



**Missing
Children
Europe**

Maria, a symbol of children slipping through the net of child protection systems in Europe.

Over 250,000 children are reported missing in Europe every year, 1 every 2 minutes. While 2-5% of these cases are those of criminal abduction that are given enormous media attention, over 90% of missing children are still under the radar. This percentage represents children running away from situations of conflict, abuse and neglect, parental abductions and unaccompanied migrant minors.

Of the 50-60% of child runaways reported by the 116000 European missing children hotline network, 1 in 6 are assumed to rough sleep, 1 in 8 resort to stealing or begging to survive and 1 in 4 children are at serious risk. Runaways often fall into [situations of sexual abuse, alcohol abuse and drug abuse](#) leading to depression. They are also 9 times likelier to have suicidal tendencies.

60% of the unaccompanied minors (UAM) accommodated in UK social care centres go missing and are never found, according the British Asylum Screening Unit. They end up in the hands of traffickers within 24 hours of arrival in the UK. Similar trends related to the disappearance of UAM are seen across other countries in Europe. Threats faced by UAM according to [Frontex research](#) include sexual exploitation in terms of pornography and prostitution; economic exploitation including forced donation of organs; criminal exploitation including drug smuggling and child trafficking including forced marriage and begging.

"It is clear that the problem of missing children is linked to other phenomena including violence, abuse, neglect as well as trafficking and illegal migration. In order to tackle the causes, effects and risks of child disappearances, a coordinated take on effective child protection systems is needed, focusing on improving services, research, prevention and laws." said Delphine Moralis, Secretary General of Missing Children Europe.

"[MCE's new strategy for 2014-17](#) will address all categories of missing children, especially those who are usually pushed to the background but we will need systematic cooperation between all agents of child protection. I am confident however that with the right understanding, awareness and coordination, we will be able to create a safer Europe for children", said Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, President of MCE and former Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Maria is currently in the care of MCE's Greek member "The Smile of The Child". While her mother has been identified, she remains a telltale sign of an urgent need for a more effective and better coordinated child protection system in Europe, including a clear focus on prevention, support and protection of missing children and their families.



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Missing Children Europe is the European Federation for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children, which represents 27 non-governmental organisations from 21 EU Member States and Switzerland. These grassroots organisations are active at the national and local levels to prevent and support victims in cases of the disappearance and sexual exploitation of children. MCE new strategy for 2014-17 focus on the development of effective and embedded child protection.

This will be done through an emphasis on high quality services provided by our members; promoting and facilitating research about why children go missing, what happens when they do, and how their needs are best addressed; raising awareness on the issues to all parties involved with child protection and influencing European policies and laws to protect and serve the best interest of the child.



Missing Children Europe is supported by the Daphne Programme of the European Union.

The Smile of the Child

The Smile of The Child is a Greek NGO that works with defending the rights of children. They are the Greek member of Missing Children Europe. They were founded in January 1996 to respect the wishes of a 10 year old boy, Andreas Yannopoulos, a short while before he lost his battle against cancer. TSOTC helps and supports children in danger and need and protects children from all forms of exploitation and abuse.

Find out more through their website: <http://www.hamogelo.gr/>

For more information, please contact

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