

ONCE MISSING, NEVER FORGOTTEN?



**Results of scoping
research on the
impact of publicity
appeals in missing
children cases**

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'Thank you for immediately disseminating my child's information. Without your help, I wouldn't know what to do. My child doesn't know how to read or speak...'

Mother of a 15 year-old girl who went missing due to mental health issues

'We are concerned because 2,5 years after my daughter's disappearance, whenever she searches for her name on the internet, she finds websites where she is still mentioned. My daughter is concerned because the profession that she chose requires a certain amount of publicity, but she feels that the information about her disappearance exposes her in a negative way'

Mother of a now 18 year-old, who went missing and attempted suicide when she was 16 years old





This publication has been funded with the support of the European Commission. This publication reflects the view of the authors only. The European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

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With special thanks to all the stakeholders who were willing to share their experiences and practices.

Printed in April 2017.



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1 Introduction

When a child goes missing, every action to find and bring him or her to safety matters. Any parent of a missing child would understandably want the world to stop, and help the search. In these cases, time is of the essence. The longer the child is missing, the higher the risk of harm to the child, or in some extreme cases even death (Hammer, Finkelhor & Sedlak, 2002). Decisions therefore need to follow quickly in terms of the tools and procedures used in the investigation. As time passes and the child remains missing, the distress for those left behind, waiting, not knowing where the child is or what happened, is said to be one of the most devastating forms of complicated grief, also known as ‘ambiguous loss’ (Boss, 2000)

In the European Union (EU) alone, at least 250 000 children are reported missing each year (Ecorys, 2013). These cases include a wide range of different situations. Children who run away or are pushed out of home or care and children abducted by a parent following a family conflict constitute an average 80% of the total number of cases reported to authorities and specialised missing children services. Other cases include children who go missing in the context of migration, in particular unaccompanied migrant children, whose disappearances too often remain unreported (Toscano & Shalev-Greene, 2016). A consistent minority of cases concern children abducted by a third party, or children who are lost, injured or otherwise missing (Missing Children Europe, 2016)¹. Every missing child has a different story, and every situation requires an individual assessment to guide the response. Luckily, the vast majority of children are found within a relatively short timeframe (UK Missing Persons Bureau, 2016).

Across these different situations, a commonly used practice in the search for missing children is the use of publicity appeals.

A publicity appeal for missing children is defined, in the context of this report, as ‘a campaign targeted at the public in general or a

specific audience², containing information about a missing child, with the aim of obtaining sightings of the missing child as well as information about possible whereabouts or any other information that may help in finding the child in question’.

A publicity appeal can be made through various channels and using various forms, both online and offline, such as websites, social media, posters, TV and radio spots, billboards, newspaper ads, national child alerts, professional partner networks and many more. Interpol’s yellow-notices³ are also a type of publicity appeal, though they are not the main focus of this report.

To date, few attempts have been made to evaluate the effectiveness of publicity campaigns, all of which were carried out in the USA. While scarce, the research tends to reveal disappointing results and suggest that publicity appeals don’t necessarily positively impact the investigation or search. The dissemination of images of missing children furthermore raises potential issues regarding the impact that it may have on the protection of the child’s privacy and overall wellbeing. Others however argue that appeals can help to gather vital information from the public and safeguard children at risk, with Child Alert systems in particular having been credited for safeguarding missing children (OJJPD, 2016). These views call for further research to ensure the effectiveness of publicity appeals in their potential of saving lives, while limiting the negative impact for missing children and their families.

¹ Missing Children Europe Figures and Trends for 2015, see <http://missingchildreneurope.eu/Portals/0/Docs/Annual%20and%20Data%20reports/Missing%20Children%20Europe%20figures%20and%20trends%202015.pdf>

² Appeals targeted to a specific audience are not shared with the public at large. They for instance include the use of partner networks (shop owners, public transport staff, postal delivery staff, pharmacies, social services, ...) who receive the information about the missing child. The specific partners are selected based on the details of the case, eg. because they work in the area of the child’s assumed whereabouts or because the services provided by the partner are of specific relevance to the missing child. For further examples of these type of discrete appeals, see section ‘Best practices in running a publicity appeal’

³ At the request of a member country, INTERPOL can issue a yellow notice to help locate missing persons, especially minors. These notices are circulated on an international basis and recorded in INTERPOL’s database of missing and abducted children



1.1 Publicity appeals use in cases of missing children

While appeals to the public to help finding a missing child may always have been used, a ground-breaking form of organised appeals was launched in the early 1980s with the disappearances of Etan Patz (1979)⁴ and Johnny Gosch (1982)⁵, using milk cartons to share pictures of missing children to families across the USA. The practice was stopped in the late 1980s, after paediatricians Benjamin Spock and Thomas Berry Brazelton criticised it as being traumatic for children who would see images of missing children each morning while having their breakfast⁶. Criticism was also expressed as to the fact that missing children milk cartons would remain in circulation after the child on the carton had in fact been found.



Overall, publicity appeals have, since the early milk carton days, become a more organised and standard practice. After milk cartons, pictures appeared in the US on pizza boxes, grocery bags, junk mail envelopes – with a message: ‘Have you seen me?’

In the EU, civil society became increasingly organised in working with law enforcement and publishing appeals in the late ‘90s, using posters, partnership networks, digital screens,

websites, classic media, social media and more. The role of civil society organisations in supporting national authorities in finding missing children was recognised formally in 2001, through a Council Resolution (2001/C 283/01) encouraging member states to make it possible, (...) ‘to support civil society organisations in the search for missing or sexually exploited children, for instance by disseminating information for locating missing children, if the authorities deem this useful.’

Alongside came the development of child alert systems; established first in the US following the disappearance of Amber Hagerman in 1996, with the aim to reach a large mass of people as quickly as possible, in the event of an extremely worrying case of disappearance⁷ (Griffin, Miller, Hoppe et al., 2007). Child alert systems evolved quickly around the world, including a first development in Canada in 2002, Australia in 2005, and a first nationwide launch in Europe in 2006 with the ‘Alerte Enlèvement’ in France, quickly followed by Greece and 16 other countries to date. Amber Alert or child alert mechanisms were formally endorsed by the Justice and Home Affairs Council in 2008 which invited EU countries to establish and develop national mechanisms to alert the public in the event of criminal abductions of children and to define the national implementing arrangements ensuring that cross-border alerts are triggered, on the basis of the best practices for launching cross-border alerts developed by the European Commission (SEC(2008)2912 final).

Another innovative practice was launched by Missing Children Europe in 2012 with the ‘Notfound.org’ app. The app replaces 404 error pages of websites with posters of missing children: ‘Page not found – neither is this child.’ Piloted first in Belgium, the app later expanded to cover 7 EU Member States, by connecting the tool to the live feed of national organisations in charge of missing children cases. Since

its launch, over 74,630,254 posters of missing children have been displayed, of which many are long term disappearances or 'cold cases' for which leads are still being looked for. Coincidentally, Notfound has been referred to by bloggers and news outlets as the 'milk

carton for the digital age'. Thus, from discrete posters shared to a targeted network of partners to full national alert systems, a wide spectrum of tools used to reach out to the public are now part of the toolbox for those working to protect children at risk.



Example of publicity appeal on digital traffic boards



Example of publicity appeal on Twitter



Example of 'notfound.org' publicity appeal

⁴ <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/14/us/etan-patz-case-conviction/>

⁵ <http://www.johnnygosch.com/>

⁶ http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2012/04/etan_patz_case_why_did_dairies_put_missing_children_on_their_milk_cartons.html

⁷ Therefore, a child alert is sometimes referred to as an 'Amber Alert'



1.2 Effectiveness of publicity appeals remains unknown

Over three decades after the launch of milk cartons with images of missing children, little is known about the impact, use and effectiveness of publicity appeals (Holmes, 2016). In 2012, an article recalling the gone-by era of missing children on milk cartons at the breakfast table quoted Johnny Gosh's mother saying 'What it did was raise the level of awareness, [...] It didn't necessarily bring us tips or leads we could actually use'⁸.

While praised by some for its success in finding missing children, others have claimed that Amber Alerts do little more than providing a 'crime control theatre' generating a 'climate of fear around a tragic but extremely rare event, pumping up public anxiety' or 'a socially constructed 'solution' to a socially constructed problem, enabling public officials to symbolically address an essentially intractable threat', creating an illusion of safety (Griffin & Miller, 2008). On the other hand, Fox (2002) argues that 'the Amber alert system may have played an important role in helping authorities find abducted children in Texas and other states.'

Further questions have emerged regarding our actual capacity to recognise children depicted in the posters displayed in supermarkets, arguing that, rather than being able to rely on memory, our recognition capacity does not differ from chance (Lampinen, Arnal & Hicks, 2009). Taking into account that following up on leads requires considerable police resources (Shalev-Greene & Pakes, 2013) and that our recognition capacity is at least questionable (Lampinen & Moore, 2016) raises the question of whether publicity appeals are the best investment of limited resources available to safeguard missing children. Overall, little evidence is available about the relation between the actual recovery of a missing child and the effect of an alert message, which is 'remarkable, since it is implicitly assumed that a child is 'saved' due to a public dissemination campaign' (Pashley, Enhus, Leys, 2010).

In 2016 the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU, launched an initiative entitled 'Missing persons: missing information' aimed at enhancing the cross-border exchange of information and finding missing persons. The initiative included a questionnaire on the use of citizens' assistance in gathering information, in identifying and finding missing persons, the outcome of which was discussed at a conference and summarised in a report⁹. The report from the questionnaire summarised responses from 24 EU Member States and Schengen associated countries who responded that they 'see the added value of involving citizens, especially in urgent cases and in cases where resources are scarce and several investigations need to be carried out.' The report further highlighted that respondents 'believe citizens' assistance can provide many additional eyes and ears possibly to identify or locate a missing person. Downsides of citizens' assistance were named as well, for instance: the risk of the media taking over the investigation, a possible information overload for law enforcement and getting misleading information.'

Responding to questions on efficiency and impact of publicity appeals has become even more important with the omnipresence of the internet and media and the rise of search engines and social media as a primary source of information-gathering and sharing among communities. In Belgium, the use of public appeals has increased since the rise of social media, while no actual growth has been seen in the number of 'worrying' disappearances or in the effectiveness of appeals to actually find children¹⁰. Online images reach an ever-larger community of likers and followers who feel compelled to help, to share and spread the picture of the missing child to others.

The phrase stated by Ambrose (2012), 'you are what Google says you are' is a powerful message of how images of children are easily found on the internet once a publicity



appeal uses an electronic format. For those who were once a missing child, this might be how they will be perceived for the rest of their lives. Therefore, beyond the questions of the effectiveness of publicity appeals, there are also now the increasing concerns relating to privacy and the right to be forgotten.

Despite these concerns, publicity appeals also have clear strengths. For example, in the UK, some children interviewed after a missing episode by Missing People¹¹ reported that the appeal convinced them that someone was waiting for them and that someone actually cared. It helped them in coping with whatever led them to run away or go missing in the first place. In some cases, the appeal itself can trigger the missing child to come back on their own, or to seek support¹². Recent research also argued that the use of child alert systems has the potential to '[lead to the quick and safe recovery of an abducted child], as well as other important benefits, such as support the investigative process, improve the relationship between law enforcement and the

child's relatives, and meet public expectations' (Shalev-Greene & Hedges, 2016).

For parents whose children have been missing for many years, knowing that they haven't been forgotten and are still being looked for, may very well be the only beacon of hope. Ultimately, for every child found or saved thanks to an appeal, the effort for all those involved will most likely have been more than worthwhile.

For all those involved in publicity appeals – including law enforcement, hotlines for missing children, family support services, social media platforms, internet service providers, and most importantly families and children – the issue has become more relevant than ever. Limited resources did not allow this report to provide for a full analysis of the issues raised above. It does, however, hope to at least scratch the surface and initiate debate on a much bigger topic, which the partners involved in this project are keen to delve into further.

⁸ Cristian Salazar, Associated Press, Era of missing children on milk cartons recalled, April 2012

⁹ Note from Presidency to the Working Party on Information Exchange and Data Protection (DAPIX), 7012/16

¹⁰ Child Focus at Steering Group meeting 23 June 2016

¹¹ Missing People is the organisation operating the European hotline for missing children in the UK, reachable through the number '116 000'

¹² Missing People at Steering Group meeting 23 June 2016



2 The research project at hand

2.1 Aims

Given these concerns, this first scoping exercise was undertaken as a collaborative effort between Missing Children Europe, Dr. Karen Shalev-Greene¹³ and Dr. Penny Woolnough¹⁴ as we jointly recognize the essential need to evaluate the effectiveness of these campaigns and their impact on the missing children, the missing children's families, and police investigators. This study is a first step in this direction and it aims to develop evidence on the decision-making process of launching a publicity

appeal, running a publicity appeal, the effectiveness of a publicity appeal, and the impact of a publicity appeal. This is done in order to identify existing knowledge, but also to shed light on operational challenges and gaps in knowledge which call for further research in this under-researched area.

Our intention with this project was to improve our understanding of these issues and lay the grounds for further research to be undertaken in 2017 – 2018 (pending available funding).

2.2 Approach and methodology

The project was initiated by Missing Children Europe with funding from the European Commission (Rights Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014 – 2020). A Steering Group was set up to provide input and feedback on the different steps of the project.

The Steering Group was composed of:

- › Coordination: Delphine Moralis and Mette Drivsholm, Missing Children Europe
- › Research: Dr. Karen Shalev-Greene, University of Portsmouth and Dr. Penny Woolnough, University of Abertay

› Hotline partners: Child Focus (Belgium), The Smile of the Child (Greece), ITAKA (Poland), Fundacion ANAR (Spain), Missing People (UK)

An initial literature review on the topic of publicity appeals in missing children cases was conducted in order to place the research in the general context and to allow the project to build on existing work.

On 23 June 2016, a kick-off meeting was hosted by Missing Children Europe with the project Steering Group¹⁵. At this meeting, the topic of impact of publicity appeals was discussed and knowledge from each partner country was shared in order to give input to the survey. Following the kick-off meeting, the survey was finalised by Missing Children Europe and Dr. Karen Shalev-Greene and sent to hotlines

¹³ Director of the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons, University of Portsmouth

¹⁴ Abertay University

¹⁵ Dr. Penny Woolnough was unable to attend the kick-off meeting.



for missing children, who were identified as potential respondents for data collection by the Steering Group.

After the data collection and first analysis conducted by Missing Children Europe, with feedback from Dr. Karen Shalev-Greene, all hotlines were invited to a webinar on 30 November 2016 where **the results were presented**. The

purpose of this webinar was to validate the results of the data analysis and to get any available supplementary information from the hotlines. The 7 participating¹⁶ hotlines confirmed the findings of the aggregated data while also elaborating on key challenges. Their input was taken into account in this report alongside the survey data.

2.3 Target group: The network of '116 000' European hotlines for missing children

Given the limited resources for the project and the wide gap in knowledge on the impact of publicity appeals for missing children in Europe, the European hotlines for missing children [hereafter: 116 000 hotlines] were selected as a target group for the research.



The telephone number '116 000' was reserved for the purpose of a European hotline for missing children by the European Commission in 2007 as the first in a series of harmonized numbers for services of social values (EC Decision 2007/116/EC). It is, in the context of this Decision, up to the Member States' authorities to assign the number to an organisation.

The hotline service was further reinforced in 2009 through the Universal Service Directive

(2009/136/EC) which obliges Member States (art. 27a4) 'to make every effort to ensure that citizens have access to a service operating a hotline to report cases of missing children. The hotline shall be available on the number '116000'. Member States shall also (art. 27a3) 'ensure that citizens are adequately informed of the existence and use of services provided under the '116' numbering range, in particular through initiatives specifically targeting persons travelling between Member States.'

Today, the network of missing children hotlines is operated by national organisations in all EU countries as well as Switzerland, Serbia and Albania. Children and families calling the 116 000 hotline receive free, and immediate emotional, psychological, social, legal and administrative support 24/7 in cases of child disappearances. The hotlines aim to offer high quality services for missing children and their families before, during and after a child disappearance. The hotlines also cooperate with law enforcement authorities in most countries through official protocols of cooperation, thus acting as the contact point for families of missing children and the police officers responsible for investigations alike¹⁷.

Since 2011, the hotlines collectively received more than 850,000 calls from parents and

¹⁶Hotlines from the following countries participated: Austria, Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Serbia and the United Kingdom

¹⁷Quality of service may vary, depending on the organisation to which the number has been assigned by national authorities. Missing Children Europe's monitoring and accreditation work for hotlines for missing children constitutes an effort to support the harmonisation of service quality among the organisations, but is not a mandatory process



children about missing children cases. On average, 58% of these cases were children who ran away from home or care, 28% were of children abducted by a parent (either national or international abductions), 3% were of (unaccompanied) migrant children, 2% were abductions by a third person, and 8% were lost, injured or otherwise missing children¹⁸. With the aim to strengthen the network and the cross-border cooperation between the national hotlines, Missing Children Europe coordinated **several European Commission funded projects over the past years**.

While the European Commission has provided funding to set up and run the hotlines between 2011 – 2015, lack of financial resources remains one of the main challenges reported by the hotlines, who rarely benefit from national funding – despite obligations outlined in the Universal Service Directive.

Missing Children Europe also collects **annual**

data on the caseload of hotlines, which includes information on the age ranges, time-lapse of disappearance, type of disappearance, etc. as well as on the services provided by the hotlines and challenges faced. Information collected about the use of publicity appeals shows that in 2014, a publicity appeal was launched in 45% of cases. This increased to 71% in 2015. Online channels are often used to issue publicity appeals, with websites and social media campaigns making up 51% of all campaigns in 2014 and 71% in 2015. Posters are also a significant channel, and poster campaigns made up 26% of all campaigns in 2014 and 20% in 2015.

In light of their involvement in the area of publicity appeals in many countries as well as their frequent cooperation with law enforcement authorities, the hotlines were in a position to provide valuable information based on their caseload of missing children cases.

2.4 Method of data collection

Data was collected through an online survey using SurveyMonkey¹⁹. The survey was conducted in English and consisted of a combination of open-ended and closed questions, 67 in total. The majority of the questions were closed.

Upon a positive ethical review by the University of Portsmouth, participants in the Europe-wide network of hotlines were invited to participate through an email that explained the aim and methodology of the scoping exercise. All participants were notified in advance that their organisation may be identified by name in order to promote better communication between hotlines and advance sharing of information between agencies.

The survey identified the organisations by name and respondents by their general roles in order to encourage discussion about good practices and facilitate information sharing. No references were made to any personal information about specific cases.

The invited participants could reply between 13 July and 15 September 2016, and 2 reminders were sent.

Questions focused on 4 areas of a publicity appeal:

1. The decision-making process
2. Running a publicity appeal
3. Effectiveness of a publicity appeal
4. Impact on children and their families

Hotlines in 19 countries²⁰ provided data on their use of publicity appeals in missing children cases and the efficiency thereof. While only one survey response was requested per

¹⁸ See the definitions of missing children categories in (Ecorys, 2013)

¹⁹ See the full questionnaire via this link: <http://missingchildreneurope.eu/Portals/0/Docs/Public%20appeals%20survey.pdf>



hotline, hotline staff were strongly encouraged to collaborate when preparing their response. Therefore, at least 107 hotline staff members were involved in answering the survey questions. The hotlines were asked to gather information from multiple types of staff members

working at the hotline, the breakdown of staff types showed that half of the staff members who responded were case managers, a third were management staff, and the rest was mainly frontline staff but also volunteers, project managers and communication officers.

2.5 Methods of data analysis

The quantitative data was summarised by SurveyMonkey and the narrative was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a

qualitative method which allows for rich, detailed and complex description of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.6 Limitations of data collection

The survey was designed with certain objectives in mind, and with the awareness of the fact that an online survey has certain disadvantages as compared to interviews. The risks were mitigated as follows (Bryman, 2004):

Cannot prompt, probe or ask additional question: The survey questions were constructed to avoid double-barrelled or unclear questions so the information requested was clear as possible, and wherever it was deemed necessary, a text box was added to allow the respondents to add any extra information.

Questionnaire can be read as a whole: A pdf version of the whole survey was shared with the respondents in order to allow for collaboration on giving input to the survey. This means that none of the questions asked are truly independent of each other. Here, the benefit of getting input from more staff members from each participating organisation was deemed to outweigh this risk.

Respondent fatigue: The questionnaire was fairly long with 67 questions. A way to guard

against respondent fatigue was to share the survey in pdf to allow preparation and cooperation, and to include a majority of closed questions vis-à-vis open-ended questions. Finally, none of the questions were mandatory and allowed respondents to skip any question at any time.

Risk of missing data: The non-mandatory nature of the questions created a risk of missing data, but this was deemed to outweigh the consideration of respondent fatigue. Furthermore, some respondents simply may not have had the data to respond to each question.

Language: The fact that the questionnaire was in English could potentially have affected the level of detail received in the open-ended questions or the respondents' motivation to respond. However, it was not possible under the current scope to translate the questionnaire to all the relevant languages.

²⁰ The respondent countries were Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and United Kingdom



3 Results

The results for each section of the survey (decision-making process, running a publicity appeal, the effectiveness of a publicity appeal, and the impact of a publicity appeal) will be presented here, along with best practices and

challenges faced by hotlines. Concluding remarks and recommendations for stakeholders based on the results are collectively presented for all sections of the survey in chapter 4.

3.1 Decision-making process

3.1.1 Who initiates a publicity appeal and for what type of cases?

In 39% of reported cases, publicity appeals are initiated by police, followed by parents or carers (25%), hotlines (18%) and others (18%). The category 'Others' covers judicial authorities such as child prosecutors, shelters, child protection units, or when there is no standard procedure.

The decision to launch an appeal took into account the possible risk of the appeal to the child in most or all of the cases (73.7%). Out of these cases, an actual risk assessment was carried out in all or most cases (70.6%).

The main risk assessment criteria were 'safety of the child', 'impact on privacy' and 'effectiveness/usefulness'. The criteria were decided jointly by police with a weight of 50%, prosecutors (29%) and hotlines (21%).

According to the hotlines, most publicity appeals were launched for²¹ (ranked order²²):

1. Runaways
2. Lost, injured or otherwise missing children
3. Criminal abductions

It is worth bearing in mind here that runaway

cases make up the largest category of missing children cases registered by the hotlines across Europe. Since Missing Children Europe started collecting Europe-wide data about missing children in 2009, runaways have made up between 50 and 68% of the missing children cases recorded by the hotlines.

Reasons for NOT launching a publicity appeal (ranked order) were:

1. 'When **asked not** to launch an appeal'
2. 'When **not asked** to launch an appeal'
3. 'When there is a suspected crime involved (such as homicide)'
4. 'When a person is 'wanted' by authorities rather than 'missing''

Several hotlines also ticked the option 'When it is an immigration case'. The researchers felt the need to clarify why this response was given, since this could be understood as the hotlines never launching publicity appeals in cases of missing unaccompanied migrant children. This is not always the case, however, as subsequent follow-up emails and calls with the hotlines that ticked this box showed.

²¹ This study did not examine which cases receive most public attention, only the number of appeals launched.

²² The ranking was made by counting how many times each reason was given as the 'most used' reason for not launching a campaign'.



The Belgian hotline Child Focus stated that they rarely launch publicity appeals for missing unaccompanied migrant children because they often don't have enough information to launch an appeal, or because there are indications that the child is with family abroad. However, this does not mean that they never launch publicity appeals for this group of missing children, and they launch an average of 3 publicity appeals for missing unaccompanied migrant children each year.

The British hotline Missing People clarified that they understood an immigration case as 'the missing person is only wanted to be detained/sent back home for immigration reasons (...). However, this would only apply to adults not children as the fact the person is a child would always take priority in assessing them as vulnerable. So, migrant children would always be 'publicised'.

The Croatian hotline said that 'We do not launch publicity appeals unless a child has been marked as missing by the authorities (the police). Missing unaccompanied migrant children also need to be marked as missing by the police, and they usually are if they run away from asylum centres'.

The Italian hotline Telefono Azzuro explained that they face a number of practical challenges

regarding the launch of publicity appeals in cases of missing unaccompanied migrant children. There is often a big delay between when the child goes missing until Telefono Azzuro is notified of the disappearance. This is because the reception centre notifies the police first, and the police in turn notifies Telefono Azzuro. When Telefono Azzuro receives the notification about a missing unaccompanied migrant child from the police, it is often hard to get in touch with the child's legal guardian (in Italy, the mayor of the city where the UACs live is often appointed as their legal guardian). Without the consent of the child's legal guardian, Telefono Azzuro cannot launch an appeal. Finally, when Telefono Azzuro receives a notification from the police, there is most often no photo of the child attached, which is an essential element of a publicity appeal.

In sum, practices vary greatly from country to country regarding publicity appeals for missing unaccompanied migrant children, but the common denominator behind publicity appeals not being launched are practical obstacles and a lack of information about these children. Problems in terms of delayed or incomplete reporting of missing unaccompanied children as well as lack of clarity in roles and agency were **confirmed in earlier research** (Toscano & Shalev-Greene, 2016)²³.

²³ For further information on challenges related to management of cases of missing unaccompanied children, see http://missingchildreurope.eu/Portals/0/Docs/report_SUMMIT%20-%20Safeguarding%20Unaccompanied%20Migrant%20Minors_1mrt.pdf



Case from The Smile of the Child, the Greek hotline: Missing unaccompanied migrant child

On 30 November 2016 the police informed the 116000 hotline of an unaccompanied missing 17-year-old boy of Syrian origin whose case had been reported as missing the same day by a psychologist of The International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Due to the lack of proper shelter for children, the boy had been living alone in a camp in Skaramagkas in Athens under the supervision of IOM'S personnel. He went missing on 24 November 2016 following an interview meeting at the Embassy of the Netherlands regarding his already approved family reunification.

Following several communications with public authorities, the National Center of Direct Assistance (EKAB) informed the 116 000 hotline that the boy had been transferred to a hospital due to a medical issue on 25 November, however, without any concrete and further information. Subsequently and upon the order of the prosecutor The Smile of the Child immediately launched a publicity appeal following the standard procedures for missing children.

On the same day, on 30 November, the 116 000 hotline received a message via facebook from a woman who had seen the image of the missing boy on social media. She was accompanying a patient in a hospital and she informed the hotline that a young person in the clinic bore a strong resemblance to the missing boy.

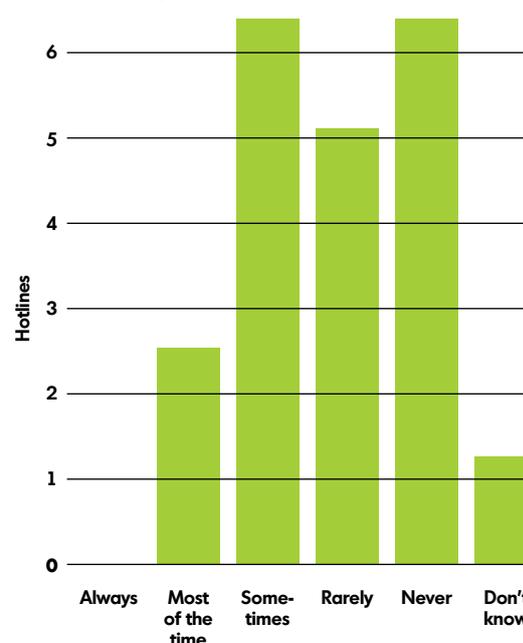
The hotline proceeded immediately with the cross check of the information, and with the help of an interpreter they verified in cooperation with the authorities that this person was indeed the missing boy who had been hospitalised on the day of his disappearance following a loss of consciousness.

The boy was released from the hospital accompanied by IOMS's personnel and was transferred to a shelter for children until his reunification following a referral by the National Center of Social Solidarity (EKKA).

3.1.2 Pressure to launch publicity appeals from family and police

Even though hotlines are not the most frequent initiators of publicity appeals, they do experience certain levels of external pressure to launch an appeal from the family of the missing child and the police. They experience more pressure to do this from family than from police, as shown in figures 1 and 2. In the first figure, 2 hotlines indicated that they experience pressure from the family of a missing child to launch a publicity appeal most of the time. 5 hotlines experience pressure from the family sometimes, and 4 hotlines rarely experience pressure from the family. In total, 11 hotlines experience pressure from family to a certain degree, whereas 5 hotlines never experience pressure from family.

Figure 1 – Do you experience pressure from family to launch a publicity appeal?



For instance, in Croatia, where the police service is the primary decision-maker, the hotline 'makes exceptions when parents call the hotline and give their permission for the hotline to make a publicity appeal and share the picture etc. of the missing child.'

In general, when hotlines experience pressure from family, publicity appeals requests are refused if it would have a negative impact on the child and/or on the police investigation. In cases of parental abduction, a request from family is refused if there is no proof that the child is in danger, or if the requesting parent has no parental authority over the missing child.

Figure 2 shows that 1 hotline always experiences pressure from police to launch a publicity appeals campaign and 2 hotlines rarely experience pressure from police. In total, 3 hotlines experience pressure from police to a certain extent, whereas 13 hotlines never

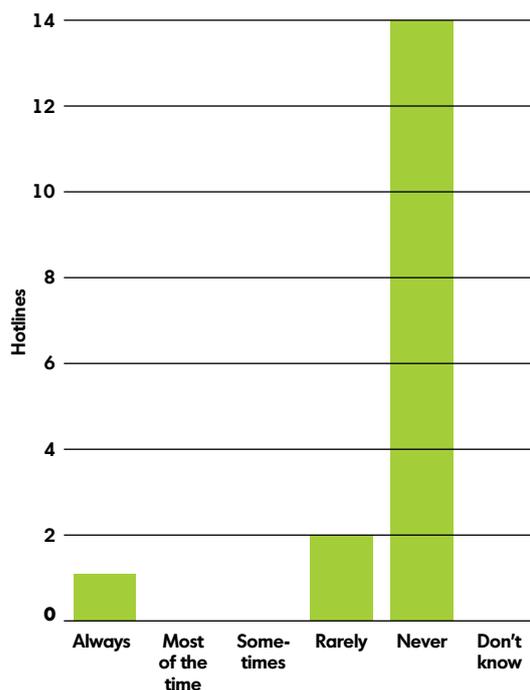
experience pressure from police to launch a publicity appeal.

When hotlines experience pressure from police, requests are refused if there could be a negative impact on the child or if the request is not in line with hotline criteria for launching an appeal.

It is important to note the context of the hotline that indicated that it always experiences pressure from the police. This is the UK hotline Missing People, and they further explained:

'We must have police permission to run an appeal - without this we would suggest a family contact the police themselves. We conduct appeals at police request, and we would not turn down a reasonable request. [However], we are not compelled to publicise for police, and we would discuss any concerns with them. We have criteria their requests must meet before we can launch an appeal.'

Figure 2 - Do you experience pressure from police to launch a publicity appeal?



3.1.3 Key findings regarding the decision-making process

In sum, the following key findings were collected about the decision-making process carried out among hotlines regarding whether to launch a publicity appeal or not.

Decision-maker: The police are an important stakeholder when it comes to the decision-making process since they initiate an appeal in 41% of the reported cases.

Main criterion: When deciding on whether to launch a publicity appeal or not, the main criteria used is the safety of the child. If launching a publicity appeal could be harmful for the child, no appeal is launched. In other words, appeals are launched where the risks faced by the child and the need to find them seem to outweigh the potential negative impact.

Who are publicity appeals launched for: The data shows that most publicity appeals are launched in cases of runaways.

Reasons for NOT launching a publicity appeal: The most used reasons for not launching a publicity appeal is if the hotline is specifically asked not to launch a publicity appeal (action taken: An appeal is actively unwanted for the particular case by the initiating actor), or if the hotline is not asked to launch an appeal (no action taken: The initiating actor does not ask the hotline to act).

External pressure on hotlines: Hotlines experience a certain degree of external pressure to launch a publicity appeal from the family of the missing child and the police, though most pressure comes from families.

3.1.4 Best practices in decision-making processes

Hotlines were asked about best practices in decision making processes regarding the launch of publicity appeals. Examples provided showed that publicity appeals can be clustered around three practices:

1. **Reviewing all possible information and taking all relevant parties into account:**

'Before launching a publicity appeal we consider all the data gathered by the reporting on the hotline. We evaluate the information, establish a connection with parents, police, prosecutors and other hotlines working with missing children. We also consider the impact of the publicity appeal. In collaboration with parents and police we take a decision' – ALO 116, the hotline in Albania.

'Every publicity appeal we launch is well assessed, in most cases we receive responses' – Child Focus, the hotline in Belgium.

2. **Discussing impact of publicity with family as well as police:**

'If asked by police to appeal for a missing and wanted person, we will only launch an appeal if the police agree that concern for the person's welfare outweighs their wanted status. We always aim to obtain consent from both police and family, and only go ahead with police permission. We have a variety of available channels, which makes it easier to appeal for vulnerable children' – Missing People, the hotline in the United Kingdom.

3. **Structuring the decision:**

The Belgian hotline Child Focus identified the need for developing a structured decision-making process to weigh the various issues at stake in launching an appeal. While no funding has been secured for such a project, the idea would be to create a so-called 'decision tree' as a structured way to make the decision of whether or not



to launch a publicity appeal. By answering key questions, the hotline staff could make an objective decision about what action would be most appropriate in a given case based on the criteria identified. This would ensure that the most useful criteria are applied in terms of effectiveness, safety of the child and other key parameters. While the need for structure is recognised throughout the network of hotlines and confirmed by the research at hand, the effort of developing such structures, eg. as a decision-tree, remains a challenge due to lack of time and resources.

3.1.5 Key challenges regarding the decision-making process

The hotlines mention several other practical challenges regarding the decision-making process. For instance, if the police play the main role, the decision of launching a publicity appeal is not up to the hotline. Furthermore, some hotlines have limited ability to distribute appeals because of the costs and efforts involved with the creation, distribution and ultimate removal of the appeal. These are relevant concerns and should be looked into, but they are ultimately questions of legal jurisdiction and resources respectively.

That aside, the general and very crucial challenge when deciding to launch a publicity appeal is how to ensure the best interest of the child (UNCRC art. 3) is respected. Two competing concerns must be balanced here: On the one hand, the potential life threat (UNCRC art. 6) facing the child as well as potential harm / violation of rights (UNCRC art. 9, 11, 19, 34, 35, 36) which may come from 'going missing'²⁴, which speaks for launching a publicity appeal to ensure the safe return of the child. On the other hand, the potential negative impact on the child caused by a publicity campaign, both during a missing incident and upon return

– (i.a. UNCRC art. 16) reinforced by the fact that the child cannot participate in the decision (UNCRC art.12).

While a missing child might be encouraged to make contact by seeing their own publicity appeal during a missing incident, a child might also react negatively and 'find effective ways to 'hide better', was a concern raised by The Smile of the Child, the hotline in Greece. There is a 'risk that an appeal would make them more vulnerable to victimisation (e.g. child sexual exploitation), a risk that it might affect their mental health, or that their mental health would cause them to react in a dangerous way to an appeal' was another concern expressed by Missing People, the British hotline.

Upon return, 'There is always the risk that after being found and returning for example to school, a child will suffer because of the behaviour of his or her school friends, who usually do not hesitate to mock children, who experience difficulties or are otherwise different' a concern raised by ITAKA, the hotline in Poland. The risk of stigmatisation is not only apparent for the child that was missing, but also for others involved such as their siblings.

Missing People further identifies the concern that the family might not be capable of understanding the consequences and appreciate the risk associated with a publicity appeal. This is important to notice because parents and carers are the second most frequent initiator of publicity appeals, and they exert the most external pressure towards the hotlines to launch publicity appeals. They do this at a time when they are in a very difficult and emotionally vulnerable position. To mitigate this, Missing People works with families to help ensure they are making informed decisions.

This only stresses the importance for there to be a clear system in place for making the decision regarding a publicity appeal in an informed way, whether this is decided by the police, the family and carers, the hotline or other actors. It is however evident, that identifying the right operational criteria is challenging, which is why best practices need to be shared among police forces and hotlines across Europe.

According to the report from the Dutch EU Presidency questionnaire on the use of citizens'

²⁴ Including sleeping rough (Moss, K., & P. Singh, 2014), sexual exploitation (Smeaton, 2013), trafficking (Toscano & Shalev-Greene, 2016), harm caused by separation of (one of the) parents, etc.



assistance²⁵ 'an assessment framework or a protocol can help countries to make correct, justified and proportionate use of citizens' assistance. However, the majority of Member States do not have a general framework or protocol in place to assess whether to involve citizens and if so what channel to use.'

Criteria and conditions to be taken into consideration when deciding the involvement of citizens in cases of missing persons included elements related to:

- > urgency,
- > fundamental rights of the victim (including privacy and the right to be forgotten),
- > whether it concerns a child or an adult,

- > or the level of vulnerability of the missing person,
- > authorisation or permission by the prosecution or a judge or, in case of children, by the parent or care taker,
- > law enforcement capacity, expertise and means needed to respond to responses,
- > frequency of appeals,
- > decisions relating to the acceptance (or not) of anonymous contributions,
- > availability of a media strategy,
- > possible risks for the investigation.

3.2 Running a publicity appeal

In this section, key practices about the running of publicity appeals will be presented, as well as practices on how to end appeals.

3.2.1 Who's involved?

While a publicity appeals campaign is usually initiated by one actor, several actors can be and often are involved with running the campaign. This was reflected in the replies given by the hotlines which for the most part mentioned the involvement of several actors, thereby providing an overview of the frequency with which each actor is involved on average. The most frequent actor involved is the police at 41%, followed by parents/carers (26%), other (hotline, social services, media, volunteers) (15%), judicial authorities (12%), and public transport authorities (6%).

3.2.2 Information and wording of appeals

The most commonly used pieces of information about the missing child used in publicity appeals are listed below, in descending order of frequency. There is little variation across the responding hotlines.

- > First name of missing child
- > Last name of missing child
- > Age of missing child
- > Region/Place where child was last seen
- > Date when child went missing
- > Picture of missing child
- > Phone number to call with information
- > Clothes child was wearing when he/shewent missing
- > Risk factor (vulnerable, high risk case, deeply concerned, etc.)
- > Date of birth of missing child

²⁵ Note from Presidency to the Working Party on Information Exchange and Data Protection (DAPIX), 7012/16



When discussing this list during the webinar with the hotlines and the task force after the initial data analysis, Dr. Lucy Holmes from Missing People drew attention to the fact that so many hotlines use the last name of the missing child in publicity appeals. The advantages of this practice should be weighed against the disadvantage it has, namely that it leaves a greater digital footprint than if only the child's first names were used in the appeal. Using the last name thus creates a greater risk for the child of long-term impact upon return. Dr. Holmes called the use of the last name of the child into question for this reason. The use of the first name only, as a way to mitigate risk, is a good practice already in use by the Greek hotline The Smile of the Child.

Regarding the wording used in publicity appeals, there is no common practice among the responding hotlines. 66% of responding hotlines use the same wording for all types of publicity appeals, while the rest responded that they change the wording according to the characteristics of the case, such as the data available, the circumstances, specific needs of the child like medication, or which manager is making the appeal.

The photos used in appeals are mainly obtained from police and family members. The main criteria when selecting a photo to use in a publicity appeal are that they are of high enough resolution, as recent as possible with a clear view of the child's face, and that the photo is not embarrassing to the child, stigmatising or offensive in any way.

In terms of hotline promotion, the most frequently used method of promoting the hotline on a publicity appeal is to 'include the hotline's contact number', followed by 'other' and 'adding a few words about the work of the hotline. Some hotlines also add their logo and/or name to the appeal (Latvia, Poland, Belgium) and some share information about a missing children app (Belgium).

3.2.3 Geographical scope

When it comes to the geographical scope of publicity appeals, the data given by the hotlines showed that national appeals are by far most frequently used, followed by local, regional and international appeals.

However, based on data from 3000 previous cases of missing persons of which the largest group were 12-17 year olds, the British Missing Persons Bureau state that

'In terms of distance travelled, 80% of them were found within 40 km. So it just tells you that 'missing' is a very local issue. They are most likely to be found very close by²⁶.'

Therefore, a thorough analysis of the effectiveness of publicity appeals could make it easier to target the appeals more specifically to local areas when an appeal with a limited geographical scope would suffice, thereby saving resources on unnecessary national appeals.

²⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19360824>



Cases of geographically limited appeals from Child Focus, the Belgian 116 000 hotline

When a child disappears, Child Focus doesn't always launch a campaign on a national scale, except on social media.

Before spreading 'vignettes' - discreet flyers which are not displayed in public places - they always consider together with the police where these flyers should be distributed in order to maximise the chances of finding the child.

Case 1: A is a 16-year-old girl. She has already run away several times in the last six months. She has run away again and a person who knows her saw her in the area of a specific metro station. We decide to distribute vignettes in the area around that station to people working in shops or in the metro and to the police staff who work in the metro. We ask them to look for the girl while working.

Case 2: K is a 14-year-old boy and mentally challenged. He didn't come back home after school. His parents are worried and report him missing to Child Focus and the police. This is a case of worrying disappearance. By tracking his mobile phone, the police observe that he is probably sitting on a train. Child Focus displays posters in all train stations along this specific train line, hoping that travellers will recognize the boy and call the police or the national helpline.

3.2.4 Channels used

Figure 3 – Dissemination channels per type of missing child

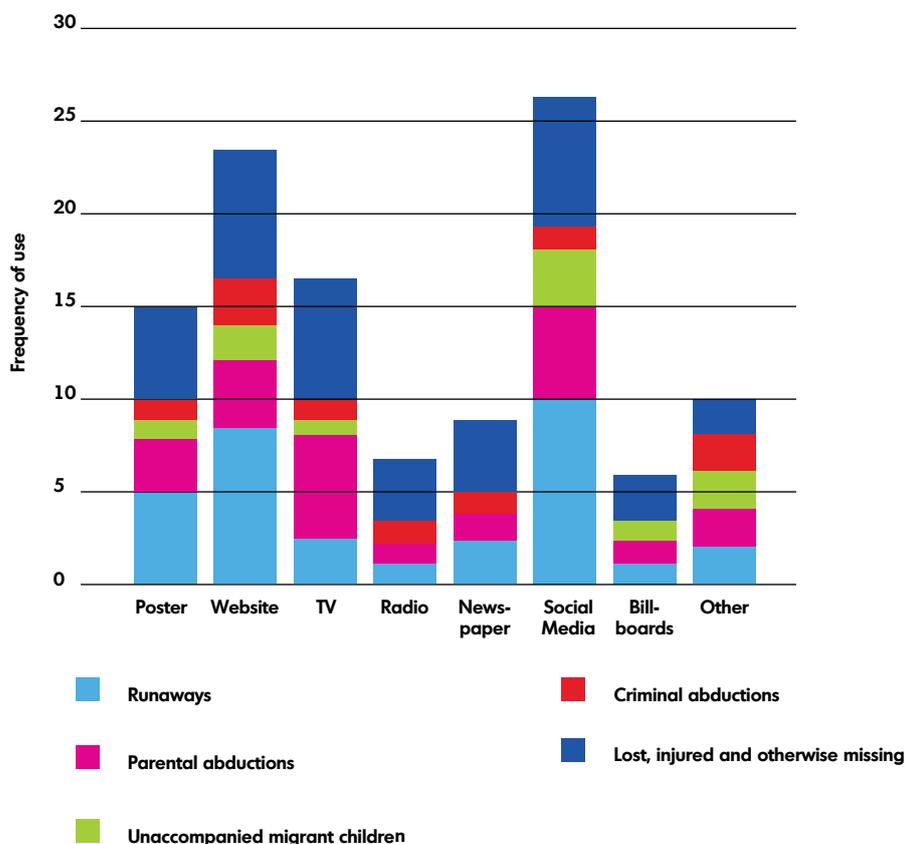


Figure 3 shows the frequency with which different channels were used to run publicity appeals in 2015. Some appeals used more than one channel to publicise for the same missing child, for instance through a combined poster and social media campaign.

The data shows that the most used dissemination channel for publicity appeals is social media, followed by websites, TV, posters,

newspaper, unspecified 'other', radio, and billboards.

According to the hotlines, the channels are chosen based on accessibility of the channel and relevance to the case at hand.

The responding hotlines stated that most of the monitoring of publicity appeals consisted of comments on social media and removal of negative comments if necessary and possible.

3.2.5 Ending the appeal

Figure 4 – Who makes the decision to 'stop' a publicity appeal?

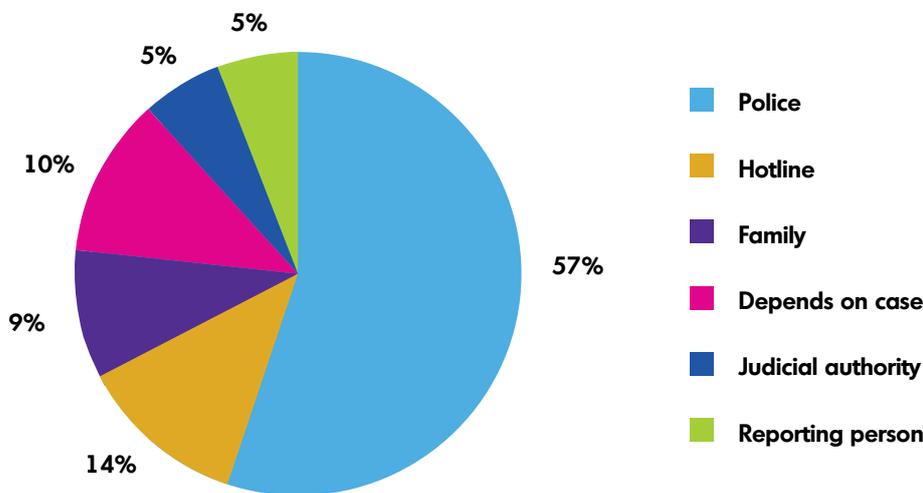


Figure 4 shows that in 57% of cases, the decision to stop a publicity appeal is made by the police, in 14% of cases by hotlines for missing children, in 10% of cases it depends on the case, in 9% of cases by the family, in 5% of cases by judicial authorities, and in the remaining 5% by the person who reported the missing child.

The most prevalent stop criteria given by the hotlines are:

- > Child is found
- > New risk assessment (appeal no longer in the best interest of the child)
- > If the reporting family members wish to stop appeal
- > If obliged to stop by police

The actions taken by the different hotlines during a publicity appeal vary across countries as well as cases. However, the actions taken can be summarised as in figure 5:



Figure 5: Summary of actions taken to stop an appeal

Summary of actions taken to stop an appeal:
1. Police/family notify of change of status (child found)
2. Hotline case database is updated (case closed)
3. Information removed from hotline's own channels
4. All associates are informed of the changed status and asked to remove information (family, police, cross border partners, the public)

While these hotlines and police are set up to remove information and images about missing children from their own channels once a child is found, important challenges remain as it is very difficult to make sure that images disseminated online by others, are completely removed from pages where they were shared because of the nature and ease of sharing content online. Thus, it is hard to make sure that all traces of a publicity appeal are completely removed when the child is found. The images and information which remain online (the 'digital footprints') is a core part of the negative impact experienced by former missing children, and ties into the recent case at the European Court of Justice about the 'Right To Be Forgotten' (C-131/12). This will be discussed in detail in section 4.4.1 on the impact of publicity appeals, including how some hotlines have started a

cooperation with Google to remove URLs referring to former missing children cases.

3.2.6 Appeals launched by other stakeholders

Publicity appeals are sometimes launched by someone other than the hotline (experienced by 70% of responding hotlines). These appeals are typically launched by family, friends, and police. For 37% of the responding hotlines, these appeals are 'sometimes helpful', whereas 43% of the responding hotlines weren't sure if these appeals were helpful.

Hotline reactions to these other appeals vary. They may contact the source, check with police regarding the legality of the appeal, or just monitor the appeals.

While there are typically no solid or institutionalised policies in place for how to handle these non-commissioned appeals, hotlines most often carry out the following steps on top of the reactions mentioned above: They identify the source; check if a risk assessment has been conducted, and if not, advise against the appeal; and re-share if agreed upon by the police.

Even when these steps are carried out by hotlines it is hard to control or stop appeals by private persons, and the practice of appealing to the broad public's willingness to help a parent whose child is missing is sometimes abused in fake appeals.

In the world of 'fake news', hoaxes about missing children are still a daily reality, the cost of which has not been measured.



Case of fake publicity appeal in Sweden with detrimental impact on the children involved²⁷

A father published a photo of his missing children on facebook and asked for help finding them. Thousands helped sharing the post and finally one person recognized the children and let him know where to find them.

However, this was not an appeal linked to a hotline or the police, and the missing information was that the mother was living under protection and with a new identity after leaving the father. Since he had found out where she and the children were, the mother and children were forced to move again – to a women's shelter.

'The worst case scenario is that you contribute to someone being beaten, raped or killed. You have to think twice before sharing this type of searches for missing people on Facebook', says Lotta Sonemalm, at The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres, (SKR).

Women who are given protected identities all live under threat.

'It can be violence in close relationships, criminal gangs that you wish to leave and women who have been subjected to honour violence', Lotta Otterdal, at Frida Women's Shelter told radio show P4 Extra.

Swedish police also warn against sharing posts about missing people on social media.

'If a person living under a protected identity has their whereabouts revealed it results in catastrophic consequences for the person in question,' says criminal investigator Anders Ahlqvist in an article in the magazine Dagens Juridik.

²⁷ <http://www.metro.se/artikel/secret-identity-blown-after-plea-on-facebook-xr>



3.2.7 Key findings regarding the running of a publicity appeal

In sum, the following key findings are reported about running a publicity appeal:

Information included in a publicity appeal:

Among the responding hotlines there is a general agreement on what pieces of information to include in a publicity appeal, although the practice of using a missing child's last name is questioned because of the risk of leaving greater digital footprints than if only the first name of the child was mentioned.

Hotline promotion: Hotlines most often promote their services by placing their contact number on the appeal and mentioning the hotline in media.

Geographical scope: Most appeals are national in scope, followed by local, regional and international.

Channels used: The most used channels of dissemination are social media, websites and posters. This choice depends on accessibility and estimated usefulness of the channel.

Appeals launched: Most appeals were launched for runaways, followed by missing unaccompanied migrant children, with parental abductions and lost, injured and otherwise missing children sharing a 3rd place.

Stopping an appeal: Most of the time, it is the police who decides when to stop a publicity appeal. However, some hotlines do have a set of stop criteria and a set of actions they take to stop an appeal.

Appeals launched by others: Publicity appeals were often launched by agencies other than the hotlines, and the hotlines took steps to consult with the source, check whether a risk-assessment had been made, follow up to check legality, and to monitor these appeals. Controlling the validity of these appeals and the removal of identifying information upon the return of the child is however extremely difficult.

3.2.8 Best practices in running a publicity appeal

1. Practical tools used during a publicity appeal:

1. **'The European Child Alert Automated system;** the SMS platform through which citizens can register themselves to be informed about missing children; MOUs with authorities involved; activation of the Search and Rescue Team 'Thanasis Makris', cooperation with Facebook in cases of Amber Alerts, collaboration with private sector and social companies' were mentioned as several tools used by The Smile of the Child, the hotline in Greece
2. **'TextSafe® - Letting people away from home know we're here and can help'**

What is it?

The hotline sends this text message to missing people: Have you run away? Please get in touch for free 24/7 confidential support. Call 116000 or text 116000. www.missingpeople.org.uk

What does it do?

- > Offers missing children and adults the opportunity to contact Missing People and then explore their options
- > Text message sent to their mobile phone
- > Always initiated by police but sent by Missing People – Can reach higher risk cases where child is not comfortable with police involvement
- > Anonymity preserved

How does it work?

- > Police confirm consent from parents guardian of the missing child
- > Police send an e-mail to Missing



People with specially formatted subject line which includes the telephone number (usually invisible to Missing People's staff)

- › Missing People's system automatically sends a message to the child's phone – no humans are personally involved

What next?

- › If there is a response then a case is automatically created on Missing People's case management system, Hermes, identifying it with a service ID – the telephone number is hidden
- › Anonymity is preserved unless until the child wishes to reveal his/her identity (just like any other case)
- › Free of charge to police in the UK
- › It is not a way for police to contact a missing child

Evaluation:

Number of people to whom a TextSafe message was sent:

- › 2011/12 - 504
- › 2012/13 - 672
- › 2013/14 - 1,115
- › 2014/15 - 4,945
- › 2015/16 - 10,502
- › 2016/17 - 32,265

There is an increase in the number of safe reconnections

'One of the biggest influences [on the large increase in TextSafe messages] is that we worked with one of the computer software companies that the police use to embed our referral process into their systems so that police could access our services either automatically or at the click of a button.

We also put resources into providing awareness raising sessions by dedicating 'Partnership Coordinators' whose roles

involved attending regional meetings, presenting to police forces and sharing best practice'. - Becca Padbury, Development and partnerships manager at Missing People

2. Disseminating and monitoring: 'Spreading information via email to media and other relevant institutions' was something done by ITAKA, the hotline in Poland. 'Monitoring dedicated police websites and relevant press daily' was mentioned by Telefono Azzuro, the hotline in Italy.

3. Assisting the search: 'Our best practice is that we are always available in the field to be involved in the physical search activity in case there is information about a missing person, which came in from a publicity appeal. We react very quickly to all possible information and gather a lot of volunteers, e.g. 500-2000 volunteers to participate in search activities' explained Bezvests.lv, the hotline in Latvia.

4. Cooperating with partners: Missing People has a variety of available channels, which makes it easier to appeal for vulnerable children:

1. The '**Support Partner Network**' (SPN): A good practice example that helps to find missing people without many of the potentially negative impacts of publicity. The Support Partner Network is a national network of over 700 support and safeguarding organisations around the UK (such as homeless shelters and community health services) who Missing People can send briefings about a missing person to when a public appeal for that person is not felt to be appropriate (e.g. if publicity could make the missing person more vulnerable). Instead of a public appeal, we can send a non public briefing to relevant Support Partners which includes the missing person's photo and name and Missing People's contact details. The briefing asks their staff and volunteers to be aware of this missing person who might access their support service. If the missing person does access their service, the Support Partner can report the sighting to the police or Missing



People charity and/or can offer tailored support to the missing person and signpost them to Missing People's helpline for further support. This service has helped to find a number of vulnerable missing people.

2. **Royal Mail:** Missing People have a partnership with the Royal Mail which includes them sending high risk appeals to all their handheld devices, carried by post men and women out delivering mail.
3. **Digiboards:** Missing People have a partnership with outdoor media companies (eg. JC Decaux, Primesight etc.) to include missing person appeals on digital advertising billboards. These are regionally specific, instant and in areas with high volume exposure. The wording on their missing child posters does not ask for information or sightings, but appeals directly to the missing child, asking them to get in touch. They don't include personal information about risks or behaviours. They don't use language designed to tug at heartstrings

3.2.9 Key challenges regarding the running of a publicity appeal

The challenge mentioned above regarding ensuring the best interest of the child and weighing the utility vs. the risk of a publicity appeal naturally also applies when running an appeal.

Apart from this key challenges, the hotlines experience several practical challenges when running an appeal. These challenges mainly concern reaching the right audience with an appeal, controlling the dissemination and accuracy (during and after a missing episode), and the structural limitation faced by the hotline if the police is in charge of all the information related to publicity appeals.

Furthermore, the cost of running a publicity appeal is a great challenge. Hotlines and police in charge of missing children investigations receive numerous responses from a lot of people. Resources are needed to collect, document and follow up on responses that may not help in finding the child eventually, but which nevertheless must be taken seriously and looked into when investigating a case. This is very resource heavy for police, hotline staff and others who assist in the running of publicity campaigns.

3.3 Effectiveness of a publicity appeal

The information collected in the survey about the effectiveness of publicity appeals will be presented in this section.

However, the knowledge about the effectiveness of publicity appeals is limited because almost no research has been done in this area, meaning that there is no analysis of the best geographical scope, the best channel, the best content of an appeal, etc. The empirical data given in the survey from the hotlines reflect this lack of general research, and most practices are developed on an ad-hoc

basis in the national context rather than being evidence-based practices which are shared across Europe.

It is worth noting that according to the report from the Dutch EU Presidency questionnaire on the use of citizens' assistance²⁸ 'Most of the Member States were positive about the effectiveness of citizens' assistance in missing person

²⁸ Note from Presidency to the Working Party on Information Exchange and Data Protection (DAPIX), 7012/16



cases. Eleven Member States consider the effectiveness of citizens' assistance high or average to high with regard to missing person's cases. Five Member States designated citizens' assistance low or low to average in effectiveness, one Member State rated the effectiveness average. Four Member States consider the use and effectiveness of citizens' assistance as strongly dependent on case specific circumstances, other Member States weren't able to rate the effectiveness.'

3.3.1 The aims of publicity appeals

The overarching aim of a publicity appeal is finding the child. More specific aims given are listed below. The first three aims are those that are most often achieved. The last three are only sometimes achieved, according to the responding hotlines.

Aims:

- > Responses, new data about the missing child, reports of sightings
- > Reassure the family, informant, police, public that everything is being done to find the child
- > Raise awareness of the issue of missing children and the services offered
- > To encourage the missing child to get in touch so they can be safeguarded
- > To 'make real' or memorialise the child, ensure they are not forgotten

"Our son went missing in 2007 and we have had no news of him since then. I have supported the notfound.org idea since its inception as I think it will genuinely help to re-unite families with missing loved-ones. Since the 404 page app is absolutely free and easy to apply, I wish every website in the world would include it. It is such a good idea and also brings hope that perhaps someone someday will see our own son on there and have an answer or clue about what happened to him"

Kevin Gosden, father of a missing boy

- > The hotlines collect the following information about the effectiveness of publicity appeals:
- > Registration of phone calls/contacts to the hotline regarding the case
- > Response from the public, sharing, comments
- > Whether the appeal led to responses, whether the responses helped to resolve the case (not always possible)
- > Feedback from the reporting families
- > Feedback from police

In sum, the effectiveness of publicity appeals is for the most part unknown. As far as effectiveness is estimated by the hotlines, the most effective channels are social media, websites, TV and posters. Again, data shows that appeals are deemed most effective in cases of runaways. This might be related to the previously mentioned fact that runaways make up the largest group of missing children, and therefore more publicity appeals are launched for them, resulting in the actors having more experience with appeals for runaways and therefore deeming them more effective.

3.3.2 Key findings regarding the effectiveness of a publicity appeal

Even though the general aim of finding the child, as well as the operational aims of publicity appeals, are clear, measuring the effectiveness of publicity appeals is still a challenge for all the hotlines.

3.3.3 Best practices in measuring the effectiveness of a publicity appeal

A limited number of best practices were shared by the hotlines about how to measure the effectiveness of a publicity appeal

1. National evaluations of the campaign measuring how many people were reached, how clear the message was, etc.



2. The use of social media monitoring tools
3. Monitoring of media
4. Family feedback surveys

3.3.4 Key challenges regarding the effectiveness of a publicity appeal

The general challenge regarding the effectiveness is that of causality - namely that it is hard to measure whether the publicity appeal led to the identified aims. It is not only difficult to measure the substantial results of a publicity appeal, it is also both difficult and costly to measure dissemination. Furthermore, there is a challenge in measuring the accuracy of the received information, and finally the hotlines sometime face a challenge regarding confidentiality – the police can't always share the outcomes of appeals.

3.4 Impact of a publicity appeal

This section will present the data on the impact of publicity appeals. As with the effectiveness, the data here is rather limited, indicating that this topic is under-researched. Missing children and their families could benefit from further light being shed on the impact of publicity appeals because better knowledge could minimise negative short and long term impact and also enhance the effectiveness.

The impact of publicity appeals is mostly taken into consideration while the child is missing, rather than upon return (this is the case for both short term and long term impact), and the survey also shows that the impact is

discussed more with family than with police.

There is not much knowledge about the impact of publicity appeals upon return. 93% of the responding hotlines do not systematically collect information on impact. Most hotlines do however provide aftercare to children and their families following a publicity appeal.

The information given by the hotlines can be found in figures 6 and 7. Through the quotes, the hotlines express the impact of publicity appeals on children and family members in the short and long term. Hotlines were asked to distinguish between positive and negative impact.



Figure 6 - Impact on children

Impact on: Children			
Short term		Long term	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Public support/ Encouragement to child (Belgium)	Gossip, threats, insults on social media (Belgium)	It reduces the risk of running away again (Greece)	Certain requests on right to be forgotten: In the last years we were contacted by three young people asking us if it was possi- ble to remove their data related to their disappearance found on online newspapers (Belgium)
Relief and positive surprise with parents (Greece)	The child feels embar- rassed and exposed towards schoolmates, not wanting to return to school (Greece)	More services are involved in taking care of the child afterwards (Latvia)	We have had people asking about digital footprint and right to know (UK)
More care by third parties, eg. school ad- ministration and peers (Latvia)	Increased attention to the child and family from the public (Latvia)		Even if we remove the image from the social media it is not easy to control other sources and sites and this could probably have a negative impact on the child's life (Greece)
Child sees appeal including message for them and goes on to contact Missing People's 24/7 Runaway Helpline for support and help to get safe (UK)	The only feedback we ever seem to get spon- taneously is that they didn't like the photo. Some say they have seen it and appreci- ate why it was done, many though don't consider themselves as missing so the publicity is viewed as more of an annoyance than anything (UK).		

Figure 7 - Impact on family

Impact on: Family			
Short term		Long term	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Public support/ encouragement (Belgium)	Gossip, threats, insults (Belgium)	Improved relationship among family members (Greece)	Concerns can be raised about 'Googling' and the footprint the missing episode can leave. This could be seen as negative when thinking long term but this thinking is usually balanced with the benefits it produced in the short term (UK)
Family members feel grateful (Greece)	Feeling of shame towards the community (mostly in small communities) (Greece)	Families know that people are still searching for their missing loved one (UK)	
Help could be provided to family (Latvia)	Increased attention towards the family (Latvia)		
Families know that the public is aware of their missing loved one and is joining their search (UK)			



Case from ITAKA, the Polish 116 000 hotline, on the impact of publicity appeals in cases of parental abduction

'We received information from parents in some cases, that having the picture of their child in public has had a negative aftermath for the child. The information came from both sides - the abducting parent, and the left behind parent (after he or she got his or her child back). Some victims of a parental abductions case (the ones that I think about were between 8 and 14 years) were - despite the removal of the picture from ITAKA's homepage - recognised by other children from school, or information about the search for them as a missing child was found on the Internet. The children were bullied by their classmates, which even forced the parent to change the child's school.

But even after changing schools it continued to happen. Information could be found on the internet and the same situation kept being repeated. These are situations from about 5-6 years ago - shortly after the time, when ITAKA had started to deal with parental abduction cases.

Therefore, ITAKA changed its policy towards going public with pictures in parental abduction cases - today we still have this option, but we inform the parents about possible negative effects of such actions and advise the left behind parents to use this method - if at all necessary - only as a last resort. We also take care of other information related to a case, which may appear on other homepages. When we find information of a case of parental abduction, that went public and has been closed (and removed from ITAKA's homepage), we contact the particular media to remove the info about the child, especially the picture. Unfortunately it doesn't always work and we are not able to force anyone to remove content from their pages' – Grzegorz Kostka, staff member at ITAKA

3.4.1 The Right to Be Forgotten

The problem of publicity appeals for missing children leaving lasting digital footprints about their missing episode ties into the so-called 'Right to be Forgotten', which is a ruling by the European Court of Justice (C-131/12).

In 2010 a Spanish citizen lodged a complaint against a Spanish newspaper with the national Data Protection Agency and against Google Spain and Google Inc. The citizen complained that an auction notice of his repossessed home on Google's search results infringed his privacy rights because the proceedings concerning him had been fully resolved for a number of years and hence the reference to these was entirely irrelevant. He requested, first, that the newspaper be required either to remove or alter the pages in question so that the personal data relating to him no longer appeared; and second, that Google Spain or Google Inc. be required to remove the personal data relating to him, so that it no longer appeared in the search results²⁹.

In 2014 the Court ruled on several issues in the case, but of relevance here is the part on the 'Right to be forgotten'. The Court ruled that individuals have the right - under certain conditions - to ask search engines to remove links with personal information about them. This applies where the information is inaccurate, inadequate, irrelevant or excessive for the purposes of the data processing (para 93 of the ruling). The court found that in this particular case the interference with a person's right to data protection could not be justified merely by the economic interest of the search engine. At the same time, the Court explicitly clarified that the right to be forgotten is not absolute but will always need to be balanced against other fundamental rights, such as the freedom of expression and of the media (para 85 of the ruling). A case-by-case assessment is needed considering the type of information in question, its sensitivity for the individual's private life and the interest of the public in having access to that information. The role the person requesting the deletion plays in public life might also be relevant.

²⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/files/factsheets/factsheet_data_protection_en.pdf



Case: 9 year-old girl missing in the UK

A 9-year-old girl disappeared after a swimming trip with her school in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, on 19 February 2008. Her mother reported her missing after she failed to return home as expected. The police announced that they had started a massive search involving more than 200 officers as concern grew for the missing girl. Her mother made a plea for her return and posters featuring the girl's picture were put up around the neighbourhood. A day later nearly 200 volunteers joined police in their hunt for the girl. Over the course of the next few days the mother issued an emotional public appeal for the girl's return on the eve of Mother's Day.

The operation, involving 250 police officers costing over £3.2m, became one of the most high profile missing person's inquiries ever seen in Britain and received intense media coverage by the British and international press.

Twenty-four days after her disappearance, the girl was found alive under a bed in a house owned by the uncle of the mother's partner, less than a mile from her home. She had been drugged and tethered in the flat where she was found. It eventually emerged she had been kidnapped by her own mother and that the pair plotted to claim the £50,000 reward money put up by the press for the youngster's return. The girl is one of seven children which the mother had by five different fathers. This girl was chosen because she was a girl and she was more photogenic, maximising the financial reward. The mother and her partner were later convicted for their involvement in the kidnapping, false imprisonment, and perverting the course of justice³⁰.

Following that, the girl was given a court-appointed new identity and welcomed into a new family. Now, that little girl, whose face was seen all over in newspapers and TV, due to her mother's lies, is an 18-year-old woman.

In February 2017, 9 years after her ordeal, The BBC released, without the girl's consent, a drama called 'The Moorside' based on the case. The programme focuses on the mother's friend, who orchestrated the hunt for the girl. The BBC, defending the programme stated that 'This drama is not focused on the girl herself. Her abduction is not portrayed, nor are her experiences during the time she was missing. The drama tells the story of the women who led the campaign to find her³¹.'

The girl's grandparents who have not seen her since she was placed with a new family, made a public statement saying: 'What happened to her was a trauma, a tragedy. It is sick and disgusting that it is being turned into a TV show. It isn't entertainment. It's real life and it hasn't even been 10 years since it happened'.

'If she sees it, she is old enough now to understand that it is about her. She will know it is about the terrible things that happened to her. How is that fair? 'It will upset her. They shouldn't be dragging up the past and what happened. It should be left in the past'³².

³⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7733586.stm>

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/feb/06/bbc-defends-tv-drama-moorside-search-shannon-matthews>

³² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/38880114/shannon-matthews-grandparents-call-new-bbc-drama-sick-and-disgusting>



This case highlights a number of important issues. First, a public appeal for a missing child is always launched without the child's consent. Yet, once found, the child must live with the consequences of their image being in the public domain. This illustrates the potential negative long term impact of launching a publicity appeal. Second, once the images are in the public domain, the child does not seem to have the legal right to control the use of those images. This denies a child, the right to be forgotten

and potentially further traumatises her. Third, once a name and image of a child are made public there is a real challenge to remove pictures and articles that were published online. It also highlights the role of the press in making it hard to move on after a missing incident and raises the question about how the ruling by the European Court about 'the right to be forgotten' can be reinforced to ensure a child who is found can choose to resume their anonymity and protect their identity.

Case from Missing People, the British hotline, 17-year-old runaway girl

A 17-year old girl was last seen by her grandmother at her home address, where she had been staying after a dispute with her mother. After leaving to apparently visit a friend, the girl did not return home. She was at known risk of sexual exploitation

At the request of the police and family members, Missing People distributed posters via poster partners as well as online publicity via social media and the charity's website. As time went on, an appeal was placed by Missing People in the girl's local newspaper to further raise awareness and assist the search. Fortunately, a month after she went missing, a police officer called to say that the girl had returned to her grandmother's house safe and well. It transpired that the girl had seen her online appeal circulated by Missing People, which then prompted her to return home.

3.4.2 Key findings regarding the impact of a publicity appeal

Only very limited information is collected by hotlines on the impact of publicity appeals. However, certain examples of impact have been identified for missing children and their families, short term and long term, positive and negative.

3.4.3 Good practices in measuring the impact of a publicity appeal

Despite the limited knowledge about the impact of publicity appeals, some promising practices have been identified among the hotlines, and they are presented here.

> Example of good practice from Child Focus, the Belgian hotline

'Integrating the right to be forgotten in Child Focus' operational work'

Why?

Child Focus sees the RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN in the broader context of the 'desaffichage', which basically means taking down posters, flyers, or online posts regarding the disappearance of a child: the impact of being confronted with images and stories of a painful situation from the (recent) past for children that went missing and their relatives is not to be underestimated. That is why Child Focus wants to help the children and their families to assert their right to be forgotten by informing and helping them with the application to Google, the end goal of this being the dereference of the links to their stories in Google search results.

What?

Child Focus has yet to put this into practice, but the procedure was nevertheless already tested through a pilot project. This is the procedure that would need to be implemented; a few months after a disappearance was in one way or another resolved, and where the disappearance was the subject of a public call for responses, the case manager does a follow-up with the family to ask about how they



are doing after the disappearance. This is what Child Focus already does today in some cases. Informing them about the right to be forgotten would now be added to this follow-up, which would mean that in just one follow-up conversation a double goal is served: doing a post factum and informing the family about and assisting with the right to be forgotten.

- > The case manager asks whether the family is interested in making the request to Google
- > If indeed the family would like to exercise their right to be forgotten, two options are available:
 - > the case manager refers them to Child Focus' website where all the steps to be taken are clearly explained

> the case manager handles the request for them

How?

- > Via an online form https://support.google.com/legal/contact/lr_eudpa?product=websearch
- > Procuration and copy ID card
- > Including all the URLs that refer to the case
- > Specify the reason: for example: the fact that this has a major impact on the child. Even if the information is not outdated, it is no longer relevant. Missing children do not choose to be exposed online about a difficult period in their lives. In the interests of recovery, future ...

Case from Child Focus, the Belgian hotline, on removing digital footprints from Google

G, 14 years old, went missing for several days at the end of 2015. It was a case of a worrying disappearance as he had never run away before and gave no sign of life. His disappearance was completely contrary to his usual behaviour. A large-scale campaign was launched in order to find him and the media brought a lot of attention to this disappearance. He was found safe and sound. Several months later, we contacted his parents and asked them whether they wanted the online articles about this disappearance to be deleted and whether they needed help doing this. They were very enthusiastic about it and didn't know that it was even possible. Child Focus submitted through proxy a request to Google in order to 'dereference' 14 URLs that were linked to G's disappearance. Our request was the following:

'All the aforementioned URLs are related to a person who went missing and for whom a large campaign was launched on x/x/15 in order to find him. He and his parents have asked Child Focus, the organisation who supported this campaign, to delete search results, as he was found safe and sound three days later and the links were therefore obsolete.'

He also prefers not to have to face this difficult episode again in his life and it could have a negative impact on his projects in the future, because his name online will remain linked to this disappearance.

The request was approved and all the links deleted.

> Examples of good practice from Missing People, the British hotline

'Aftercare service upon return of a missing person'

Aftercare is a service provided by Missing People available in Wales, funded by Big Lottery Wales. Through the Aftercare service

we are able to proactively reach out to families when their loved one returns from a missing episode.

The outline of the service is as follows:

Aftercare is a service offered to missing people and their families upon point of return from a missing episode. The returned missing person is able to receive the correct support to address their reasons for leaving. Additionally, the



family receive support to address the anxiety of their loved one going missing and the range of emotions felt when their loved one returns. Although the return of a loved one is extremely positive, many families struggle to have the important conversation of why the person left. Families also worry about their loved one going missing again. Through our intervention, the hope is that we improve communication within the family unit to pre-empt any further missing episodes. The Aftercare service is a confidential space for the whole family to receive support individually.

Aftercare can provide a tailor-made care plan to suit the needs of the individual (up to three months) and offer support whilst signposting the individual or family to the correct organisations. Through Aftercare we ensure that the individual and their family can access vital on-going support at such a crucial time.

'Return Home interviews'

Missing People have developed a template

for carrying out interviews with missing people upon return. The template identifies a long list of questions to map out what happened and risk factors the person was exposed to before, during and after a missing incident. It also assesses the current risk of the returned person and identifies which follow-up actions have been planned.

3.4.4 Key challenges regarding the impact of a publicity appeal

The hotlines identified a few challenges and risks regarding the impact of publicity appeals, such as the child's exposure in public places, no long-term post facto relationship with victim/environment, and tension if the family didn't want publicity but the police did. Finally, the right to be forgotten was stressed again by several hotlines as a main challenge.



4 Conclusion and recommendations

The analysis of the existing literature and the data obtained from the 116 000 hotlines gathered in this report confirm that the use of publicity appeals in cases of missing children is a common practice. However, the findings also show that significant challenges remain in the effort towards ensuring more effective practices when running publicity appeals as well as how to steer clear of negative impacts for the missing children and their families upon return of the missing child.

Benefits of effective publicity appeals

Challenges such as the limited ability of people to recognise a person based on the picture in a publicity appeal and the ever-present question of whether an appeal played a significant role in finding a child only add to the urgency of developing a more robust and objective framework for launching publicity appeals for missing children. The benefits of more effective publicity appeals would be at least two-fold. First and foremost, more targeted and evidence-based processes in deciding and running publicity appeals would contribute to achieving the main objective of bringing more missing children to safety. Secondly, it would ensure that resources at the agencies involved in running publicity appeals (such as police and hotlines) were spent in a more cost-efficient manner – thus enhancing the management of public resources.

Mitigating the negative impacts in a digital age

While the potential for immediate positive impacts of publicity appeals for children and their families are clear (children returning or being found because of the appeal), the challenge remains of how to protect children and their families from the negative effects in the short and long term. For formerly missing children and

their families, attempting to control their own digital footprint by requesting that Google remove certain links that refer to their missing incident is a step in the right direction. However, it is only useful once the potential harm is already done. The 'Right to be forgotten' ruling makes it possible to remove the top of the iceberg of online references to a case. But to get to the root of the problem, we must stimulate a critical and respectful mindset across the board. As seen in one of the cases mentioned in the report, it can be very hard for a former missing child to put the past behind her/him if the media continues to keep the story alive years after the fact. Private persons who uncritically share publicity appeals without checking the source can inadvertently share fake appeals by parents who are trying to track down children over whom they no longer have custody. And in schools, children will sometimes bully those who have been abducted by a parent, not realising that in doing so, they are re-traumatising the abducted children and preventing them from moving on.

In other words, everyone can contribute to being smarter about how we publicise for missing children: The media, the general public, children's peers, and police agencies, hotlines and everyone else who is involved in the running of publicity appeals for missing children.

Better informed, evidence-based decision-making could prevent harm, and this study merely scratched the surface of the issue. There is an essential need for further in-depth research in order to meet the challenges faced today by hotlines, police, missing children, families and everyone else involved in or affected by a publicity appeal, whether it is online or offline.

Missing Children Europe and the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons at University of Portsmouth put forward the following



operational recommendations. The recommendations are directed at practitioners in the field of publicity appeals for missing children including hotlines, law enforcement, judicial authorities, and other relevant actors. They may however also be of use for institutions and

agencies at the European level and international level who craft or support policies and practices relating to missing children, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, Europol and Interpol.

4.1 Recommendations regarding the decision-making process

1. Identify criteria (decision tree) and disseminate systems that work: Clear systems must be set up, with a focus on identifying criteria to weigh the relevant concerns against one another to determine the best interest of the child. Such clear systems should then be shared among all actors involved in the decision making process across Europe.
2. Acknowledge and utilise the central role and expertise of the hotlines: Because of their *raison d'être*, the scope of their work and their hands on experience, the hotlines are especially well-placed to provide the support which can be crucial to families and/or police when deciding whether or not to launch a publicity appeal based on the best interest of the child. The hotlines should therefore be systematically involved in these decisions, also when the police are the ultimate decision-maker, as well as all actors involved in publicity appeals (judicial authorities, families, children).
3. Following from the above recommendations, a special focus should be made to involve children in defining the decision-making process (CRC art. 12 on the right to be heard in decisions affecting them). Feedback from children will be invaluable because they are the ones affected the most and for whom publicity appeals are launched in the first place.

4.2 Recommendations regarding the running of a publicity appeal

Since the experiences are so different in running publicity appeals across countries, it is recommended to make it possible for the hotlines and other relevant agencies to not

only share best practices and learn from each other, but also to have resources allocated for further research.



4.3 Recommendations regarding the effectiveness of a publicity appeal

In order to maximise return on invested resources in publicity appeals, it is recommended to allocate resources to measuring the effectiveness of different types of campaigns and to encourage evaluation in a more systematic and thorough way. This is specifically relevant

in light of the limited resources and the fast-paced constant work load of the hotlines, also bearing in mind that the focus often moves away from a publicity appeal once it has been stopped so hotline staff can deal with more urgent tasks.

4.4 Recommendations regarding the impact of a publicity appeal

1. More research is needed to shed light on the short and long term impact of publicity appeals on former missing children and their families to better protect them from the potential negative consequences. One example is the project on the decision-making process (creating a decision tree).
2. For the negative consequences that are already known, more emphasis should be put on them at national level with the stakeholders involved with publicity appeals, including the hotlines and the police.



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