



## Key Findings and Recommendations

# Missing Children Europe Data Report on Runaways

## Key findings and recommendations

RADAR (Running Away: Drivers, Awareness, and Responses) is a European project on running away coordinated by Missing Children Europe, launched in March 2020. The aim is to improve awareness, understanding, and responses for children (at risk of) running away and to provide them with better protection and care across the EU. The scope of this report is to improve our understanding of the underlying causes for running away. This report presents quantitative data on runaways collected from the network of 116000 hotlines as part of Missing Children Europe's annual data collection survey about the year 2019. A total of 23 hotlines across Europe (20 NGOs and 3 governmental agencies) participated in the survey.



### Key finding 1

Our RADAR data collection confirms that 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. While 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 hotline existing in their countries. This illustrates how child helplines and hotlines work collaboratively.

### Recommendations:

- Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, safer and easier avenues to connect children with hotlines (e.g., chat platforms) should be explored, and hotline awareness raising efforts should be improved for children quarantined in challenging situations.
- Considering the potential for a good return on investment in prevention calls, more research is needed on how hotlines can improve this prevention work.



### Key finding 2

The issues that lead to running away start early on, with the youngest runaways reported below the age of 10. Slightly more girls than boys are reported as runaways to the hotlines across Europe. Data disaggregated by country point to underreporting of runaways and give a mixed picture on gender, which could indicate that boys are particularly underreported.

### Recommendations:

- Prevention should start early on and focus on identification of early Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) for children and targeted support to reduce the risks associated.
- General awareness raising, as well as training of caregivers and law enforcement is needed to reduce the stigma around running away and to improve reporting rates, response times, as well as vigilance about potential underreporting of boys

### Key finding 3

The high incidence of multiple episodes of running away tells us that children are often returned to the same situation without additional measures of support, leaving the initial underlying problem unresolved. Repeat episodes last longer increasing the risks.

#### Recommendations:

- Protocols should be developed for timely preparation of the return home and statutory protocols should ensure individual follow-up, return home interviews and targeted support addressing the cause for running away, to mitigate the risk of a repeat episode.
- Investigation is needed into better support for and outreach to long term runaways

### Key finding 4

Young runaways experience high rates of violence and abuse compared to other categories of missing children, and this in the most important contexts of their lives: at home, in school, and in the care homes where they live.

#### Recommendations:

- Running away should first and foremost be seen as an indicator of one or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Against this backdrop, family interventions should be tailored to individual needs with the aim of reducing ACEs.
- Mandatory training for professionals working with children (educators, social workers, law enforcement, judicial staff, hot- and helplines) on links between running away and ACEs.
- Implement effective anti-bullying policies and contextual safeguarding in schools

Reasons for running away	N* Hotline responses
Problems at home	15
Problems at school	11
Problems at care homes	10
Mental health issues	9
To be with a partner	8
Drugs/Alcohol	6
Adventure	5
Peer pressure	4
Unknown	4
LGBTQIA+	1

\* Data from 18 hotlines

### Key finding 5

Struggles with mental health were ranked as a common reason why children ran away and are often triggered by adverse experiences in different contexts of their lives.

#### Recommendation:

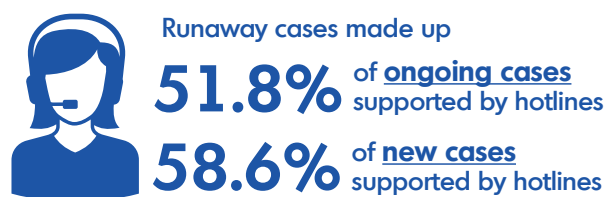
- Investment in reducing stigma around mental health from an early age, which can be partly be achieved by introducing counselling and mental health services in schools and mandatory training on mental health first aid and awareness for school staff

### Key finding 6

Different groups of children follow different trajectories of running away exposing them to diverse challenges and risks. Children in alternative care are overrepresented among runaways, and issues around conflict, quality of care homes, and desire to rejoin one's family are indicated as primary concerns. There is evidence that runaways from the LGBTQ+ community are significantly underreported, potential reasons stem from prevailing issues around stigma and fear of judgement. For runaway children in migration lengthy procedures, inadequate reception centers, and family reunification were indicated as leading causes for running away.

#### Recommendations:

- Care homes for children are a key area for prevention. Focus should be on improving the quality-of-care homes and developing care arrangements for family contact to avoid children being cut off from their families. These care arrangements should be co-developed with children themselves.
- Improved understanding and awareness raising efforts are needed to improve the support offered to runaway LGBTQ+ children and young people.
- Improving the quality of reception centers, speeding up integration into society, and ensuring effective quality guardianship systems are stepping-stones towards providing children in migration alternatives to running away and reducing exposure to abuse.



Type of missing child cases experiencing violence	N* Hotline cases
Runaways	334
Parental abductions	15
Missing children in migration	2
Criminal abductions	6
Otherwise missing	3
Other	130

\* Data from 15 hotlines

