services provided to law enforcement were training and information campaigns. Efforts relating to prevention of running away as well as other types of disappearance and child sexual exploitation are undertaken by organisations running hotlines at schools and by training teachers and students.
“2.5 years after my daughter’s disappearance, whenever she searches for her name on the internet, she still finds websites where she is mentioned. My daughter is concerned because the profession that she chose requires a certain amount of visibility, but she feels that the information about her disappearance exposes her in a negative way”

Mother of girl who went missing at 16

Publicity appeals

A commonly used practice in the search for missing children is the use of publicity appeals. A publicity appeal uses communication channels such as posters, social media, websites etc. with information about a missing child aimed at the public in order to get information on the whereabouts or other information that may help in finding the child.

Yet very little research has gone into the effectiveness and long term impact of these publicity appeals on children and families once the child is found. Missing Children Europe published a scoping research on the topic, showing that while publicity appeals can encourage runaway children to come home, these types of appeals can also have long term negative impacts. When these appeals are not taken down completely, children could become stigmatised at school or in their communities and these appeals could affect their future relationships and careers. Read the full “Once Missing Never Forgotten” report on the website.

Child alerts

In extremely worrying missing children cases, where the life of the child is at immediate risk, national child alert systems are deployed. Sometimes referred to as Amber Alerts, they make use of various channels including billboards and text messages to spread the word of the disappearance to as many people as possible in the shortest time. Child alerts exist in at least 13 countries in Europe according to responding hotlines.

The UK (8 times), Greece (10 times) and Romania (more than 10 times) are the most frequent users of child alerts while the majority of countries who responded (Belgium, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland) did not use child alerts at all in 2017. When asked about how the cooperation was improving in the best interest of the children with national missing children organisations and law enforcement, the majority of hotlines stated it is only adequate and 9% state that it is challenging. This is worth noting as the release of a child alert system is very complex for the police and they have a lot of concerns about using it and understanding which clues and leads to follow.

Calls made to hotlines by children versus adults

In 2017, the majority of the calls to hotlines came from adults while calls made by children fell by 6% compared to 2016. Regardless of who calls the hotline, hotline staff make every effort to ensure that the support they provide is always in the best interest of the children.

Challenges and funding of hotlines for missing children

Key challenges faced by hotlines (on average)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of financial resources</th>
<th>Service not known well enough by public</th>
<th>Lack of human resources</th>
<th>Little help from the government</th>
<th>Opposition from the government</th>
<th>Difficult cooperation with government agencies</th>
<th>Difficult cooperation with operators to set up hotline</th>
<th>Difficult cooperation with the police</th>
<th>Difficult cooperation with courts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</table>

* Data from 16 hotlines

The key challenges faced by hotlines have consistently been the lack of financial and human resources, lack of awareness of the service and lack of support from national governments.

Sources of funding for hotlines for missing children (on average)

- European Commission: 29%
- National government: 33%
- Statutory agencies: 3%
- Corporate/business donors: 6%
- Private donors: 22%
- Other: 8%

* Data from 16 hotlines

National governments provide the majority of funding to hotlines (33%) on average. While the European Commission still provided 13% of funding to hotlines in 2017, no further funding calls will be available to hotlines, making funding even more insecure for hotlines that depended on it to keep running. While the European Electronic Communications Code obliges Member States "to make every effort to ensure access to the 116 000 hotline for citizens", many national governments provide no or little financial support to hotlines.

In 2017, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the hotline number, Missing Children Europe urged national and European policy makers to continue supporting the network of hotlines through:

- Quality of services: Missing Children Europe ensures quality standards for its hotline service run by members. However, national authorities in charge of assigning the number to an organisation are not bound by these criteria. This oversight must be corrected so that high-quality services in line with the “same number – same service” objective is assured.
- Sustainability: Member States have an obligation to “ensure citizens have access to the 116 000 hotlines”. But over half of the hotlines reported that they did not have access to funding from their national authorities.
- Awareness: A Eurobarometer survey showed that three out of four people in the EU feel that their government does not provide enough information about the 116 hotlines. Lack of awareness means that children and families are unable to reach the support they need.
Runaways

Definition

All children who voluntarily run away or are pushed out of home or from the institution where they have been placed.¹

› In Belgium, 67% of runaways are girls.²
› In Belgium, 17% of children running away spent between a week to a month on the run while 8% spent between 1-6 months away from home.²

“It wasn’t nice in the institution. They were always yelling. I was always fighting with one of the girls in my group. So eventually I preferred going to Alex. I didn’t think about anything. Ok, I had to sleep with men but I didn’t feel any particular way about it because I was under the influence of drugs.”

Eva, 17 year old girl, living in an institution

Age range

Children running away or forced out of home or care institutions were between the ages of 5 and 17 years old, with the highest number of children reported running away at the age of 15.

Children found

59% of the runaways reported to hotlines in 2017 were found within the year, which shows a positive increase of 13% since 2016.

Children running away more than once

The percentage of children running away repeatedly has increased from 15% in 2016 to 16% in 2017. Children running away 3 times or more has decreased from 44% in 2016 to 40%, and the percentage of children running away 10 times or more has decreased to 0% though there have been cases of a single child running away over 40 times in 2017.

This indicates persisting problems at these children’s homes or care institutions. Research shows that the more a child runs away, the more vulnerable they are because they are forced to use riskier strategies to survive such as begging, stealing, being sexually exploited etc.

Runaways generally ran away from

In 2017, the percentage of children reported running away from their homes (56%) as well as foster homes (6%) remained the same as in 2016. The number of children running away from institutions dropped by 9% from the previous year. However more children contacted the hotlines because they had run away but did not want to share where they had run away from (Unknown is up to 30% from 21% in 2016).

Timelapse of runaway children who were found

Of the runaway children found, 61% were found within a week after their disappearance. Tragically, 20% of the children who ran away were not found alive as a result of suicide, or other reasons.

Children running away witnessed the majority (26%) of all runaways of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation among the cases reported.

Excerpt from “Green Park”, a poem from Ben Westwood’s book about his experiences as a runaway child

“In the end I went back to the Dellow, but this time not to eat. But to get a blanket, and sleep out on the street. I’d saw there were some doorways, where I might not get moved. Any sleep would do at all, there’s not much I can lose. So I stayed not far from Green Park, often moving place to place. And go into the local cafes, to go and wash my face. I’d go explore and walk around, all day in the West End, Or sometimes stand and talk with George, who was my newfound friend.”

Find the full poem here: http://benwestwooduk.blogspot.be

¹ Missing and Sexually Exploited Children in the Enlarged EU: Epidemiological Data in the New Member States (2005), as part of the Childoscope project run by Missing Children Europe
Definition

Children being taken away to or kept in a country other than that of his/her normal residence by one or more of his/her parents or persons having parental authority against another parent’s will or against the will of the person with parental authority.1

> On average, it has taken longer to settle a child abduction case in the EU (150 days), than in the rest of the world (141 days). This is approximately 5 months and much longer than the 6 week limit imposed by the Hague Child Abduction Convention.3
> When a child sees his/her abducting parent arrested, this will to a great extent influence his/her well-being negatively.4
> No matter the circumstances or where they end up living, children find it important to remain in contact with both their parents.6

“At the beginning, I couldn’t talk about all that without crying. But now, it’s just a memory. It was hard, but I became mature. I was very naive before. But now I don’t trust anyone. I pay attention and listen very carefully. When I look back at everything that happened, the things I had to prepare, the things I did… all by myself. Well, I must say that I was very strong.”

Olivia, abducted at 15 years old

Age range

Children abducted by a parent were between a week old and 17 years of age.

Cases closed

28% of cases involving children abducted by a parent dealt with by hotlines, were closed in 2017. While the location of the abducted child may be known, in many circumstances, complex and differing legal systems even within the EU make it hard to enforce the return of children when mandated.

64% of abducted children have no contact with the left behind parent during an abduction.7 Due to the length of court proceedings in these types of cases, it may not be in the best interest of children to be sent back to another country disrupting once again ties with family, school, friends, language and environment. All these factors make the resolution of parental abduction cases more complex.

7% of children abducted by a parent faced an element of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Data collected from the network of Cross-Border Family Mediators (CBFM)

The network of Cross-Border Family Mediators brings together 178 bi-cultural family mediators from 37 countries across the world specifically trained to deal with cross-border family conflicts including parental abduction. A study by the European Parliament found that family mediation brought about significant and measurable time and money savings in resolving cases of parental abductions.7

General figures

Mediators from the network who responded to the survey dealt with 184 cases related to family conflict including parental abductions. On average, mediators dealt with 4.6 cases each which is an increase from 2.5 in 2016.

81% of the cases handled by mediators from the network reached a full (49%) or partial (32%) agreement. Mediation is generally supported by Missing Children Europe as an effective way to prevent and resolve parental abductions as the process is completely voluntary and confidential.

Countries involved in cases handled by the CBFM network

23% of all mediated cases were undertaken between two EU Member States, a decrease of 18% compared to 2016. Another 35% involved an EU Member State and a non-EU country while 42% of all cases involved 2 non-EU countries.

Conflicts addressed by the CBFM network

<table>
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* Data from 40 mediators

5. Child abductions by parents: a high impact on children, yet little effort made to achieve reconciliation, 2010
7. Rebocting the mediation Directive: assessing the limited impact of its implementation and proposing measures to increase the number of mediations in the EU, 2014

How abducted children feel in court proceedings6

When children who had been abducted by a parent went to court in relation to the abduction, they felt a lack of clear communication and a limited understanding of the proceedings.

Children who didn’t have the opportunity to be heard in court, didn’t understand why they were not asked for their opinion. Even children who were heard complained about the lack of understanding about how their opinions would influence the decision.

Often children did not feel that their opinion was taken into account which also meant that an undesired outcome for the child led to feelings of desperation and anxiety.

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Missing children in migration

Definition
A child who migrated from the country of origin fleeing conflict or persecution, or in search of survival, security, improved standards of living, education, economic opportunities, protection from exploitation and abuse, family reunification or a combination of these or other factors, whose presence became known to authorities or caregivers of that country and whose whereabouts cannot be established.8

Case studies

618 unaccompanied children were reported missing in Belgium in 2017.9
Between 2014 - 2017 the equivalent of 60 classrooms of children from non-EU countries went missing in Sweden.10
In Spain, approximately 85% of all cases of missing children concerned foreign children, according to the Ministry of the Interior, in 2018.11
In Austria, 161 non-EU children between the ages of 0-14 and 491 children between 14-18 were reported missing in the Schengen Information System II, according to the Ministry of the Interior, in 2018.12

“I want to go home”
Tamim, arrived in Malta as an unaccompanied child

Age range
Children in migration have been reported missing from the age of under a year up to 17 years of age.

Ibrahim returns home

Ibrahim is a 14 year old boy from Afghanistan who had fled unaccompanied to Germany and had been living with foster parents in Cologne for nearly two years. In May, 2017, he left to meet up with friends, but never returned home.

His foster parents were both surprised and worried as Ibrahim had built a life in the city, attending school and making close friends. After contacting the police, his foster mother was able to access his phone records which suggested that he had gone to Belgium. She made contact with authorities in the city of Antwerp who immediately advised her to contact Child Focus (the Belgian member of Missing Children Europe).

Child Focus started a four-way collaboration with the mother, the missing children’s hotline in Germany and the German police. Through coordination and cooperation, Child Focus shared a picture and description of the boy on social media (Facebook and Twitter) and on their website to ask the public for leads. A day later, they were contacted by an employee of a centre for unaccompanied migrant children in Wallonia, Belgium, who had recognised the boy as someone staying in their centre.

Child Focus spoke with the boy and, whatever his initial reasons for wanting to leave home, he was more than happy to be put back in contact with his foster family. He was eventually helped to return home to Cologne. The quick and strong cross-border collaboration between hotlines ensured that the family and Ibrahim were quickly reunited before Ibrahim disappeared completely.

In 46% of the cases solved, children were found within a week of their disappearance. One child was found deceased. Very high concerns remain for the large majority of these children, whose current situation and location remains unknown, especially in those cases when the child is at risk of being (re-) trafficked or falling victim to exploitation and abuse.

Cases closed
261 missing children in migration were reported to hotlines, but often very few of the children who go missing in the context of migration are reported to hotlines or authorities. 95% of the children in migration reported missing were unaccompanied, however reports from the field show that even children who are accompanied by an adult responsible for their care face very similar challenges and risks. 27% of the cases of missing children in migration who were reported missing were solved in 2017, compared to 30% in 2016.

Due to the lack of coordination among stakeholders in charge of the protection of these children and the confusion regarding roles and responsibilities, nationally and across Europe when the missing case is transnational, the whereabouts of thousands of children remain unknown.

Time lapse of missing children in migration who were found

In 46% of the cases solved, children were found within a week of their disappearance. One child was found deceased. Very high concerns remain for the large majority of these children, whose current situation and location remains unknown, especially in those cases when the child is at risk of being (re-) trafficked or falling victim to exploitation and abuse.

8. Missing Children Europe
11. FRA, Periodic data collection on the migration situation in the EU, February 2018
12. FRA, Periodic data collection on the migration situation in the EU, March 2018

**Miniila app**
Smart technology to help young newcomers find their way to safety

In 2015, Europeans were shocked and saddened to hear that more than 10,000 unaccompanied children had gone missing in Europe. Thousands more have continued to go missing since. While support services exist, children are generally not aware of them or are unsure of who to trust.

Children attempting to find safety in Europe have repeatedly stated that they lack access to food, shelter, medical assistance and other critical information about their rights. However, many children in migration have a smartphone to navigate and speak with family back home. Missing Children Europe saw the opportunity of leveraging this crucial bit of technology to give children access to information on their rights and the support services available wherever they are in Europe. The Miniila app, developed in cooperation with children and launched in April 2018, will empower children (especially those unaccompanied) to make informed decisions and be better protected, rather than be forced to trust those who profit from their vulnerability.

The Miniila app features real-time and regionally specific information, allowing children to find out more about services available near them on a map in their own language. It guides them towards trustworthy people who can help provide shelter, food, health services, legal assistance, guardianship and more.

Read more on www.miniila.com
**Criminal abductions**

**Definition**

Abduction of a child by anyone other than the parents or persons with parental authority.1

- The total number of abductions in the EU rose from 12,463 in 2009 to 14,886 in 2015 – a 19.5% increase.13

- Police recorded non-parental child abduction in the UK has doubled in 4 years.14

**Age range**

Children abducted by a stranger who were reported to hotlines were as young as 1 and as old as 17 with a peak age of 7. However, consistent with figures from 2016, less than 1% of cases reported to hotlines involved a criminal abduction.

17% of children abducted by a third party were found in 2017, an alarming decrease of 16% from 2016. Investigations to find children are conducted by law enforcement.

Only 2 children who were abducted were found within a month though 1 child was found deceased. Research shows that these types of missing cases have the highest likelihood of children not being found alive. While criminal abductions happen very rarely in Europe, the first 3 hours after the disappearance are crucial to finding the child alive. This is why Child or Amber Alerts have been established in many countries in Europe.

**Lost, injured or otherwise missing**

**Definition**

Disappearances for no apparent reason of children who may have gotten lost or hurt themselves and cannot be found immediately or whose reason for disappearing has not yet been determined.1

- 1,703 children were lost at the Belgian coast in 2016. In 2017, this number decreased to 866 children – the lowest in 10 years.15

- One in six British parents have lost their child on holiday. The average time lost was 4 minutes and the most common location for children to wander off is at the swimming pool.16

Most of the children found in this category are found within a week (57%) which also corresponds with children getting lost and being found shortly after. Sadly, 7 children were not found alive. This is another missing category that is at high risk in terms of the ratio of deaths per child going missing.

**Age range**

Children were lost, injured or otherwise missing from the age of 1.5 months to 17 years. 14 was the most common age for this category of missing children.

70% of the children reported in this category were found which corresponds to the temporary nature of many of these types of disappearances of children getting lost.

**Timelapse of criminally abducted children who were found**

- Found alive
- Found deceased

* Data from 2 hotlines

**Timelapse of lost, injured or otherwise missing children who were found**

- Found alive
- Found deceased

* Data from 7 hotlines

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“Living in the US has not stopped me raising awareness for my son. I support families in similar situations. I help highlight cases that have not had much publicity for a while. I’m just a mum trying to turn this nightmare into something meaningful.”

Valerie, mother of Damien who went missing 22 years ago

“I used to think the worst thing that could happen to anyone was their child dying. After a decade since Andrew went missing, I realise that not knowing if your child is alive or dead is far worse.”

Kevin Gosden, Father of a missing boy

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**Hotlines for missing children**

### Hotlines run by members
- Albania: ALO 116
- Austria: 147 Rat auf Draht
- Belgium: Child Focus
- Bulgaria: Nadja Centre Foundation
- Croatia: Centar za Nestalu
- Cyprus: Consortium: SPAVO & HFC
- Czech Republic: Ztracene Dite
- Denmark: Thora Center
- Estonia: Estonian Advice Center
- France: CFPE enfants disparus (116 000 enfants disparus)
- Greece: The Smile of the Child
- Hungary: Kék Vonal
- Ireland: ISPCC
- Italy: Telefono Azzurro
- Lithuania: Missing Persons’ Families Support Centre
- The Netherlands: The International Child Abduction Centre
- Poland: ITAKA
- Portugal: Instituto de Apoio à Criança
- Serbia: ASTRA
- Slovakia: Linka detskéj istoty
- Spain: Fundación ANAR
- Switzerland: Missing Children Switzerland
- United Kingdom: Missing People
- Ukraine: NGO Magnolia

### Hotlines run by non-members
- Germany: Vermisste Kinder
- Luxembourg: L’Office National de l’Enfance
- Latvia: Law enforcement
- Slovenia: Zavod 116
- Sweden: SOS Alarm
- Malta: Law enforcement
- Romania: Asociatia Telefonul Copilului
- Finland: Nödcentralsverket

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**Get involved and keep in touch**

**Make a donation**

Donate to a good cause:
- IBAN: BE41 3630 2576 0210
- BIC: BBRUBEBB

Donations over 40 euros made by residents in Belgium, France and Luxembourg are eligible to receive a tax exemption certificate.

**Join the Notfound campaign**

Download the free notfound app on your website and give missing children another chance to be found. Go to notfound.org to help families find their loved ones.

**Participate in a fundraising event**

Run, golf or play bridge at one of our fundraising events this year. Register via the website.

**Partner with us**

Sponsor a project or become a partner at one of our fundraising events to help create a safer Europe for children. Find out how on our website.

**Support the Miniila app**

Do you work for an organisation that provides support to young newcomers in Europe? If so, add your services to the Miniila app, to help children in migration find their way to safety. More information on Miniila.com.

**Fundraise on facebook**

You can now donate or create a fundraiser directly through our facebook page.

**Fundraise in fun ways**

Do something fun, get your friends involved and fundraise for us via missingchildreneurope.givengain.org

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**Special thanks to our supporters**

We would like to especially thank our partners and sponsors. You support is invaluable to us.

The full list of sponsors and donors can be found on our website.

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