

ANNUAL REVIEW 2020



**Missing
Children
Europe**

Who we are

“We strive to protect and empower children to prevent them from going missing, and to keep them from harm when they do go missing”



2020 has been a challenging year. Measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 gravely impacted the rights and wellbeing of children across the world. Our hotlines for missing children strongly felt the impact. 35% reported receiving more calls and the overall caseload increased by

16,8% with school closures and restrictions on movement and social gatherings leading to more runaways and parental abductions. With no other sources of support, each case required more intensive follow-up.

Our members showed amazing resilience, investing, for example, in chat and text functions to make their services safely accessible to those who could not speak freely in confinement, and this despite the crisis' severe impact on funding. I want to congratulate and thank all of them for their crucial work and dedication.

Despite the crisis, MCE continued its activities, and I would like to take the occasion to celebrate some of our achievements in 2020.

In March, while going into lockdown, MCE kicked off its runaways programme, RADAR, co-produced with young people with experience of running away. By late April, we had moved online, hosting more than 100 professionals in an Initiative for Children in Migration webinar on relocation of young newcomers. On May 25th we campaigned to support our hotline operators, and over the summer, the ChildRescue App was launched in Greece and Belgium.

November saw the kickoff of the iCare project raising awareness on international child abductions with and amongst young people; our very first Runaway Prevention Month campaign, crafted by children with experience of running away, reaching 200,000 people on social media; and a well-attended online symposium on “Technology for Good: engaging with the public to help find missing children”.

Finally in December we launched a series of videos from young newcomers spreading the word about Miniila – an app that helps them stay safe and informed – and organised an online Lost in Migration conference with 16 young newcomers who will co-lead the preparations of next year's live conference.

We are currently seeing initial successes of our advocacy last year: As co-chair of the Child Rights Action Group we led the advocacy on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Published this March, it provides a broad framework for the sector's future work, and includes a recommendation to Member States to support and address the funding needs of the hotlines. We also brought together a coalition of more than 30 NGO's to support the Commission's legislative initiatives to combat child sexual abuse online, another problem exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. The strong pressure of the child rights organisations helped to ensure the adoption of temporary legislation allowing tech companies to continue to scan for child abuse material and detect grooming, keeping children safe(r) online while long term solutions are being developed.

Despite the challenges we managed to make 2020 fruitful. In the coming year, we will reflect on how to tackle the fall-out of this crisis. We will take child participation to a new level, involving children with experience of going missing in the development of Missing Children Europe's new strategy 2022-2025, which should enable us to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on children at risk of going missing.

Missing Children Europe is the European Federation for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children connecting 31 grassroots organisations in 26 countries across Europe. We are all committed to the same goals: to prevent children from going missing, and to protect children from any violence, abuse or exploitation that leads to or results from them going missing.

Each year over 250,000 children slip through the net in the European Union. Children go missing for a wide range of reasons, including conflict, violence, abuse, and exploitation.

We work with professionals who assist missing children, children at risk of going missing and their families. We support them to better protect and empower children through research, training, advocacy and awareness, facilitating exchange and cross-border cooperation. We coordinate the network of 116 000 missing children hotlines, and the Cross-Border Family Mediators network. In all these ways we contribute to more effective, holistic and integrated child protection systems across Europe.

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One of the most important things that I am constantly trying to bring onto the European agenda is that policy makers tend to address the effects of children going missing but do not always address the root causes of why children go missing. It's certainly linked with vulnerability, exclusion and childhood experiences such as abuse, neglect or addiction in the family. Thanks to the RADAR project run by Missing Children Europe and its members, we have an opportunity to listen to young runaways and understand what brings them to these difficult decisions.

Dragoş Pîslaru, Member of the European Parliament (Renew Europe Group)

Thousands of children are being trafficked every year across borders, and yet communication between countries – which is crucial for decisions on children's futures – remains a challenge. In 2020, my Office designed a framework for national focal points to protect child victims of trafficking drawing inspiration from the work of the Missing Children Europe network and engaging Missing Children Europe's expertise in the process. I hope that this state-led mechanism contributes to viable long-term solutions for trafficked children and helps protect those who go missing.

Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

It's been great to see how Missing Children Europe are inspired by and supporting young people to take a lead in the RADAR project by shaping the participatory research activities offered to younger children and use their experiences to guide campaigns and analysis. The task ahead is to ensure that children's expert views are at the heart of the co-developed training and recommendations.

Prof. Cath Larkins, Director, The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation, University of Central Lancashire

I am very grateful for Missing Children Europe organising such a great conference [Lost in migration]. As a migrant I feel safe speaking to people who stand with migrants in every circumstance and are willing to hear me speak and respect my ideas.

Maria, 22 years old participant of the Lost in migration conference

Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, President of Missing Children Europe and UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

Our impact 2020

From improving the quality of the services that support children and families, to providing recommendations to policy leaders, here is the impact Missing Children Europe has had on the issue of missing children in 2020.

Supporting frontline professionals



Advocating for child-centred policy



The organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) embedded our **INTERACT** recommendations in their work towards the establishment of National Focal Points to Protect Child Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings.

More than **30 organisations** joined our coalition to combat online child sexual abuse and exploitation.

The European Commission launched the **Pact on Migration and Asylum** that included points on relocation of **unaccompanied minors** influenced by MCE and Child Circle's publication "Keeping the Child's Best Interests at the Heart of Relocation".

Together with **28 organisations** developed a Joint Position Paper on a **Comprehensive Child Rights Strategy** advocating for the prevention and protection of children from violence and abuse that can lead to going missing and for support to the 116 000 hotlines that the recommendations from which were reflected/taken up in the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

Raising awareness and challenging narratives

likes up by **219**
followers up by **532**
followers up by **530**

Over **1,6M** people were reached through Missing Children Europe's **social media** channels in 2020.

Over **1M** people were reached through the **Tiny and Apollo** campaign displayed in cinemas in Belgium, Italy and Bulgaria and social media channels.

Our **November Runaway Prevention Month** campaign reached over **200K impressions** on social media.

Supporting child participation



16 young newcomers participated in the **Lost in Migration youth conference** to prepare and co-steer the development and messages of the 2021 edition.

A **Child Comms Expert group of 5 young people**, some with experience of going missing, co-developed the new child friendly section on the Missing Children Europe's website.

10 young people with **experience of running away** joined our **Young People's Board** and are co-steering the **RADAR** project research, campaigns, and policy recommendations.

Using scientific data to define priorities



Collected data from **22 hotlines** and **28 cross-border mediators** across Europe.

Conducted **focus group** interviews with **28 children** and **young people** with experience of running away to understand the underlying reasons for children to run away from home or care.

Consulted **15 professionals** working with runaways in a **Delphi study** on attitudes, responses and best practices regarding running away.

Generated a total of

164 press articles

30 on general topics related to missing children

6 on Runaways
6 on NotFound day
8 on Child Sexual Abuse
9 on parental abductions



69 on International Missing Children's Day

23 on children in migration

13 on ChildRescue

Members

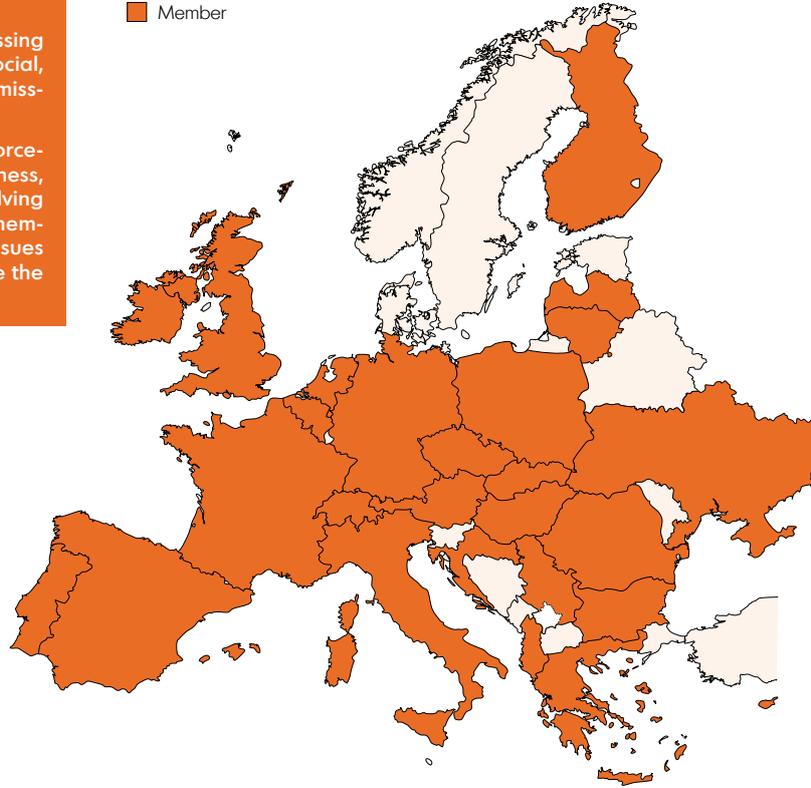
Our 31 member organisations work on the ground in 26 countries across Europe for the prevention, protection and support of missing and sexually exploited children and their families.

22 members manage the national 116 000 hotline services for missing children, providing free and immediate emotional, psychological, social, legal and administrative support 24 / 7 to children (at risk of) going missing and their families.

Our members share publicity appeals, link up parents with law enforcement in investigations, enable support across borders, raise awareness, and organise prevention programmes, many of them directly involving children. Missing Children Europe develops projects that involve members as partners to support them and tackle the most pressing issues that lead to child disappearances to protect children and guarantee the safeguarding of their rights.

Where our members are

Member



Members

1. **Albania** ALO 116
2. **Austria** 147 Rat auf Draht
3. **Belgium** Child Focus
4. **Bulgaria** Nadja Centre Foundation
5. **Croatia** Centar za nestalu – CNZD
6. **Cyprus** Consortium: SPAVO & HFC
7. **Czech Republic** Cesta z krize, z.ú.
8. **Finland** Lasten perusoikeudet, Kaapatut Lapset ry
9. **France** APEV, Droit d'Enfance, La Mouette
10. **Germany** Weisser Ring
11. **Greece** Smile of the Child
12. **Hungary** Kék Vonal
13. **Ireland** Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
14. **Italy** SOS Il Telefono Azzurro Onlus
15. **Latvia** Bezvests.lv
16. **Lithuania** Missing Persons' Families Support Centre
17. **Portugal** Instituto de Apoio à Criança, Associação Portuguesa de Crianças Desaparecidas
18. **Poland** Itaka Foundation
19. **Romania** Salvati Copiii
20. **Serbia** Astra
21. **Slovakia** Linka detskej istoty, n. o.
22. **Spain** Fundación ANAR
23. **Switzerland** Missing Children Switzerland, Fondation Suisse du Service Social International
24. **The Netherlands** Centrum Internationale Kinderontvoering
25. **Ukraine** NGO Magnolia
26. **United Kingdom** Missing People

Telefono Azzurro is proud to be a member of Missing Children Europe. Thanks to this network, we can strengthen our advocacy activities at the European and international level. Moreover, Missing Children Europe provides us with shared operational standards and best practices to protect and advance missing children's rights in cooperation with all the other members of the network.

Telefono Azzurro (Italian member)

95%

of members surveyed state that membership of Missing Children Europe helps them to stay ahead of opportunities.

95%

of members surveyed find the Missing Children Europe's member newsletter extremely useful.

89%

of members surveyed are extremely satisfied with the cooperation with Missing Children Europe members in other countries.

89%

of members surveyed consider Missing Children Europe's joint communications campaigns to be very well organised.



Parental Abductions

When an international family conflict escalates, it can lead to a child abduction, which occurs when children are taken to or kept in a country other than their normal residence by one parent against the will of the other.

To prevent and resolve abductions, Missing Children Europe coordinates the **network of Cross-Border Family Mediators (CBFM)** – a growing network of 206 bi-cultural mediators that represent 40 countries across the world. They are trained to engage directly with parents to find a solution that reflects the specific family situation and boasts an 81% success rate. In 2020, we welcomed our first Indian mediator.

In 2020 MCE's partners in the **INCLUDE** project conducted focus groups with children in Cyprus and Hungary to explore their views on how children in international child abduction proceedings should receive support from judges and other professionals. The findings were analysed involving young people aged 14-17 as collaborators and will form the basis of a good practice guide.

Between 12-16 October, we commemorated **International Mediation Week** promoting mediation in cross-border family disputes. Children want parents to find their own solution in family conflicts. Artugoep designed a graffiti wall for Missing Children Europe in Brussels and digital posters promoting the campaign were displayed across 5 Belgian cities.



Digital posters promoting the Mediation Week campaign in Belgium



In November, Missing Children Europe kicked off the **iCare** project that will develop tools and activities to improve the condition of children in international child abductions, promoting judicial cooperation and international family mediation.



To mark the Mediation Week 2020, Hugo de Jesus Alves created a HearMeOut wall in Ixelles (Brussels).

Cross-border cooperation helps reunite an abducted child with his father

In March 2020, a three-year-old boy was abducted by his mother, after a court order granted child custody to his father, since the mother was suffering from psychological problems. Cross-border cooperation helped locate the child and reunited him with his father.

After the boy was abducted, ANAR (Spain) sent a cross border cooperation request to Telefono Azzurro (Italy) where the boy was suspected to have been taken, which allowed them to work together to locate him. The abduction was reported to law enforcement and the central authorities were notified to activate the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

The organisations worked with the police, the child's father, and his lawyer to coordinate a response and share information between countries. The boy's photo was also published on ANAR's website to raise awareness of the abduction.

Nine months later, thanks to continued cross border efforts, the child was found in a European country and is now living with his father.

Impact of COVID-19 on missing children and the 116 000 hotlines

The restrictive measures to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened the risks to which certain children are exposed. Over 60% of 116 000 hotlines reported that the introduction of COVID-19 related measures had an impact on missing children cases.* School closures, restriction of movement, prohibition of social gatherings and curfews all prompted children to run away from home or care (the latter often to see their families). School closures, restriction of movement and limited access to support led to increases in parental abductions. Border closures put children in migration at a higher risk of trafficking and exploitation. 116 000 hotlines, often underfunded, had to deal with a 17% increase in volume of cases, which required more time and energy as callers were deprived of other forms of support.* At the same time, hotlines had to invest in technology to work remotely and in fast development of chat and other functions to ensure that everyone had safe access to hotlines services and that family could not interrupt or listen in on calls. Therefore, in 2020, we focused our awareness-raising on the 116 000 hotlines which are key to society and we urged Member States and the EU to take their responsibility to safeguard children's rights to access to these support services with our **COVID-19 statement**.

* For figures on the impact of COVID-19 on missing children and on the hotlines read our [Figures & Trends 2020](#)

Missing children in migration

Tens of thousands of young newcomers attempting to escape violence or poverty go missing after their arrival in Europe. Concern over the fate of these children relates to the increasing crossover between the smugglers who bring these children to Europe in risky and dangerous circumstances, and the traffickers who then force these children into sexual and labour exploitation as well as criminal and begging rings.

Miniila is an app that informs children and youth on the move in Europe of their rights, and of safe procedures and services available to them. It was re-launched with new design and features at the beginning of 2020 in Arabic, English, Farsi, French and Tigrinya. By the end of 2020, the app was downloaded 1,500 times and included information related to around 400 services in 8 European countries. Missing Children Europe launched an online campaign to promote the app, with explanatory videos, and interviews with young migrants sharing their positive views, encouraging other young newcomers to use the app.



One of the Miniila video-interviews reached almost 30K views on TikTok.



Miniila demos demonstrate the main features of the app

In December 2020, Missing Children Europe hosted the fourth **Lost in Migration online youth conference**. During the previous edition, participants called for the inclusion of young newcomers' voices in decision making. This year Missing Children Europe gathered 16 young self-advocates to participate in three sessions to identify strategies for effective youth participation in the current debate on migration and asylum. Words, visual art and music were used to express ideas which laid the foundations for a new format for the fifth edition of Lost in Migration in 2021.

Since 2017, Missing Children Europe **coordinates the Initiative for Children in Migration**, an informal collaboration between more than 100 migration, asylum and child protection actors at the European and national level involved in joint EU advocacy. In May, MCE and Child Circle published key recommendations on "Keeping the Child's Best Interests at the Heart of Relocation", informing the ongoing initiative to relocate unaccompanied children from Greece. MCE also led the development of a **Joint statement on the impact of the new Pact on Migration and Asylum on children in migration**, signed by 28 organisations and European networks.

Miniila App provides a migrant family with crucial support

When Andera and her husband became concerned about their son's mental and physical health whilst living in a refugee camp in Greece, they reached out through Missing Children Europe's Miniila App to get crucial support for their son.

Andera's son Mohamed* was struggling both mentally and physically whilst living in the Polycastro refugee camp in Greece, with over 800 other people in migration. Mohamed was suffering with enuresis, a condition leaving him with little bladder control. This condition, alongside the experience of being a child in migration, left Mohamed withdrawn, sad, and refusing to use the shower and toilet facilities in the camp.

Mohamed's mother, Andera, was extremely concerned at her son's deteriorating mental and physical health and sought help wherever she could find it within the camp. This was a challenge since a number of the support services had been shut down as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic response. The staff she could get hold of were dismissive and did not listen to her many desperate requests for such crucial support for her son.

Before Mohamed's health further deteriorated, Andera heard about Missing Children Europe's Miniila App. She reached out to Miniila through Facebook and made a plea for support for her depressed and physically unwell son. At this point she was desperate and willing to do anything to get this life-saving mental support for Mohamed. Thanks to Miniila, Andera was connected with the Smile of The Child and they arranged counselling for her son to support him through his condition.

*The young person's name has been changed for protection purposes

Online Child Sexual Abuse

During the last quarter of 2020 it became evident that the entry into force of the European Electronic Communications Code on the 21st of December, would have grave implications for the fight against child sexual abuse online. This would widen the scope of the e-Privacy Directive and make technology used by service providers to scan messages for child sexual abuse material and patterns of grooming illegal.

Missing Children Europe brought together a coalition of more than 30 concerned NGOs to jointly advocate in support of the Commission's proposal for temporary legislation to mitigate this problem; was involved in discussions with the EP Intergroup on Child Rights, the European Commission, EUROPOL and the Council of Europe's Lanzarote Committee on this topic; and organised a webinar for members on the prevention of online grooming.

Unfortunately, negotiations dragged on longer than necessary and after December 21st, the number of reports from the EU fell by 51%. With the ngo-coalition, Missing Children Europe continued to put pressure, through joint statements, letters to the negotiators, and opinion pieces in the press. At the time of writing of this report, late April 2021, a political agreement was finally reached, keeping children safe(r) during the development of long-term legislation on the issue.

Runaways

Running away from home or from care is misunderstood and tied to shame and judgement. These misconceptions lead to inadequate responses and lack of protection for young runaways in Europe. These children face adverse experiences within the home and risk of violence on the streets, placing them among the most vulnerable groups of children.

Missing Children Europe leads the RADAR project on young runaways improving policies, responses, and protection for them. In spring 2020, with our hotlines in Portugal, Belgium, Greece and Poland, we recruited a **Young People's Board**, consisting of 10 young people with experience of running away. This board is an active member of the project's implementation and progress. RADAR is further supported by a board of professional child protection experts in child prostitution, street children, adverse childhood experience, mental health, and more.

In the summer of 2020, our **members conducted focus groups and individual interviews with 28 young runaways across Europe**. These consultations were analysed by the University of Liège and will form the basis of a consultation with professional stakeholders in early 2021.

Child Helpline International and Missing Children Europe collected data on calls about runaways to their networks and a mapping of best practices was carried out with all project partners.

All of this research will inform the development of training toolkits, resources, and a Massive Open Online Course on the topic of running



Posters promoting the Runaway Prevention Month campaign in Portugal were placed in the hotspot areas identified by RADAR Young People's Board.

away for professionals and law enforcement in 2021.

In November 2020, RADAR ran its first campaign to commemorate **Runaway Prevention Month. The campaign, called Listen. Change. Protect., was developed by the young people's board, reached over 200,000 social media impressions** and was spotted at different runaway hotspots in Portugal.

Chiara runs away a second time

When Chiara*, a 17-year-old suffering from substance abuse who had run away in the past, went missing again, the Italian 116 000 hotline for missing children was able to help her mother locate and support her vulnerable daughter.

Several months before, Chiara had run away from home, but had returned after a few days. As Chiara went missing for longer than just a few days this time, her mother became extremely concerned about her wellbeing, especially since she suffered from substance abuse. Chiara's mother filed a missing persons' report at their local police station and called the Italian 116 000 hotline for missing children.

As soon as Chiara ran away, her mother reached out to Chiara's friends and teachers to try to find out why her daughter had run away and where she could be. Unfortunately, this was to no avail. Thankfully, the operator at the 116 000 hotline was helpful by asking the right questions to enable her to support and locate Chiara. The operator asked Chiara's mother whether her daughter had been associating with a different group of friends before she ran away. This question jogged Chiara's mother's mind and made her remember about a new group of friends Chiara had mentioned who hung out in a different suburb of the city.

The 116 000 hotline provided this new information to the Italian police, allowing them to focus their search to these suburbs. Shortly after, they found Chiara sleeping in a shelter and brought her home.

*The young person's name has been changed for protection purposes

European 116 000 hotlines



Snapshot from the video created by 116 000 hotline operators for the International Missing Children's Day 2020

Missing Children Europe actively supports the improvement and coordination of the European network of hotlines for missing children available through the 116 000 number.

We continued to advance our Client Relationship Management (CRM) project with France and Cyprus who will go live with the CRM between Spring and Summer of 2021. The CRM tool for hotlines allows them to record data on missing children using a common platform and structure, which will improve sharing and comparability of case data.

The Accreditation project was faced with some unprecedented setbacks due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the travel ban, the accreditation of the Ukrainian hotline was put on hold, although their internal self-assessment was completed and reviewed by Missing Children Europe.

Finally, Missing Children Europe continued its advocacy for implementation of the European Electronic Communications code obligation on Member states to ensure equal access, allocation of adequate funding, and awareness raising for the hotlines.

Behind the scenes as of May 2021

Team members

Aagje Ieven, Secretary General
Rebecca Granshaw, Senior Operations Officer
Kalim Ullah, Finance and Payroll Officer
Andrea Tedde, Partnerships and Fundraising Officer
Eugenia Yumi Miyashita, Project Officer for Runaways and Hotlines
Greg Kostka, Senior Project Officer for International Child Abductions
Jagoda Luto, Acting Communications Officer (maternity leave cover)
Syed Hasnain, Project Consultant for Children in Migration
Agata Wanat, Policy and Programmes Assistant
Charlotte Marsh, Communications & Fundraising Assistant
Francesca Pisanu, Operations Assistant
Frédérique Badin, Supporting Committee Coordinator (volunteer)
Holly Shorey, Communications Volunteer
Musu Kargbo-Reffell, Communications Officer (maternity leave)

Patrons' Council

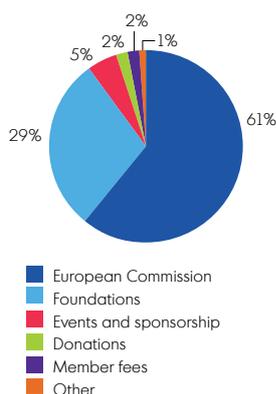
H.M. Queen Paola, Honorary President of the Patron's Council
Sir Francis Jacobs, Former President of Missing Children Europe
Dr. Vaira Viķe-Freiberga, Former President of Latvia
Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, Former European Parliament Coordinator for Children's Rights
László Andor, Mercator Senior Fellow at the Hertie School of Governance and former EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Sir Rob Wainwright, Senior Partner at Deloitte and former Executive Director of Europol

Board members

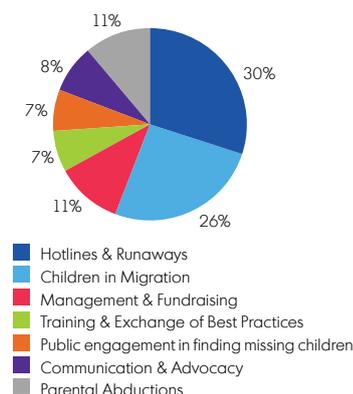
Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, President of Missing Children Europe
Heidi De Pauw, Vice President of Missing Children Europe, Belgium
Coskun Çörüz, The Netherlands
Piji Protopsaltis, Greece
Sheila Donovan, Spain
Stefano Ficorilli, Italy

Our finances

Income sources 2020



Expenditure 2020



Support Missing Children Europe

Make a donation

Support Missing Children Europe in its work to prevent and protect missing and sexually exploited children. Together we can give more than hope to children and their families!

Donations via Bank Transfer
IBAN: BE43 310 165 832 401
BIC/SWIFT: BBRUBEBB

Are you a resident of Belgium, Luxembourg or France? For donations of 40 EUR or higher, you are eligible for a tax exemption certificate.

Please, transfer to:
IBAN: BE 41 363 025 760 210
BIC/SWIFT: BBRUBEBB

Donations via PayPal or credit card

Donate with just a few clicks:
<https://missingchildreneurope.eu/donate/>

Get involved

Find out about our campaigns and fundraising events at <https://missingchildreneurope.eu/get-involved/>.

Would you like to sponsor one of our fundraising events, organise such an event or support one of our projects? Contact us at info@missingchildreneurope.eu.

Celebrate with us on Facebook

You can celebrate your birthday, wedding, or graduation with us and encourage your friends to donate to a valuable cause. Find out how to set up a Facebook fundraiser for Missing Children Europe on www.facebook.com/fund/MissingChildrenEurope

Donate a service

We are in continuous need of kind-hearted volunteers with skills such as website development, photography, videography, translation, interpretation, copy editing and IT support. Does this sound like you? Get in touch at info@missingchildreneurope.eu

Download 404 NotFound

Help with the ongoing search to safely find missing children by downloading the free NotFound app on your website. Notfound replaces your website's useless 404 error pages with posters of missing children. Find out more on <https://notfound.org/en>.

Support young newcomers through the Miniila app

Do you work for an organisation that provides support to young newcomers in Europe? If so, add your support services to the Miniila app to help children in migration find their way to safety. More information via [Miniila.com](https://miniila.com).

Special thanks to our sponsors and donors



A special thanks to all our donors, supporters and volunteers:

Anna-Maria Pizzinini, Dani Oshi, Alain Sannen, Boróka Bálint, Agata Fraczek, Helena Gruga and Giulia Sanna, Vera Crisci, Wyvern Lingo, Jean-Charles De Keyser, Chef Hugues Mattagne, and all volunteers who supported the organisation of the concert in tribute of Charles Aznavour and the golf event



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