Who we are

Missing Children Europe is a European umbrella organisation representing 29 national grassroots NGOs in 24 countries in Europe that works towards the well-being of missing and sexually exploited children.

We provide the link between research, policies and organisations on the ground to protect children from any kind of violence, abuse or neglect that is caused by or results from them going missing.

Over 900 of the cases dealt with by missing children hotlines in 2015 were cross-border in nature. Our cross-border projects and efforts ensure missing children and their families get the support they need anywhere in Europe.

Children go missing for many different reasons including situations of violence and abuse. A worrying number of children also go missing after arriving unaccompanied in the EU due to situations of war, abuse or poverty back home. Our vision is to create a safer Europe for children where all measures are taken to empower and protect them from any situation of harm.

209 841 calls related to missing children were handled by the network of hotlines for missing children in 2015

9 532 requests were received through other communication channels including text message and email by the network of hotlines for missing children in 2015

Children go missing everywhere, every day and for many reasons. When missing, measures of protection to which the child is entitled simply stop. For each of these situations, a targeted response is needed that takes into account the specific context leading to the disappearance, as well as the risks faced by the child when missing. In 2015, 54% of the cases dealt with by hotlines for missing children concerned children who ran away, mainly following violence, conflict or abuse either at home or in the care institution in which they were placed. Up to 20% of these children ran away more than once, finding themselves very vulnerable to harm as they relied on increasingly risky strategies to survive while alone and on the run. Another 29% of the missing children reported to hotlines concerned children who were abducted by a parent following a heightened family conflict. 48.5% of these children were abducted to another country, often cutting ties with the left behind parent, and leaving a lasting impact on the well-being of the child.

2015 also saw increased challenges for unaccompanied children arriving in the EU, with staggering reports on their disappearances. While every child should be treated as a child first and foremost – irrespective of his or her origin or asylum status – these vulnerable children still receive a lower level of support when reported missing, and are at risk of being exploited by traffickers for sexual or labour purposes. Missing Children Europe is determined to change that and works closely with stakeholders from across Europe to give these children a better chance.

Whatever the cause of a disappearance, it is clear that the problem of missing children can only be tackled effectively if we all work together to provide protection: policy makers, NGOs; hotlines for missing children, family mediators, law enforcement, guardianship services, care centres – over and beyond national borders. This is where Missing Children Europe can make a difference, bringing actors together to provide safety and prevent harm, one child at a time.

Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and President of Missing Children Europe

Team

Delphine Moralis, Secretary General, Belgian
Hilde Demers, Project Officer, focal point parental abductions, Belgian
Federica Toscano, Project Officer, focal point missing unaccompanied migrant children, Italian
Matia Drivsholm, Project Officer, focal point runaways, Danish
Gail Rago, Communication Officer, Indian
Rebecca Granshaw, Fundraising Officer, British
Hélène Decloux, Finance and Human Resources Officer, Belgian
Nathalie Suvée, Office Manager, Belgian
Kalim Ullah, Finance Assistant, Pakistani
Francis Herbert, Legal Counsel (Volunteer), Belgian
Férida Kaddour, Supporting Committee Coordinator (Volunteer), French
Margo Burns, Project Assistant (Volunteer), Polish
Sergio Campo, IT Support (Volunteer), Spanish
Missing Children Europe’s member organisations provide direct support and prevention services to children who go missing and their families. Three additional organisations applied for membership in 2015.

Members

1. Austria 147 Rat auf Draht
2. Belgium Child Focus
3. Bulgaria Nadja Centre Foundation
4. Croatia Centar za Nestalu
5. Cyprus Consortium: SPAVO & HFC
6. Czech Republic Cesta z krize, z. o.
7. Denmark Thora Center
8. Estonia Estonian Advice Center
9. France APEV, La Mouette, Centre Français de Protection de l’Enfance
10. Germany Wesser Ring
11. Greece The Smile of the Child
12. Hungary Kék Vonal
14. Italy Telefono Azzurro
15. Lithuania Missing Persons’ Families Support Centre
16. The Netherlands The International Child Abduction Centre
17. Portugal Instituto de Apoio a Criança
18. Poland Fundacja ITAKA
19. Romania SalvatiCopii, Focus Romania
20. Serbia ASTRA – Anti trafficking action
21. Spain Ayuda a Niños y Adolescentes en Riesgo, Protegeles
22. Slovakia Linka detskej istoty, n. o.
23. Switzerland Missing Children Switzerland, Fondation Suisse du Service Social International
24. United Kingdom Missing People

Applicant members
25. Albania ALO 116 – Albanian National Child Helpline
26. Finland NGO Lasten perusoikeudet
27. Portugal Associação Portuguesa de Crianças Desaparecidas

95% of members surveyed consider our projects very or highly relevant to the real and current needs of missing children and their families on the ground

90% of members surveyed think our work responds very or extremely well to the needs of their organisation

100% said we were highly or extremely relevant at staying ahead of issues, challenges and projects relating to missing children trends

“In 2015 we went through the process of having our hotline service for missing children accredited by Missing Children Europe. It was a very valuable experience to ensure we are delivering a high standard of support to children and their families.

Being part of Missing Children Europe’s 116 000 hotline network adds great value to the work that we do – from being able to increase the reach of our appeals for missing children, to being able to consult colleagues on issues they have more experience in. In what is a particularly challenging climate in terms of the movement of children across Europe, the work Missing Children Europe does keeps us all grounded in working towards making sure children are safe.”

Paul Joseph. Operations Manager, Missing People, UK
Children we found

A chase across borders

Father Daniele and mother Anna welcomed baby Luca into their lives in the city of Milan, Italy in March 2015. Things had not been easy for them in recent times and Daniele had suffered from mental health issues. They were no longer together as a couple, but they were both keen for Daniele to play an active role in the baby’s life.

Daniele seemed to be coping well with the new arrival and had been helping out in different ways, spending time with mother and baby and doing jobs to support Anna. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary when he drove the three of them to the supermarket one day and waited in the car with Luca while Anna went to buy some things.

When Anna first came out the supermarket and couldn’t find them she initially blamed her memory. How could she forget where she’d left the car? Then she thought Daniele must have had to move the car for some reason or run another errand. But the panic quickly rose up inside her. Her baby was gone.

Unable to reach Daniele by phone, Anna turned to her sister Marta who came to pick her up from the supermarket and tried to help her think clearly through her panic. They did not believe that Daniele would deliberately harm Luca, but were worried that his fragile mental state would put the baby in danger. They also knew that Daniele had none of the basic supplies he needed to take care of Luca, who had only ever been breast-fed.

They found out about the Italian hotline for missing children and called to report their case. Alessia, a trained call manager immediately initiated standard procedures for ‘worrying disappearances’ of children and contacted the local police station. They were able to track Daniele’s car by GPS and found the surprising news that he had already left the country and was now in France.

Thankfully, Missing Children Europe has established clear cross-border cooperation procedures for cases such as Luca’s. The Italian hotline immediately contacted its French counterpart, who liaised with French police to continue the investigation, forming a relay of information which ensured that Anna and Marta were kept regularly up to date.

The tracking of Daniele’s movements showed him heading quickly across southern France and into Spain. The cross-border procedures were designed to cope with this rapidly evolving case. The French and Italian hotlines contacted the Spanish missing children hotline for immediate follow up. Although complex, the hotlines were able to coordinate between themselves and with the authorities in the three countries.

The tracking efforts continued to keep pace with Daniele’s movements and when his car was spotted through CCTV footage at a petrol station in Valencia, the local police were able to move quickly. They found baby Luca hungry and tired, but safe. Further quick cooperation between the authorities and hotlines in each country helped reunite Luca with his desperate mother.

Anna’s relief at having her baby back was tremendous. She was also grateful for the support she received during the process to find him and the feeling that people were out there actively working to get Luca back. “Thank you for your work and your emotional support in finding Luca,” she said. “The collaboration between all the services was essential, and I will be forever grateful.”

For more information on Missing Children Europe’s work on parental abductions, read about our Cross-Border Family Mediators’ network on our website.
**A long way from home**

Audra is a bright 16-year-old girl from Lithuania who has often dreamt of escaping what she saw as her ‘ordinary life’ and travelling the world. She imagined the people she would meet and the opportunities she might encounter for a more exciting life.

When she made a friend online who subsequently offered to buy her tickets to travel to Spain, it seemed like the opportunity of a lifetime. Audra mentioned to her parents about a trip to Spain with friends, but they thought it was just an idea. Audra was worried they would say no so she kept things vague and made arrangements directly with her ‘friend’.

When Audra didn’t come home from school one Friday afternoon, her mother Vyta immediately suspected what had happened. Knowing nothing about the ‘friends’ Audra might be with, she feared the worst and called the Lithuanian hotline for missing children. Thankfully, the Lithuanian hotline is part of a dedicated European network with procedures in place to follow up on missing children wherever they go or are taken in 29 countries across the continent. A case manager at the Lithuanian Hotline, Diana, quickly got in touch with a Spanish counterpart to coordinate efforts to find Audra.

Vyta received a text and some photos from Audra, which seemed like good news. But Audra would not say where she was or who she was with and the contact soon stopped. When Vyta called, it was only ever the ‘friends’ that answered the phone; there was always a reason why Audra could not speak to her mother.

For Audra, things were changing very quickly. She was now unable to leave the apartment where she was being kept. She no longer had access to her phone and the people she thought were her friends were making increasingly unpleasant threats. They told her she was to be sold to human traffickers.

Behind the scenes, Diana had already forwarded the photos Audra sent to the case worker in Spain. The Spanish police were able to trace a car that seemed to belong to one of the people Audra was with. It was now a race against the clock to find Audra before she was moved or sold.

Thankfully, information on the car led the Spanish police to an address. When they carried out a raid, they found Audra inside and were able to arrest her kidnappers. After a short stay in a police-protection centre, Audra was on her way home, more than glad to go back to her ‘ordinary’ life. The cooperation procedures established by Missing Children Europe were fundamental in enabling the coordinated response between law enforcement authorities in two far apart European countries that led to Audra’s rescue.

Not only did the Lithuanian and Spanish hotlines enable this coordination, they also ensured that Audra’s parents were supported and informed throughout the process. Even after her safe return, they continued to provide Audra and her family with counselling and aftercare to ensure Audra recovered from her traumatic experience.

For more information on Missing Children Europe’s network of hotlines for missing children, visit our website.

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**Photobooth**


2. A Cross-Border Family Mediators’ training session that inducted 17 new bi-cultural family mediators including the network’s first members from Brazil and Singapore.

3. This year the Running for Missing Children Europe fundraising event brought together 210 runners in Brussels to raise awareness and funds.

“2015 has experienced an unprecedented challenge with the number of unaccompanied children arriving on EU shores. Thousands of these children go missing once in Europe and face continued abuse, violence and exploitation. As a European network of national grassroots organisations, Missing Children Europe plays a key role in bringing these children to safety and offering them the future every child deserves. As a member of the Patrons’ Council, I remain determined to support these vulnerable children find their best chance at a safe, happy life.”

Her Excellency Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta and member of Missing Children Europe’s Patrons’ Council

*Personal details of persons in the stories have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.*
European hotlines for missing children

A child is reported missing every 2 minutes in Europe. Our network of missing children hotlines is operated by local grassroots organisations in 29 countries in Europe. Children and families calling the 116 000 European hotline for missing children receive free and immediate emotional, psychological, social, legal and administrative support 24/7.

Our activities in 2015 focused on better and more consistent collection of data on missing children via our customised CRM system and the development of an accreditation process to make sure victims of child disappearances receive the same quality of support across Europe. The accreditation mechanism inspects all aspects of the hotline service from giving a caller the best advice for their situation to ensuring hotline staff are highly trained to deal with all possible types of scenarios.

Network of Cross-Border Family Mediators

In the EU, 120 000 international couples file for divorce every year. Financial hardship, acrimonious court battles and on-going conflict over custody arrangements can have a lasting effect on the well-being of any children involved. A 2013 study by the European Parliament agreed that family mediation brought about significant and measurable time and money savings in cases of parental abductions.

Our network of Cross-Border Family Mediators consists of 142 trained bi-cultural mediators who specialise in supporting parents find an agreeable solution in cases of international family conflicts. Mediation can be very successful with two thirds of cases handled by the network having reached a full or partial agreement in 2015.

Disappearance of unaccompanied children

According to Europol, at least 10 000 refugee children are unaccounted for after arriving in Europe with many feared to be exploited and abused for sexual or labour purposes. The SUMMIT project aims at Safeguarding Unaccompanied Migrant Minors from going Missing by Identifying Best Practices and Training Actors on Interagency Cooperation (SUMMIT).

In 2015, SUMMIT has helped develop guidance for improving interagency cooperation and has promoted successful attitudes and ways to prevent and respond to the disappearance of unaccompanied children through training and a handbook of good practice.

Public appeals

Public appeals were used in 71% of missing children cases in 2015 via channels such as websites and social media. The notfound.org app, for example, is a public appeals tool that replaces a website's useless ‘404 page not found’ error messages with posters of missing children. By doing so, thousands of website error pages help share information about geographically relevant missing children cases which increase the chances of finding them.

However, in extremely worrying missing children cases where the life of the child is at immediate risk, national child alert systems are additionally deployed. These national child alerts make use of varying channels including billboards and text messages to spread the word of the disappearance to as many people as possible in the shortest time. In 2015, national child alerts were used 15 times by 7 countries.

The Google child alert was designed to support national child alert systems. It alerts Google users about worrying cases via Google’s platforms. The Google child alert is currently operational in the USA and efforts are being made to launch it in Europe.

Child sexual abuse and exploitation

The European Financial Coalition against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online (EFC) brings together key actors from law enforcement, business and NGOs in Europe with the common goal of fighting the online sexual exploitation of children for profit. EFC members join forces to take action on the payment, information and communication technology systems that are used to run these illegal operations. Missing Children Europe coordinated the EFC’s activities until October 2015 after which the project was successfully handed over and embedded into the structure of Europol.

Missing Children Europe also promotes better European legislation to protect the rights of children. The "Together against Sexual Exploitation of children" project assessed the manner in which the EU Directive on the Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children, a legal instrument in effect for the protection of children, is being transposed into national law by 27 EU Member States.

Capacity building

As an umbrella organisation, Missing Children Europe strives to support our member organisations to deliver the best and most relevant support to children and families. We do this through research, training, access to funding avenues and raising the issue of child disappearances with EU policy makers.

In 2015, we convinced EU governments to extend funding to the network of missing children hotlines for another year. We also organised bi-monthly webinars to share best practice on topics relating to missing children, finding and applying to funding sources and coordinated awareness efforts for International Missing Children’s Day. In addition, we sent member specific newsletters to keep organisations informed about relevant developments in the sector and the efforts of other members.
Our impact in 2015

1. Developing cross-border solutions

- Grew the network of Cross-Border Family Mediators to include 142 trained bi-cultural mediators
- Developed an accreditation mechanism to ensure consistent quality services are provided by missing children hotlines consisting of 69 criteria which are being used by 21 hotlines
- Represented the rights of missing children at high level conferences and events including the European Parliament conference on missing people, Interpol Specialist Group, the Conference of the Anti-Bullying Network and more
- Co-chaired the Child Rights Action Group, coordinating the exchange and cooperation between 14 child rights organisations to increase influence on policy making
- Trained 30 law enforcement agents through the European Financial Coalition project to deal with child sexual exploitation online
- Brought together national child alert coordinators from 14 countries to foster cooperation to quickly find vulnerable missing children

2. Supporting research and evidence

- Brought together 81 international academics, NGOs, law enforcement officials, decision makers and government officials to share research and findings at the International Academic Conference on Missing Children and Adults
- Compiled annual European data and statistics on missing children to understand and respond to missing children trends
- Launched an online research, publications and best practices hub on the topic of missing children
- Interviewed 58 law enforcement officials, carers, reception centre operators, guardians and hotlines for missing children in Italy, Cyprus, Greece, Spain, UK, Ireland and Belgium on the prevention, response and after care of missing unaccompanied migrant children
- Launched a report that examines the transposition of Directive 2011/93/EU on combating sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography by 27 EU Member States
- Published a best practice guide for the financial industry on the prevention and detection of commercial child sexual exploitation material as well as a report on the implications for web hosting companies of using image recognition technology to detect known child abuse material uploaded by users to their network

3. Raising awareness and prevention

- Showcased our “Missing Children: Out of Focus” exhibition based on 3 real stories of missing children at the European Parliament and at the offices of Allen and Overy, Covington and Mundo J
- Launched an awareness raising video about why children go missing and how Missing Children Europe can help prevent, support and protect these children
- Encouraged 100 000 people to save the 116 000 number in their phones via a crowd amplifying campaign
- Broadcasted 2 powerful radio adverts to raise awareness of the 116 000 missing children hotline number on Belgian radio
- Press mentions in Europe in 15 media outlets from the BBC to Al Jazeera
- Reached 1.09M impressions and 26.7K engagements with Twitter campaigns and 5 623 video views via a YouTube campaign

4. Promoting policies and laws

- Organised a round table event at the European Parliament to engage with European leaders on polices to tackle the issue of missing children
- Published a memorandum to European leaders detailing recommendations on how to tackle the different categories and issues facing missing children
- Brought together 37 law enforcement officials, NGOs and legal workers at a workshop to present a report on how EU countries were transposing Directive 2011/93/EU on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children
- Organised a conference at the European Parliament that highlighted the persistence of commercial sexual exploitation of children online and the emergence of new threats, to 70 delegates from law enforcement agencies, the private sector, NGOs, traditional and alternative online payment providers and policy makers
- Collaborated with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and the European Asylum Support Office to develop better responses to missing unaccompanied migrant children
- Actively contributed to the work of the European Parliament Intergroup on Children’s rights, as well as to the Lanzarote Committee with the Council of Europe
- Brought evidence on the problem of missing unaccompanied children on the occasion of a European Parliament Hearing
Get involved & keep in touch

Make a donation
Help us to continue protecting missing children:
BAN: BE41 3630 2576 0210
BIC: BBRUBEBB
Donations over 40 euros are eligible for a tax credit in Belgium, France and Luxembourg.

Join the Not-found campaign
Download the notfound app on your website and give missing children another chance to be found. Go to notfound.org to find out more.

Participate in a fundraising event
Run, play golf or play bridge at one of our fundraising events this year. Register through our website.

Partner with us
Sponsor a project to find children or become a partner for a fundraising event. Find out how on our website.

Volunteer to do good
Have skills and time to dedicate to the cause? Get in touch at supporting.committee@missingchildreneurope.eu

Fundraise in fun ways
Fundraise for us: Cycle, swim, sell cookies, donate your birthday money etc. via missingchildreneurope.givengain.org

Find us at
Rue de l’Industrie 10,
1000, Brussels, Belgium

Call us on
+32 2 894 74 84

Write to us at
info@missingchildreneurope.eu

Sign up to our newsletter and read about our activities on the news page of our website:
www.missingchildreneurope.eu

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Connect with us on our LinkedIn company page

Watch our videos on our YouTube channel

Annual expenditure by activity in 2015

Board members
Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, President of Missing Children Europe
Heidi De Pauw, Vice President of Missing Children Europe, Belgium
Alexandra Simões, Portugal
Coskun Çörüz, The International Child Abduction Centre, The Netherlands
Ernesto Caffo, Telefono Azzurro, Italy
Piji Protapsidis, The Smile of the Child, Greece
Sheila Donovan, Ayuda a Niños y Adolescentes en Riesgo, Spain

Total annual expenditure for 2015 came up to 759 694 euros.

Special thanks to our supporters
The full list of sponsors and donors can be found on our website.

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