



**Missing
Children
Europe**



**FIGURES AND
TRENDS 2022**

General figures

Missing Children Europe (MCE) is the European federation of 32 grassroots organisations working to prevent and protect missing and sexually exploited children. Missing Children Europe coordinates the network of 116 000 hotlines for missing children, a dedicated service for children (at risk of) going missing and their families; and the cross-border family mediators' network that prevents and resolves parental abductions.

Our 32 member organisations are active on the ground in 27 European countries, preventing, protecting, and supporting missing and sexually exploited children and their families.

The national 116 000 hotline services for missing children are managed by 23 members, who provide free and prompt emotional, psychological, social, legal, and administrative support 24 / 7 to children (at risk of) going missing and their families.

Every year at least 250,000 children are reported missing in Europe. Due to the lack of comparable official statistics on missing children – the only Europe-wide report¹ is outdated, with figures from 11 years ago – it is difficult to understand the full scope of the issue

or what are the current reasons why children go missing. As a result, Missing Children Europe has been collecting and analysing data from missing children hotlines since 2014.

The 116000 hotline is operating in 32 countries across Europe. 23 hotlines are run by Missing Children Europe members. Hotlines from 21 countries (20 NGOs and Foundations and 1 governmental agency) provided (partial) data to this report. Missing Children Europe collected data from: Albania, Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

While the hotlines may generally provide information on the number of calls answered and the number of cases supported, more precise data on categories of missing children, causes, outcomes and so forth cannot be always collected. The data in the report therefore provide a partial but nonetheless important picture. It is the only overview collected on an annual basis, and while it does not reflect the total number of missing children in Europe, it can help us understand the evolution of the causes and consequences of child disappearance. Ultimately, it shows us the gaps in our system, as

well as the levers to achieve more integrated child protection systems and thus helps us forge targeted responses.



32
organisations in Europe run a
116000 hotline for missing children

70855
points of contact were recorded by
21 hotlines in 2022

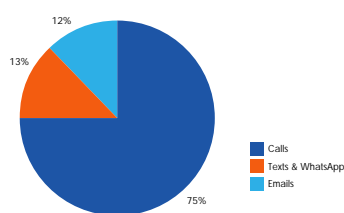
8200
cases of missing children were dealt
with by 18 hotlines of the 116000
network in 2022.



+32 2 894 74 84
www.missingchildreneurope.eu
info@missingchildreneurope.eu

Contacts with hotlines

Calls and contact points

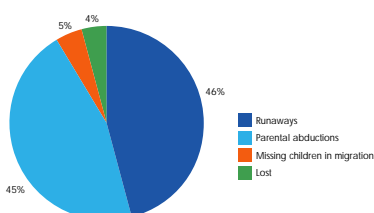


*Data from 19 hotlines.

Traditional phone calls still make up the majority of contact points, complemented by texts, emails, and chat notifications. To highlight the importance of our hotlines' accessibility, we asked members to provide us with a breakdown of all points of contact answered, rather than just calls.

In 2022, 70,855 points of contact with the 116000 hotlines were recorded by the 21 respondents to our survey. Almost all hotlines provided a breakdown between means of contact. The free 116000 telephone number remains the most popular way of contacting the hotlines with 53,711 calls to the number, marking a total of 76% of all points of contact. Other popular means to contact hotline services included 9,795 texts or WhatsApp

Prevention



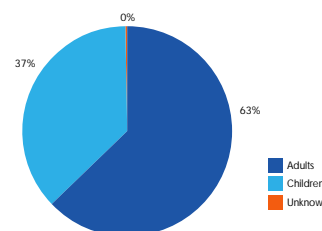
*Data from 11 hotlines.

messages (13%), and 8,914 emails (12%). In 2022, hotlines differentiating between prevention and other cases stated that prevention accounted for 11% of their points of contact. In 2022, prevention calls concerned parental abductions (45%) and children running away (46%). These types of calls are important because effective prevention measures can protect children from harm while also conserving limited investigation resources.

Who contacts hotlines

Just under 38% of respondents do not record much detail about the identity of the person contacting the hotline, or the data is difficult to retrieve due to operational restraints.

From the hotlines that do record these details, we know that adults make up 63% of persons contacting the hotlines with children accounting for 37%. Since we have started including points of contact other than through phone calls in our survey, the percentage of children contacting the hotlines has gone up, showing that children are more comfortable reaching out to distance support services by text, chat, or email. Equal access for children to the services of the 116000 hotlines means not only raising awareness amongst children, but also entails online access. Investment is required in technology and human resources for hotlines who cannot yet offer support through text, chat or email.

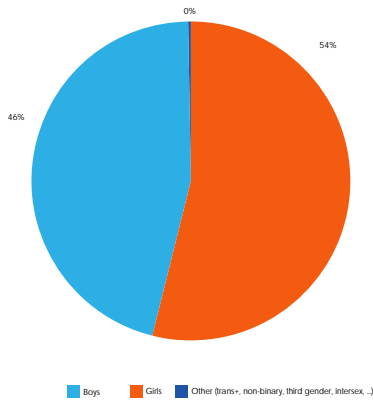


*Data from 17 hotlines.

¹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/655b34ad-341b-4348-9e3b-38741ff40f23/language-en>

Cases

The 18 hotlines who could give us more detail about the casework behind the calls, opened a total of 8,200 new cases in 2022. The number of hotlines that can answer this question has varied in the past few years making a useful comparison regarding total caseload quite difficult. At least 624 of the new cases opened in 2022 were registered as cross border cases.



*Data from 14 hotlines.

Gender

As in previous years, girls constituted the majority of missing children reported (54%), while boys made up 46%. Across all categories of missing children, two were recorded as identifying as non-binary this year. Referrals of children with non-binary gender identities are noticed – for example, several hotlines share anecdotal evidence of trans+ children going missing from home – but such information is not recorded systematically and therefore, unfortunately, this vulnerable group does not show up in the statistics.

Types of missing children cases

In 2022, 66% of new cases opened concerned children who ran away or were pushed away from home or care. A quarter of new cases, 24%, involved a parental abduction, with both categories increasing in size, whereas 3% of cases concerned children missing in migration, a decrease from the previous year.

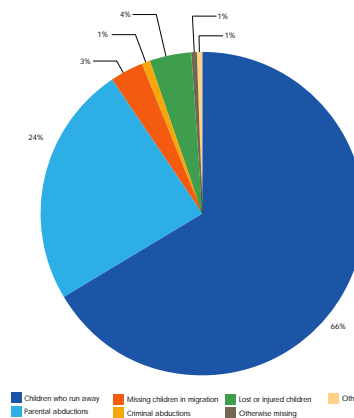
"Children who run away are the main category of cases where an element of violence or abuse was reported"

Reports of violence or abuse

This year 8 hotlines reported data on violence or abuse, marking a significant increase compared to last year when only one hotline (Spain) was able to provide representative data on that category. Sadly, children who run away made up 92.2% of the cases (482 out of 523) where an element of violence or abuse were reported. Other categories of disappearance where violence was reported were parental abductions (32 or 6.1%), criminal abductions (4 or 0.8%), lost injured or otherwise missing (5 or 1%).

These data present similar trends across Europe although it should be noted that violence and abuse often go unreported due to the nature of the offense and the pertinent stigmatisation and lack of safe reporting channels.

This is particularly the case for children in migration, among others due to a lack of opportunities and trust in national authorities' reporting mechanisms.²

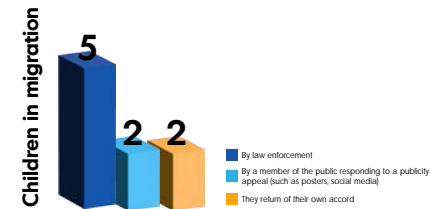


*Data from 12 hotlines.

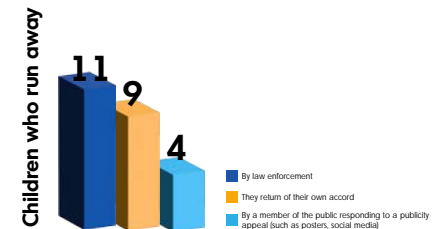
It should be noted that children who are suspected of having run away, missing boys and children missing in migration often remain underreported.³

How missing children were found

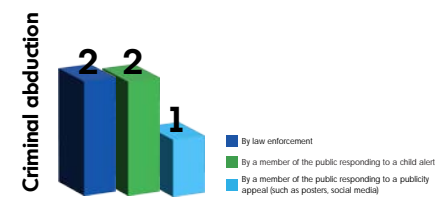
The 116000 hotlines work closely with law enforcement who initiate and conduct investigations into missing children. The hotlines' role in that cooperation can include direct contact with children who are missing to encourage them to speak to a trusted person (such as Textsafe® or similar), the dissemination of child alerts and publicity appeals, and coordination of volunteer support in search and rescue operations. When asked how missing children are usually found, the hotlines' rankings clearly indicated that different groups are found in distinct ways. While alerts and publicity appeals can play a supporting role when a child is at risk (lost, injured, abducted, or trafficked), the role hotlines play in cases of children who run away often revolves more around brokering contacts between the child, the family, and local authorities to find a solution.



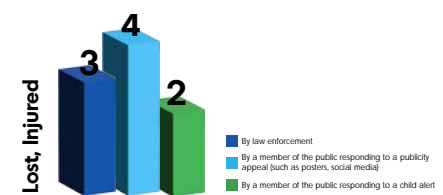
*Data from 6 hotlines.



*Data from 13 hotlines.



*Data from 3 hotlines.



*Data from 6 hotlines.

² <https://missingchildreneurope.eu/download/outcomes-local-hubs-lim-2021-final-version/?wpdmdl=3087&refresh=627e48b62b88b1652443318>

³ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/publications/criminal-networks-involved-in-trafficking-and-exploitation-of-underage-victims-in-eu>

Children who run away

All children who run away from or are pushed out of their home or the institution where they have been placed.⁴ Without an agreed upon definition nor comparable official data (2013 report), children who run away make up more than half of all missing children cases reported to the 116000 hotlines since 2014.

- > The most common risks identified for children who run away include sleeping outdoors, having little access to food or water, and an increased exposure to violence or exploitation. Personal background also contributes to the extent of harm a child experiences while on the run. Personal background factors include neglect, sexual abuse, or an unsteady familial structure⁵
- > Research shows that running away has an impact throughout the life-course and is strongly linked to adversity in later life. For example, young people who experience homelessness longer term often describe running away. Homelessness studies suggest that running away at an early age is a strong predictor of later homelessness.⁶

> In the EU, there is limited data about LGBTQ children. Non-EU research indicates that in the US, approximately 20% of LGBTIQ+ youth leave home because their family members disapprove of or are uncomfortable with their sexual orientation.⁷

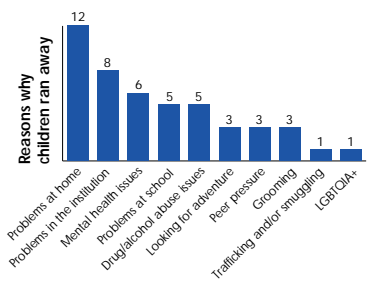
> Children in institutional care feature highly among runaways (Radar, 2021). One of the pathways to institutionalisation of children is family violence, and children in institutions are at risk of violence.⁸ Moreover, institutionalisation increases the risks of (re)-trafficking, including unaccompanied children, runaway children and children left alone.⁹

"And sometimes I cry, because...when I left home, I always thought about them, I missed them, but I was afraid to go back... what we really want to hear is "I like you" or "I love you" – that's all. But I've never heard it".

Girl participating in RADAR project Portugal

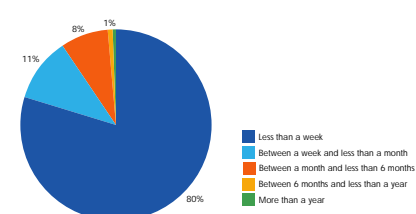
Caseload, Age and Gender of children who run away

The 18 hotlines who reported details of the distinct categories of missing children received 1,948 new cases of runaways in 2022 making up 66.7% of the total. The youngest child was two years old and the most common age range for children who ran away was between 14 and 17 years old. Of the cases recorded by the hotlines in 2022, 1,121(57.5%) were girls followed by 816 (41.9%) boys and 2 (0.01%) non-binary young people.



*Data from 12 hotlines.

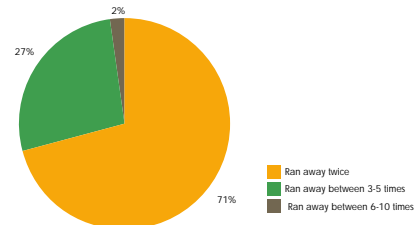
How long does it take to find children who run away?



*Data from 8 hotlines.

The majority of children who ran away and were found alive, were found within 6 months – 59.7% within a week of their disappearance, 8.2% between a week and a month and 5.6% between a month and less than six months. They are usually found by law enforcement agents or return home on their own accord, according to the hotlines.

Children who were found deceased account for 4.6% of children who ran away in 2022; they were found in less than a week and between six months and less than a year. 21% were not found within the year, which is an increase compared to the 16% of children who presumably ran away who were not found in 2021.

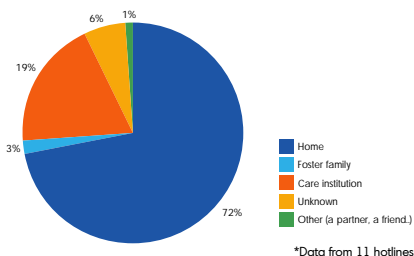


*Data from 9 hotlines.

Running away more than once

70.6% of children who ran away more than once in 2022 ran away twice, and around 28% ran away between 3 and 10 times. This calls into question the capacity of current interventions to address root causes and the needs of runaway children.

Where do children run away from?



*Data from 11 hotlines.

72% of children were reported to have run away from home, a slight decrease in percentage compared to last year's 76%. 19% ran away from a care institution, and 2% from a foster family some cases, representing 6% of the total caseload, the point of departure for runaway children was unknown, while a minority of approximately 1% ran away from a friend or a partner. Children living in alternative care are clearly overrepresented, particularly those living in institutions.

Reasons why children run away

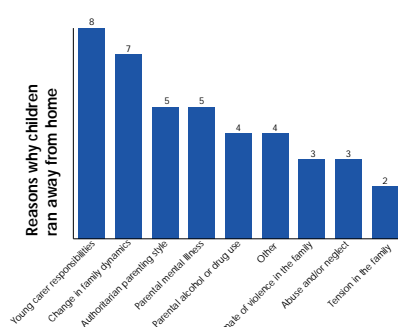
In 2022, problems at home or in the care institution are reported as the main reasons for children to run away.

Contrary to last year, mental health problems are no longer ranked highest by hotlines, but remain in the top three reasons why children run away.

Other common reasons included running away because of problems at school, drugs or alcohol use, adventure or personal discovery, peer pressure and grooming.

Going into more detail, per context from which a child ran away, a period of heightened conflict/tension, a climate of violence and experiencing abuse or neglect were ranked as top three reasons for a child to run away from home, emphasising once more the link between running away and violence against children.

Other important reasons for running away were authoritarian parenting style and parental mental illness and/or parental alcohol or drug use. All these results indicate the importance of prevention work with families and children to identify support strategies before children run away.



*Data from 8 hotlines.

⁴ <https://lib.ugent.be/en/catalog/rug01:001222769>

⁵ Understanding and Responding to Children who Runaway from Institutions. MCE, 2022

⁶ Social Exclusion Unit. Young Runaways. (Internet). 2002

⁷ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/?section=Introduction>

⁸ UN GLOBAL STUDY ON CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY (2019) - Omnibook

⁹ Lumos Cracks in the system Report Web_v1Alrpa.pdf (contentfiles.net)

Missing children in migration

A child who migrated from their country of origin fleeing conflict or persecution, in search of survival, security, improved standards of living, education, economic opportunities, protection from exploitation and abuse, family reunification or a combination of these or other factors, whose presence became known to authorities or caregivers of the country in which the child arrives and whose whereabouts cannot be established.¹⁰

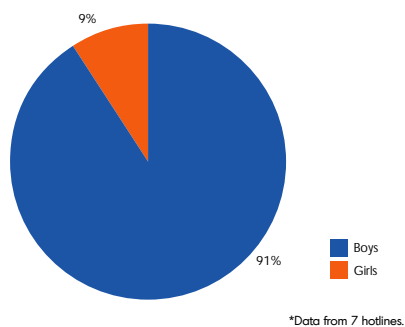
- > More than 18000 migrant children are estimated to have gone missing since arriving in Europe between 2018-2020.¹¹
- > Children in migration continue to be underreported to hotlines and the police. Lack of comparable data and insufficient cooperation between cross-border authorities render addressing the disappearance of unaccompanied minors extremely challenging.¹²
- > While underreported and underrepresented in hotline data, Europol has warned that children in migration and unaccompanied minors are at a higher risk of trafficking and exploitation, and that they are likely to be increasingly targeted by traffickers.¹³
- > Underreporting and lack of awareness of reporting avenues pose further challenges to a full understanding of the problem's scale. When missing and out of the protection system, children are particularly vulnerable to harm, abuse, and exploitation.

"Young migrants do not often disclose much and will often not say where they've been, where they've gone – it would be hard to get any information about them, as to where they've been.[...] A lot of our young migrants wouldn't necessarily disclose where they've been and what happened during that missing episode."

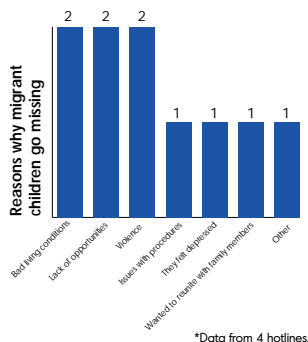
Social Worker,
UK, Interact project.

Caseload, age and gender

In 2022, 92 cases concerning missing children in migration were opened by the reporting hotlines this is a decrease compared to last year's 253 cases. Underreporting and lack of awareness about reporting channels pose further challenges to a full assessment of the scale of the problem. Of the cases reported in 2022, 91% were boys and 9% were girls. This latter figure is an increase compared to last year's 7% of girls. However, it is still lower than the number of missing girls in migration in 2020.



While 80% of hotlines surveyed work with children who run away and parental abductions on average, only 57% work with the category of missing children in migration. While external data suggests that tens of thousands of children in migration continue to disappear¹⁴ from safety nets and that trafficked and unaccompanied children are still much more likely to go missing than other children¹⁵, few cases are reported to hotlines or the police, which is worrisome.



Why migrant children go missing

Based on this year's survey, the main reasons children in migration go missing, include bad living conditions in accommodation facilities and lack of support, violence, and lack of opportunities. From previous research we know that bad living conditions, the desire to reunite with family, fear of repatriation, lack of trust in the system, long status determination procedures and the issue of human trafficking play a role.¹⁶

How long does it take to find missing children in migration?

These cases are not sufficiently prioritised and stronger cross-border cooperation in searching for these children is an absolute must. At the end of 2022, 30 of the 92 children in migration reported missing to these hotlines, one third, were not found.

How missing migrant children are found?

According to the hotlines upon resolution of the case, children in migration are usually found by law enforcement authorities. Some are found by a member of the public responding to a publicity appeal and others return home of their own accord are additionally mentioned trends.

It is impossible to ascertain the exact number of missing children in migration, as there is no consistency in the definition of 'missing children' among MS and professionals, and data is not collected in a systematic, uniform, and comparative way across MS and stakeholders. Data provided by Lost in Europe estimates that at least 18,292 refugee children have disappeared from asylum seekers' centres in Europe between 2018 and 2020.

¹⁰ <https://missingchildreneurope.eu/children-in-migration/>

¹¹ Missing Children Europe. Over 18,000 children in migration missing in Europe between 2018-2020. <https://missingchildreneurope.eu/over-18-000-missing-children-in-migration/>

¹² European Migration Network. How do EU Member States treat cases of missing unaccompanied minors? <https://emn.ie/publications/how-do-eu-member-states-treat-cases-of-missing-unaccompanied-minors-emn-inform/>

¹³ Criminal networks involved in the trafficking and exploitation of underage victims in the EU | Europol (europa.eu)

¹⁴ European Migration Network. Approaches to Unaccompanied Minors Following Status Determination in the EU plus Norway. Synthesis Report for the EMN Study. http://emn.ie/files/p_201808090907072018_emn_synthesis_unaccompanied_minors_09.08.2018.pdf

¹⁵ ECPAT UK and Missing People. Still in Harm's Way: An update report on trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK. <https://www.ecpat.org.uk/still-in-harms-way>

¹⁶ INTERACT Project (2019) Interact: Towards a more efficient cooperation across border for the protection of children in migration from trafficking and exploitation. Report on multi-agency practical simulations on fictional cases in Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, The United Kingdom, and Sweden. Available at: <https://missingchildreneurope.eu/?wpdmdl=1324>; Summit Project (2016) Practical guidance on preventing and responding to unaccompanied children going missing <https://missingchildreneurope.eu/?wpdmdl=2253>

International child abductions

Children being taken away to or kept in a country other than that of their normal residence by one of their parents or persons having parental authority against the will of the other parent or the other person with parental authority.¹⁷

> Adults' decisions in matters of child abduction have a profound impact on affected children and young people. (...) For abducted children and young people to feel included, respected and taken seriously in decisions about their lives, adults should adopt a positive, confident, and reassuring interaction style with children and young people.¹⁸

"It is like choosing between father and mother, between Spain and Belgium... And that is not really a choice. Or if it is, it is a very terrible choice."

Young participant in the Include project, Belgium

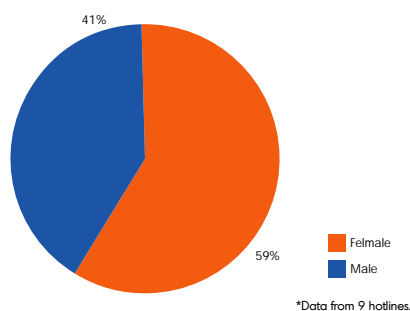
Caseload, age, and gender

637 new cases dealt with by hotlines involved children abducted by a parent or person with parental authority. Cases reported by the hotlines concerned similar amounts of girls and boys (172 girls, 177 boys). Amongst the most common ways of resolving international child abduction cases is mediation (18%) and court proceedings (12%).

Gender of parental abductor

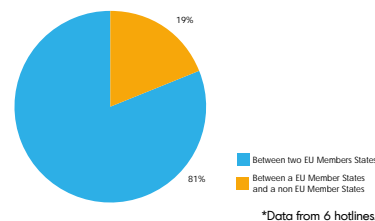
In over 59.5% of parental abduction cases reported to the hotlines, the parental abductor

was reported to be female, whereas 40.5% of abductors were reported to be male. This is consistent with the trends in recent years of more female than male abductors.



Location of international child abduction cases

The majority of abductions by a parent took place between EU countries (81.4%), whereas 18.6% took place between an EU and a non-EU country.



Criminal abduction

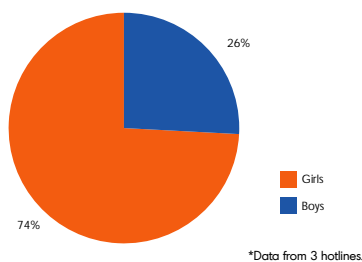
Abduction of a child by anyone other than a parent or person with parental authority.¹⁹

Caseload, age, and gender

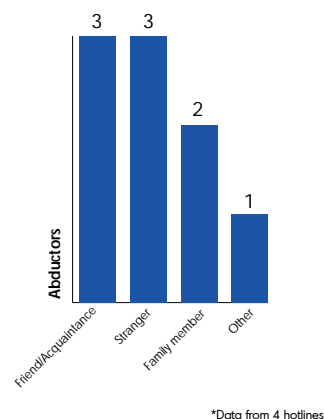
In 2022, 5 hotlines for missing children supported 24 cases of criminally abducted children. As was the case last year, only a few cases reported to our hotlines were found to have been abducted by someone other than a parent or guardian or a stranger. 74% of criminally abducted children were girls, 26% boys; one unknown case is also recorded.

According to the hotlines that provided data, the most common ways that abducted children were found were through law enforcement and public response to a child alert. Child alerts²⁰ which aim to obtain sightings and information on missing children, can thus prove to play a valuable role in finding a missing child, although they should only be used in exceptional circumstances. Other ways abducted children were found was by returning of their own accord or after a search and rescue team intervened or after a tip from member of the public in response to an alarm or publicity appeal.

By enhancing communication and trust in their primary carers, prevention should emphasise empowering children to understand which strangers they may trust in an emergency and to be able to report any type of wrongdoing, including inappropriate touching, sexual abuse, or exploitation.



Based on previous reports and this year's data, in most cases the abductor is someone close to the child: a family member or friend/acquaintance.



¹⁷ Gert Vermeulen. Missing and sexually exploited children in the enlarged EU: epidemiological data in the new member states. <https://lib.ugent.be/en/catalog/rug01:001222769>

¹⁸ Missing Children Europe. INCLUDE Guide to Good Practice. <https://missingchildreneurope.eu/download/include-guide-to-good-practice/>

¹⁹ Missing and Sexually Exploited Children in the Enlarged EU: Epidemiological Data in the New Member States (2005), as part of the Childscope project run by Missing Children Europe

²⁰ Missing Children Europe. Briefing on child alert systems. <https://missingchildreneurope.eu/download/missing-children-europe-briefing-on-child-alert-systems/>

Lost, injured or otherwise missing

Disappearances of children for no apparent reason, including youngsters who may have gotten lost or hurt themselves and cannot be found immediately, or whose reason for disappearing has not yet been determined. It may concern children who got hurt and cannot immediately be found such as accidents during sports activities or youth camps. It can also include children with a physical or other disability which limits their ability to return home or to the place where their parent or custodian is.

Caseload and age

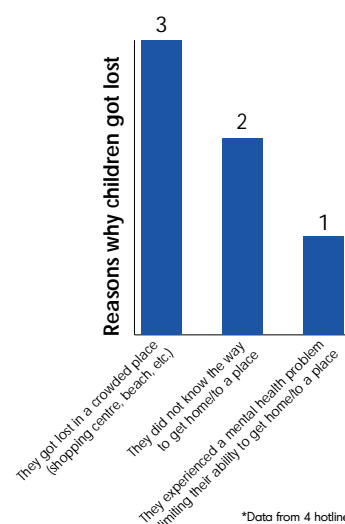
Children who were lost or injured or otherwise missing were the subject of 120 missing children cases recorded by 11 hotlines. Any given year, our hotlines are confronted with a considerable number of "otherwise missing children" whose reason for disappearing has not yet been determined.²¹ These are cases that may take a long time to resolve and are often the most traumatic cases for the families left behind. The complex type of grief experienced by these families is referred to as "ambiguous loss" as they can feel stuck between having hope of finding the child and needing to grieve their loss to be able to move forward.

Since for some children there is no information on how or why they went missing, the importance of the 116000 network of hotlines who can provide support is further highlighted.

Most common reasons why children were lost or injured

According to respondents, the causes of these disappearances are usually unknown. However, it is possible to identify some of the reasons why children get lost or injured, or go missing. The most common reasons include experiencing a mental health problem which hindered their ability to return home (1), the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (1), not knowing the way to get home (2), getting lost in a crowd (3).

Among the children that were found alive, 90% were found between a week and a month.



Hotlines sustainability and accessibility

The important challenge for the 116000 hotlines is a lack of financial resources which threatens the services' sustainability and quality. Other operational issues have included a lack of public awareness of the hotlines and a lack of human resources to operate the hotline, as well as challenging cooperation with the government and other actors. These figures are consistent with information provided by hotlines in previous years.

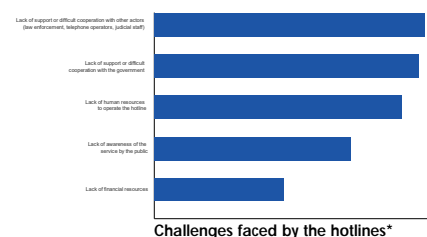
Based on data provided by 19 hotlines (2022), national authorities provide almost 38.25% of funding for the hotlines, which marks a decrease compared to last year's figure (47%). Trusts and foundations and corporate/business donors are the second largest funding source for hotlines (19.7%), and including individuals (11.6%) make up the top three, among those specifying a donor type. Three hotlines received their full amount of funding from "other" sources, increasing thus the percentage of this category (29%).

72.7 % of the hotlines receiving funding from national authorities indicated that this was sufficient to ensure the expected standard of service." Others, who claimed it was insufficient, pointed to the nefarious impact of a lack of human resources. Hotlines who are confronted with a lack of funding find ways to deal with this such as working with volunteer professionals and reducing the hours at which the hotline remains available to all children.

Missing Children Europe [calls on Member States](#) to fulfil their obligations under the EU strategy on the rights of the child to establish (where not yet available) and improve child helplines

(116 111) and missing children hotlines (116 000), including through funding and capacity building.

Hotlines provided an overview of their accessibility for children. Almost all the hotlines (71,4%) that participated in Missing Children Europe's annual data collection survey identified as being online accessible to all children and reachable 24/7 to callers; however, difficulties due to the lack of ability to translate from text to speech were indicated on the side of groups at risks such as children with disabilities. Email (13 hotlines) and chat platforms (10 hotlines) are the most used methods of communication besides telephone. Other means of accessibility listed are text services, online forms, and website communication.



*Data from 16 hotlines.

²¹ Missing and Sexually Exploited Children in the Enlarged EU: Epidemiological Data in the New Member States (2005), as part of the Childscope project run by Missing Children Europe

*The numbers in the graph were obtained by making an average of the ranking given by the hotlines. 1 is the most recurring challenge they have, 10 the least. Thus, lack of financial resources is the overall most challenging factor for the hotlines. Lack of support or difficult cooperation with other actors (law enforcement, telephone operators, judicial staff) is appearing as the least key challenge.

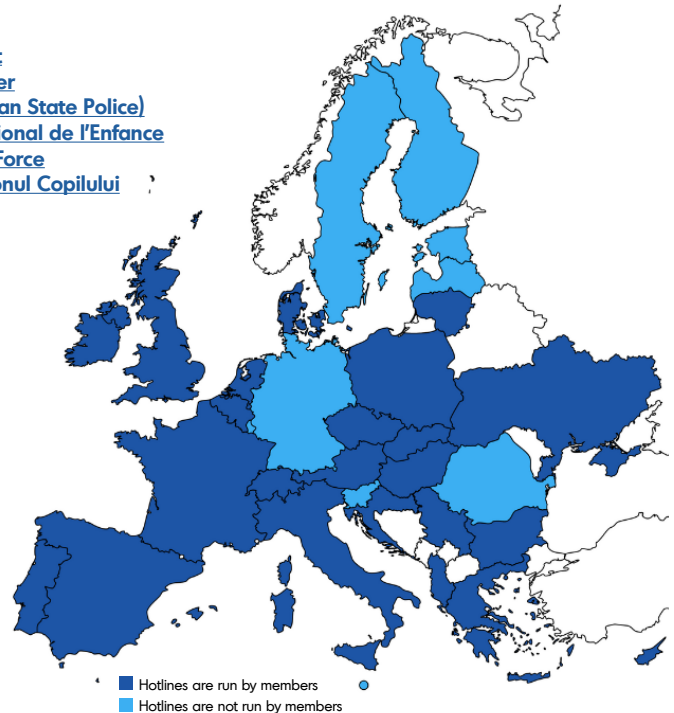
Hotlines for missing children

Hotlines run by members

*Albania: [ALO 116](#)
Austria: [147 Rat auf Draht](#)
Belgium: [Child Focus](#)
Bulgaria: [Nadja Centre Foundation](#)
*Croatia: [Centar za Nestalu](#)
Cyprus: **Consortium:** [SPAVO & HFC](#)
Czech Republic: [Cesta z krize, z. u.](#)
Denmark: [Borns Vilkar](#)
France: [Droit d'Enfance - 116 000 Enfants Disparus](#)
Greece: [The Smile of the Child](#)
*Hungary: [Kék Vonal](#)
Ireland: [Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children](#)
Italy: [SOS Telefono Azzurro](#)
Lithuania: [Missing Persons' Families Support Centre](#)
Poland: [ITAKA](#)
Portugal: [Instituto de Apoio à Criança](#)
Serbia: [ASTRA](#)
Slovakia: [Linka detskej istoty](#)
Spain: [Fundación ANAR](#)
Switzerland: [Missing Children Switzerland](#)
The Netherlands: [Centrum Internationale Kinderontvoering](#)
United Kingdom: [Missing People](#)
Ukraine: [NGO Magnolia](#)

Hotlines not run by members

*Estonia: [Lasteabi.ee](#)
Finland: [Nödcentralsverket](#)
*Germany: [Vermisste Kinder](#)
Latvia: [Valsts Policija \(Latvian State Police\)](#)
*Luxembourg: [L'Office National de l'Enfance](#)
*Malta: [The Malta Police Force](#)
*Romania: [Asociația Telefonul Copilului](#)
*Slovenia: [Zavod 116](#)
*Sweden: [SOS Alarm](#)



*Did not provide data for this report.

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BIC/SWIFT: BBRUBEBB
*Communication: Donation + "Tax certificate required"

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<https://missingchildreneurope.eu/donate/>



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A heartfelt thank you to our donors

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