



## Key Findings and Recommendations

# Child Helpline International Data Report on Runaways

## Key Findings

This report presents quantitative and qualitative data on runaways collected from our European child helpline members. There were a total of 11 child helplines that reported data to our RADAR (Running Away: Drivers, Awareness, and Responses) project survey, seven additional child helplines that reported no contacts related to runaways in 2019, and two child helplines that were unable to share data as a direct result of Covid-19. Based on the analysis from the data, the following key findings can be drawn to highlight four recurring issues that our child helplines experienced.



### Key finding 1

**Child helplines, alongside missing children hotlines, play a pivotal role for those children and young people who contact them at critical moments such as running away.**

Whilst we identify a portion of our European child helplines did not receive any contacts related to runaways or runaway behaviour, this does not imply that there are no children and young people from these countries who runaway or consider running away. In some cases, child helplines explain the limited contacts due to separate missing children hotlines existing in their countries. This illustrates how child helplines and hotlines work collaboratively.



### Key finding 2

The majority of children and young people who contacted a child helpline are currently living with or have run away from their parent or primary caregiver. Our data shows that **three out of four children and young people want to run away from something in their homes.** In the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic, this finding highlights a concern that children and young people who have runaway or are considering running away are potentially more at risk now more than ever before.



### Key finding 3

Violence is the recurring top underlying issue of children and young people who contacted child helplines because they have runaway or are considering run away. This means that **one out of two times a child or young person contacts a child helpline about running away, the root cause is related to violence.** Violence can take many forms, such as physical violence and neglect, which may relate to violence by parents.



### Key finding 4

Child helplines took further actions to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people who have run away. One out of four times that a child or young person contacted a child helpline about running away, a child helpline took further action on the case beyond listening and talking about the issue that they were concerned by. This shows that child helplines are **42.6% more likely to take actions on contacts related to runaways and runaway behaviour** than contacts related to other concerns. For this reason, child helplines are not only a direct contact but often act as a liaison between the child or young person and other organisations.

# Recommendations

Based on our key findings, the following recommendations can be drawn to improve the protection responses for runaway children.

## We recommend that child helplines and missing children hotlines:

- **Should (continue to) work collaboratively.** This should especially include the referral mechanisms (including Standard Operating Procedures) and case management, to provide support to children running away or considering running away. It is important to strengthen this collaboration to collect accurate data and share existing knowledge about runaway children.
- **Work jointly to create awareness, influence, and advocate** policymakers, governments, and other organisations working on these issues. From this, spaces should be created for capacity building, regarding runaway children and missing children, to create awareness and to encourage children and young people to contact a child helpline, and to report cases of missing children.



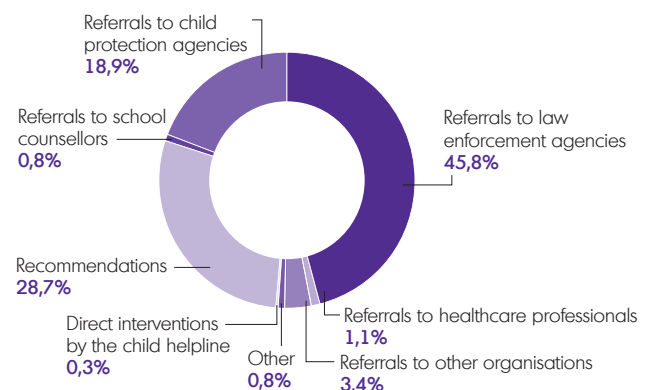
A 16-year-old boy phoned to the child helpline and admitted that his parents have alcohol addiction. Quite often, **“in this state, they first fight with each other and then start hurting me.”** **“My parents get drunk almost every day.”** In the evening, the father got drunk and “began to strangle” the boy. **“My mother, at that moment, was sitting at the table, drinking and did not react to the situation.”** As a result, the boy “pushed his father away and ran out of the house.” At the time of the call, he was on the street near the house, but was very afraid to return home and did not want to.

- With the support of their partners, such as social services (when possible respecting confidentiality), should establish a process to follow-up with contacts from children and young people that indicate concerns of violence, neglect, and any other type of abuse; **to provide guidance, to intervene and support on the consequences of running away before the child decides to run away.**
- Have guidelines in place on how to respond to runaways and runaway behaviour. They should identify which organisations are relevant to contact when making referrals for cases of runaways. These guidelines should be co-created with relevant external organisations and together with young people. In addition to this, these collaborative discussions strengthen existing relations and allow the inclusion of **new partners, such as organisations focused on violence against children.**

## We recommend that governments, policymakers, partner organisations, external organisations working with children and young people:

- **Create awareness campaigns on the potential number of children suffering due to the Covid-19 reality.** These campaigns and programmes should not only focus on running away but also supporting and highlighting children and young people that are facing violence and abuse. It could be useful to use evidence-based methods and narratives, such as excerpts from runaway cases, to support these campaigns.
- **Address the root causes and underlying issues leading to runaways and runaway behaviour,** as a consequence of a larger issue, such as Violence. Therefore, existing programmes, projects, and policies working on this problem must be strengthened using existing data to reinforce better measures to protect children and young people from violent contexts.
- **Facilitate and promote child and youth participation,** where possible, and with the support of child helplines and missing children hotlines. To ensure that children and young people’s voices and experiences are included and used to inform policy and practice on all levels.

## How did our child helplines respond?



A 15-year-old girl phoned the child helpline crying a lot because she was **“very scared”** and she **“does not know what to do and how to proceed.”** The counsellor calmed the girl down and asked her to share what had happened to her. Due to poor performance at school, the girl’s parents **“began to shout and call her very loudly.”** **Her mother “hit her in the face very painfully until she left.”** The girl could not stand it and ran away from home, and was **“at the station, where it was dark with many homeless people.”**

