



**Missing
Children
Europe**

Child alerts for missing children: A need for balance, coordination and integration



Endangered missing children for which a child alert system can be of use constitute an average **1 to 2% of the total cases of missing children**. While child alert systems can be of use in those 1 to 2%, the overall problem of missing children - of which an average 60% concern children running away from situations of conflict, abuse, violence and neglect - requires a much **more comprehensive approach, including measures aimed at prevention and empowerment**.¹

Child alert tools have proven their value in a number of Member States. They however need to be **integrated in a wider set of complementary tools** including hotlines for missing children, trained law enforcement services, mediation services, social services and child protection services. Child alert systems can furthermore only function efficiently and legitimately where national agencies

¹ For further breakdown of data and epidemiological references, see data collected by Missing Children Europe from 116 000 hotlines in 2013 at <http://missingchildreneurope.eu/Portals/0/Docs/Missing%20Children%20Europe%20Annual%20Report%202013.pdf> as well as the "EC Study on missing children: Mapping, data collection and statistics on missing children in the European Union," 2013 at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/missing_children_study_2013_en.pdf



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mandated to deal with missing children work on the basis of clear operational procedures including the necessary **assessment of the child's best interest**.

Where images of missing children are disseminated, it should be done with the **consent of the parents or legal representative**, and taking into account the need to balance the risks faced by the child with his or her **right to privacy**. In case of **cross border alerts, clear procedures** should be in place that allow to manage and control both the information shared with the public, as well the testimonies on sightings regarding the missing child received from the public. While using an efficient technology to disseminate information with the general public on missing children is valuable, **the use of a powerful technology can be harmful if preconditions for 1) an effective best interest determination in each individual case and 2) the efficient management of the information, are not met**.

Missing Children Europe is therefore concerned with any approach which:


- Implicitly **reduces** the understanding of the broader issue of 'missing children' to the smallest category of missing children,
- Provides a purely **reactive** instead of global comprehensive approach to missing children,
- Does not take the **full set of rights of each individual missing child** - including the child's right to privacy- into account when assessing the need to disseminate a child's picture,
- Promotes the use of specific technologies and platforms of dissemination of images above the need of **clear national and cross border child alert procedures** able to take the aforementioned concerns into account.

Missing Children Europe promotes the development of effective child protection systems that prevent, protect and support children from any kind of violence, abuse or neglect that is caused by or results from them going missing. Our 30 member organisations from 24 European countries provide day to day support to families and children confronted with the disappearance of a child. Hotlines for missing children active in 29 European countries and coordinated by Missing Children Europe responded to 268,309 calls in 2014.



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