Missing Children Europe

FIGURES AND TRENDS

2024

Co-funded by the European Union

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GENERAL FIGURES

Missing Children Europe (MCE) is the European federation for missing and sexually exploited children, representing 35 member organisations across 28 countries. We coordinate the 116 000 hotline and the Cross-Border Family Mediators network, a network that prevents and resolves parental abductions. Together, we bridge research, policy, and grassroots efforts to protect children from violence, abuse, and going missing.

The 116 000 hotline is a dedicated service for children (at risk of) going missing and their families, and is available in 32 countries across Europe, providing free and prompt emotional, psychological, social, legal, and administrative support 24/7.

In our work, understanding why children continue to go missing across Europe remains a significant challenge. This is, in part, because the lack of comparable statistics makes it difficult to fully grasp the reasons why children go missing, and how to properly prevent it. For example, the only report giving an estimation of the number of missing children across Europe dates back to 2013[1]. Therefore, Missing Children Europe has been working to fill this gap by collecting and analysing data from the 116 000 missing children hotline since 2014.

For this year's report, 22 countries provided data to Missing Children Europe (19 NGOs and foundations, and 3 governmental agencies). These include Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Although data collected from the hotlines does not capture the full scale of the phenomenon, it does provide insight on reoccurring risks and vulnerabilities. While the hotlines generally provide information on the cases received, further detail on the causes and consequences of going missing is not always provided. Nevertheless, this report remains the only annual overview of its kind in Europe. It offers valuable information on evolving trends in child disappearances and highlights where child protection systems must be strengthened.

32

organisations in Europe run a hotline for missing children

124,375

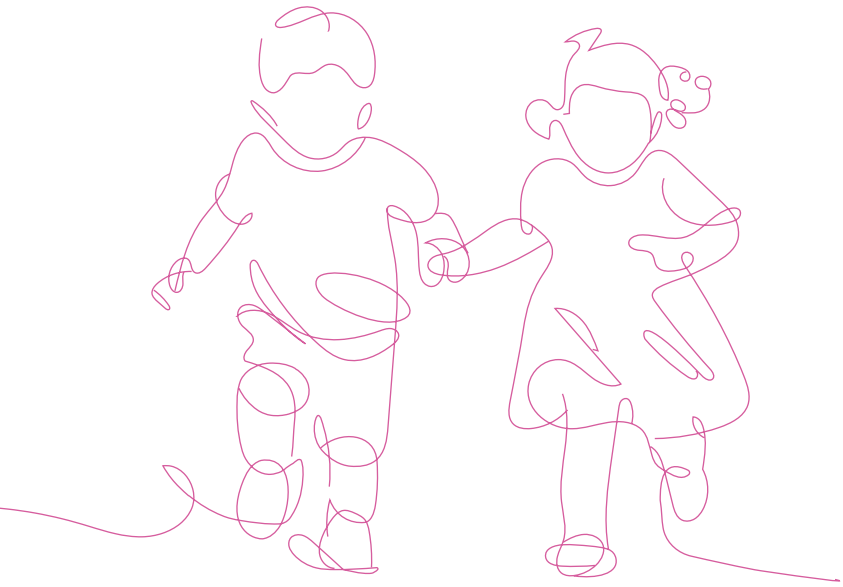
points of contact in 2024

*data from 22 hotlines

6,132

new cases in 2024

*data from 20 hotlines



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[1] European Commission (2013) - Missing Children in the European Union

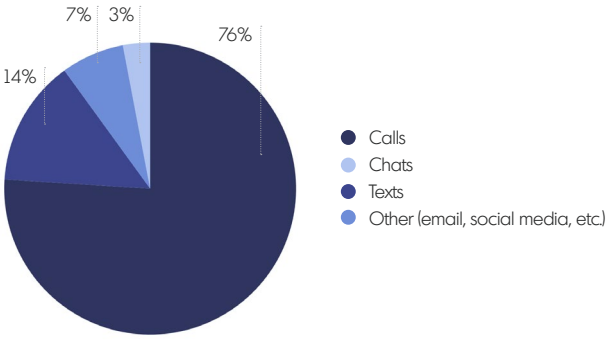
CONTACTS WITH HOTLINES

Calls and contact points

Phone calls remain the most used means of contacting the hotlines, with other means including text messages, emails, chat services, and social media. To better understand which communication methods are most frequently used, the hotlines were asked to provide a detailed breakdown of both answered and unanswered points of contact.

In 2024, a total of 124,375 points of contact were recorded across 22 hotlines - nearly double the amount recorded in 2023 (67,345). Phone calls accounted for 94,548 of these contacts, representing 76% of all communication methods. Other common methods of contacting the hotline included text messages, reaching 17,103 (14%), though only Belgium reported being contacted in this way. Emails and social media messages accounted for 8,418 points of contact (7%) and chats were the least utilised contact method, accounting for 4,306 interactions (3%).

Types of points of contact



*Data from 22 hotlines

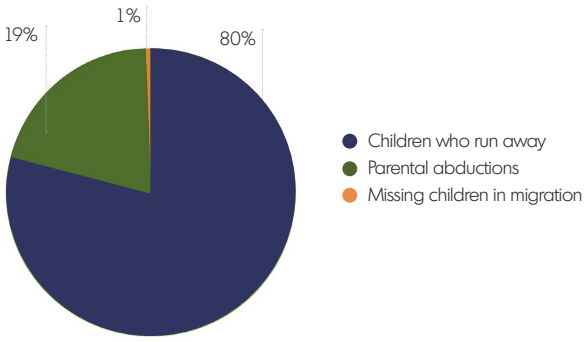
Prevention points of contact

In 2024, 15 hotlines recorded 7,824 points of contact dealing with prevention, though not all these hotlines were able to provide a categorical breakdown of this number. Of the 12 hotlines that were able to provide more detail, 3,367 points of contact were broken down into the following categories.

Children running away (2,705) made up 80% of all categorised prevention points of contact, followed by parental abductions, which accounted for 645 contact points (19%). Children going missing in migration, and those that were criminally abducted or otherwise lost, together accounted for less than 1% of prevention points of contact.

These types of calls are essential to prevent children from going missing, enabling timely intervention with tailored solutions to protect vulnerable children. In this regard, the role of the 116 000 hotline is crucial as they represent the only specialised national service offering free counselling to families and caregivers on potential child disappearances.

Types of prevention points of contact

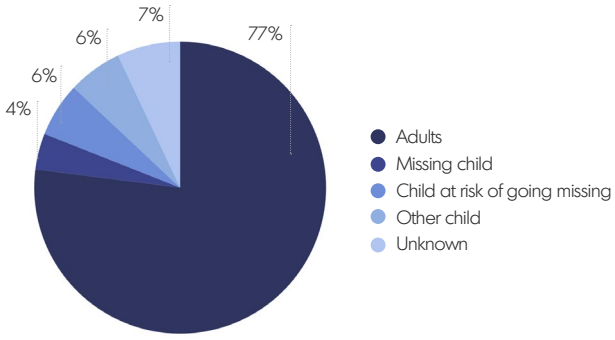


*Data from 12 hotlines

Who contacts the hotline

In 2024, adults made up the majority of those contacting the hotlines, accounting for 77% of known contacts (95,389). In comparison, children, including those missing, at risk, or others, accounted for 16% of all callers. Among children, the largest group contacting the hotline were children at risk of going missing and those categorised as «other children» both accounting for 6%. Children who had already gone missing were the least likely to call the hotlines, making up just 4% of all contacts. The remaining 21,852 points of contact were not categorised.

Although the total number of registered points of contact increased in 2024 (with more hotlines providing information on the caller's identity) the proportion of calls made by children actually decreased compared to the previous year. In absolute terms, more children contacted the hotline in 2024 (15,278) than in 2023 (14,710). However, children accounted for a smaller share of the total points of contact: in 2023, 1 in every 2.4 calls came from a child, whereas in 2024, that figure dropped to just 1 in every 6. This shift is likely due to a higher number of hotlines reporting caller identity data in 2024, resulting in a broader dataset.



*Data from 21 hotlines

It remains crucial to continue to offer accessible contact options for children, whether through online platforms, social media, or traditional phone calls. However, this must be accompanied by enhanced awareness campaigns to ensure children are informed about who to turn to when they are at risk of going missing.

CASELOAD AND MISSING CHILDREN

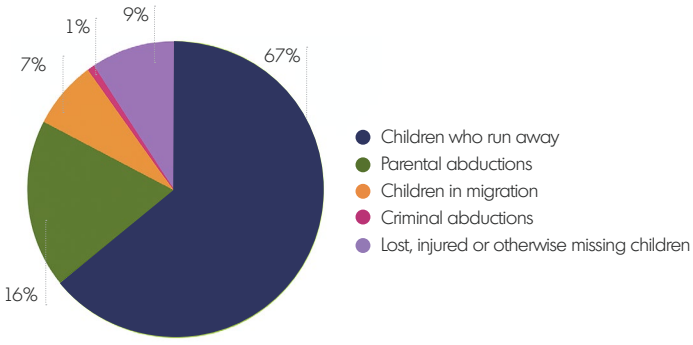
In 2024, 20 hotlines reported a total of 6,132 new cases, and 19 hotlines reported supporting 5,380 individual children in cases opened that same year. The difference between the number of cases and the number of children supported can be attributed to variations in data collection methods across countries. Some hotlines record numbers of cases, others record numbers of children, most record both. Even for hotlines who record both, the numbers of cases and children may differ: a parental abduction may count as one case but involve multiple children, while a child who runs away three times in one year could be counted as one child, but each runaway episode may be recorded as a separate case.

Types of missing children cases

It is particularly encouraging that this year most hotlines were able to provide a breakdown of the types of cases received (20 in 2024 as compared to 13 in 2023, 12 in 2022 and only 9 in 2021). Such information is crucial in order to understand the root causes of children going missing.

As in the past two years, roughly two thirds of recorded cases involve children who have either run away or been pushed out of their homes or care institutions, accounting for 4,091 cases (67%). Parental abductions account for 16% of cases (1,014), followed by cases involving lost, injured, or otherwise missing children, reaching 561 cases (9%). Finally, cases involving children in migration slightly rose in 2024, reaching 428 cases (7%) while criminal abduction cases making up for less than 1% of new cases.

Types of missing children cases



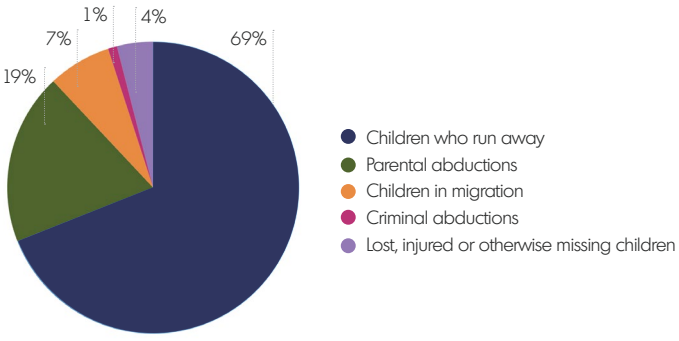
*Data from 20 hotlines

Of the new cases opened in 2024, 11 hotlines indicated that 575 cases had a cross-border dimension, reflecting a significant decline from the 1,018 cross-border cases reported by 13 hotlines in 2023. This is due to one hotline with a relatively high caseload not reporting cross-border cases this year.

Categories of missing children

In 2024, 5,380 children were supported by 19 hotlines whereby 3,706 children ran away from home (69%). Parental abductions affected 1,040 children (19%). Moreover, 350 children were reported missing in migration (6,5%). A total of 53 children (1%) reported were victims of criminal abduction, and 231 (4,3%) children were lost, injured, or otherwise missing.

Children who go missing



*Data from 19 hotlines

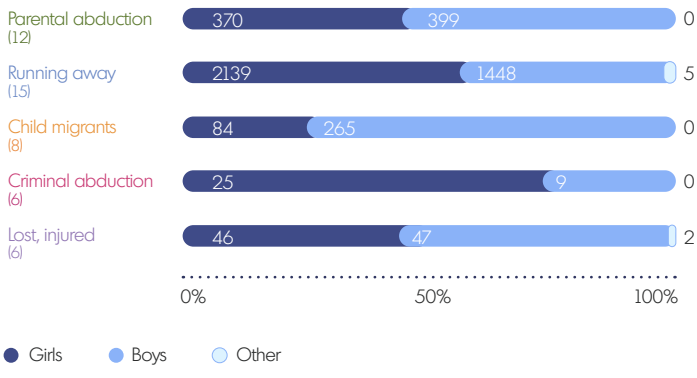
The breakdown of case types and missing children categories is broadly similar, except for "parental abductions," where one case may involve multiple children, and "lost, injured, and otherwise missing" where hotlines that track cases rather than individual children may record fewer details and classify more cases as "otherwise missing."

Gender

Some hotlines were able to provide data on the gender of supported missing children, although others do not record such information, resulting in 541 instances where the child's gender was not identified. Of those where the gender is known, girls account for 55% of missing children (2,664), with boys accounting for 45% (2,168), and 7 children (0,14%) identified as non-binary or transgender. Children reported to have run away or pushed out from home are predominately girls (2,139) compared to boys (1,448). However, evidence from Belgium, comparing hotline with police data suggests a possible gender bias in reporting, with boys being underreported compared to girls. Conversely, children reported missing in migration are more often boys (265) than girls (84), possibly because there are also more male asylum seekers and refugees.[2]

6 out 10 children reported to have run away are girls. This may be due to boys being underreported.

Gender distribution across all categories



*Parentheses indicate number of hotlines recording this information

[2] European Commission (2024) - Asylum applications - annual statistics - Statistics Explained - Eurostat

Reports of violence or abuse

This year, 14 hotlines documented instances of violence or abuse, affecting 1,582 children, with runaway children making up the largest affected group (85% of all abused children). This is expected, as they remain the most common type of missing child. Children involved in parental abduction represent 9% of children who faced abuse or violence (139 children). Additionally, 41 children (3%) who were lost or injured were recorded to have experienced violence, alongside 30 children in migration (2%) and 22 victims of criminal abduction (1%).

As not all hotlines collect data on abuse or violence, the available figures may not fully capture the scope of the issue - however, of the 14 hotlines that were able to provide information on both the number of children running away (2,116) and the number of children who experienced abuse or violence (1,350), the data shows that 64% of children who run away were known to have experienced violence or abuse either before or during their missing episode.

Approximately 2 out of every 3 children who ran away experienced abuse or violence.

Online grooming and children going missing

Grooming is defined as the process of building a relationship with a child, either in person or through the internet or other digital technologies, to facilitate sexual contact either online or offline.[3] *Grooming can result in a range of serious outcomes, and frequently leads to further victimisation, including trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation, and overall children going missing.*

Grooming is an emerging concern that hotlines are only beginning to recognise as a factor in missing children cases. However, 14 out of 22 hotlines currently record no information on grooming. In many cases, national authorities serve as the primary contact point for children who have been groomed online and may have gone missing. This helps explain why hotlines often lack access to such data, even when the child is reported missing through them.

Although systematic data collection from hotlines remains limited, 2024 witnessed a continued global increase in reports of online enticement.[4] NCMEC (The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children), a non-profit organisation based in the United States, received more than 546,000 reports of online enticement in 2024, a 192% increase compared to reports in 2023.[5] At a European level, such data is unavailable, but Missing Children Europe's CESAGRAM project highlighted a strong connection between online grooming and child disappearance: 13 out of 20 interviewed survivors of online grooming reported experiencing one or more missing episodes.[6] As recommended in our CESAGRAM survivor report, all children need to have access to information on where they can seek help following online grooming, to prevent missing cases.[7] Missing is a very visible sign and possible lever for prevention and safeguarding children. Improving the ability of the 116 000 hotlines to identify and document grooming-related cases could help build a more accurate picture of the issue and support more informed responses across child protection systems.

[3] ECPAT (2025) – Terminology Guidelines.
[4] NCMEC defines "online enticement" as a process involving an individual communicating with someone believed to be a child via the internet with the intent to commit a sexual offense or abduction. This is a broad category of online exploitation, in which a child is being groomed to engage in sexual activities.
[5] NCMEC (2025) - Cyber Tipline Report
[6 & 7] Missing Children Europe (2024) - Online Grooming & Going Missing: The Voices of European Survivors

« He told me that it would be important to meet up… he said 'don't you want to talk in person? Listen, do you know where the mall is?' I said yes, he said 'good, we'll meet there'. »

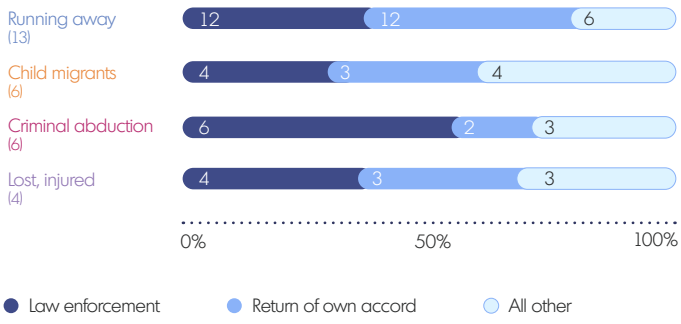
Ana (19), survivor of grooming
(Name changed to protect the identity of the individual)

How missing children were found

The 116 000 hotlines play an important role in finding children who go missing, such as directly contacting missing children to encourage them to seek help, issuing child alerts and publicity appeals, cooperating with law enforcement and coordinating volunteer-based support during search or rescue operations.

When asked how missing children are found, the hotlines' responses clearly indicated that efforts from law enforcement agencies are the most common way in recovering missing children, with children returning of their own accord as the second most common. Publicity appeals and child alerts were mentioned by two hotlines as the most common way of recovering a child who ran away, compared to other categories. The role of the hotlines maintaining communication between families and law enforcement agencies is critical in enhancing the chances of finding missing children.

How missing children were found across categories



*Parentheses indicate number of hotlines recording this information

CHILDREN WHO RUN AWAY

Missing Children Europe defines children who run away as all children who run away from or are pushed out of their home or the institution where they have been placed.[8]

Despite limited comparable data due to different definitions across member states, the 116 000 hotlines have consistently reported that children who run away make up more than half of missing children since we started collecting the data in 2014, going up to two thirds since the COVID crisis.

› Children who run away from different backgrounds (e.g. migrant or institutionalised children) often face distinct risks and experiences. For example, girls and LGBTIQ+ youth who run away are at heightened risk of sexual exploitation compared to other groups. Missing Children Europe's RADAR study showed that children who run away also frequently face stigma from professionals, which can hinder their access to support.[9]

› Raising awareness and providing training for professionals on the diverse risks faced by children who run away is essential. This includes ongoing education on emerging threats and efforts to reduce stigma. Key steps include large-scale prevention campaigns and the development of ethical, anti-stigma policies for local authorities, public bodies, relevant and organisations.[10]

› Studies on running away often intersect with themes such as youth homelessness, child abuse, delinquency, substance abuse, and issues affecting LGBTIQ+ youth. According to a FEANTSA report, violence and conflict is reported as a reason for LGBTIQ+ young people to become homeless around the time of their coming out.[11]

Conflict with families resulting from coming out as LGBTQIA+ had a direct impact on individuals' housing situation.[12]

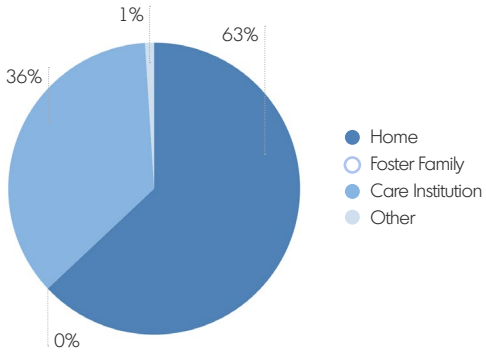
Caseload, age and gender

In 2024, 19 hotlines reported 4,091 cases of children running away, accounting for 67% of all cases and marking a slight increase from 3,817 cases in 2023. The median ages, according to 18 hotlines who could provide such data, ranged between 12 and 16 years old, meaning that adolescent children are the most at risk. 18 hotlines provided gender-specific data for 3708 children, indicating that 58% of children reported to have run away were girls (2,139), while 39% were boys (1,448). 5 children (0.13%) were recorded as non-binary or transgender. For 114 children these hotlines had not recorded any gender.

Where do children run away from

In 2024, 13 hotlines provided information on where children who ran away had gone missing from. Of those that are known, the majority of children, 1,991 (63%), ran away from home, while the second largest group of 1,111 children (36%), left care institutions. Although data collection methods vary across years, the available information suggests little overall change in the risks faced by children in both home and institutional settings.

Environments Children run away from

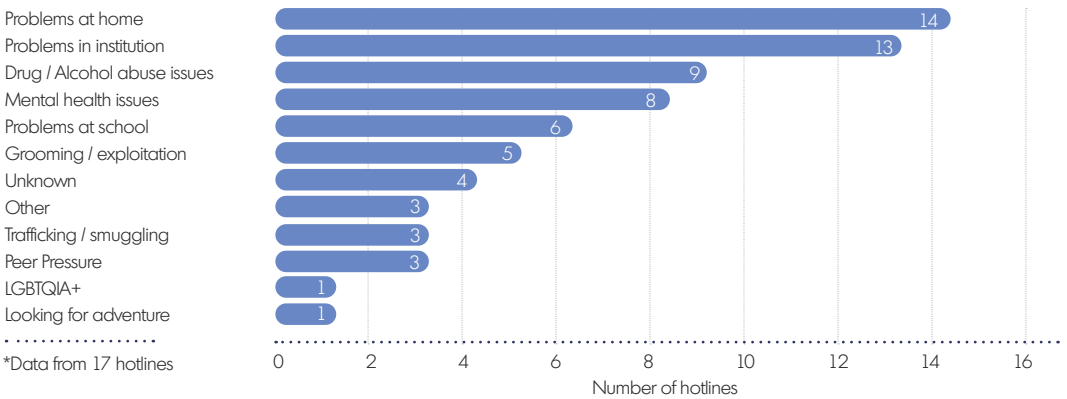


*Data from 13 hotlines

Reasons why children run away

17 hotlines answered our question to rank the most common reasons why children run away. Home-related issues were identified as the leading cause, with issues in the care institution a close second. Drug and alcohol-related issues were ranked third, up from fifth place in 2022 while mental health concerns were also still considered a significant influencing factor. Problems at school, grooming, and trafficking or smuggling were also considered relevant by hotlines. Seeking adventure or personal discovery and struggles related to coming out as LGBTIQ+ were not commonly identified by the hotlines as reasons for running away. This stands in contrast with evidence from other sources, which is why Missing Children Europe teamed up with IGLYO on the LGBTIQ missing project to do research on how services and prevention can be improved for these children.

Most common reasons for running away

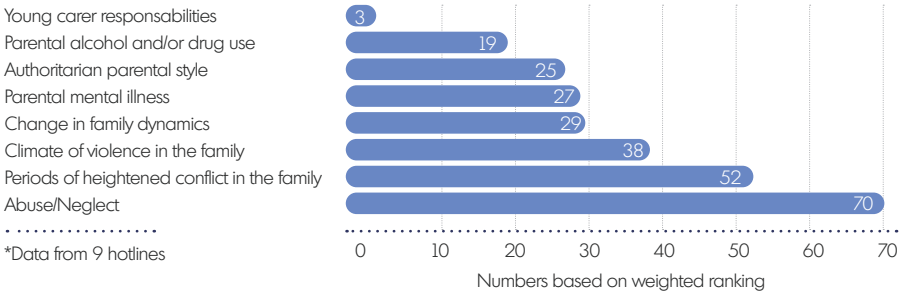


*Data from 17 hotlines

[8] Vermeulen (2005) - Missing and sexually exploited children in the enlarged EU : epidemiological data in the new member states.
[9] Missing Children Europe (2021) - RADAR Full Research Report.
[10] Missing Children Europe (2021) - RADAR Full Research Report.
[11] FEANTSA (2023) - Pride: Homelessness in the LGBTIQ community
[12] FEANTSA (2023) - Pride: Homelessness in the LGBTIQ community

The hotlines were able to provide a deeper understanding of the reasons why children run away from home, with abuse and neglect (whether physical, emotional, or verbal) ranked as the most common reason. Periods of heightened conflict in the family was ranked second, followed by climates of violence in the family. Overall, the three most cited reasons revolved around conflict and abuse, highlighting the strong link between violence and children going missing. These findings emphasise the importance of prevention work with families and children to identify support mechanisms before a child runs away.

Ranking of the most common problems at home



*Data from 9 hotlines

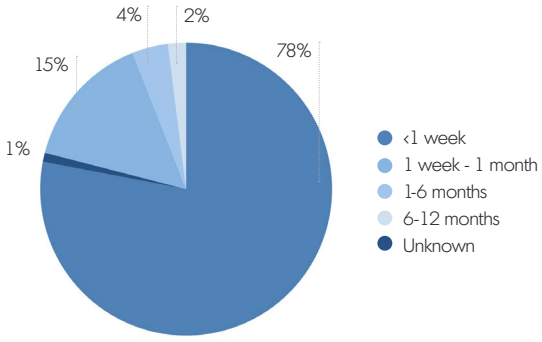
How long does it take to find children who run away

11 hotlines provided data on how 559 runaway children were found. The same hotlines revealed that most had been recovered alive (84%), and one child had been found deceased. Most commonly, children who ran away were found in less than a week (78%) and 15% were found between a week and a month after their disappearance. The hotlines reported that the two most common ways of a child being found are either by law enforcement or by returning home on their own.

Children running away more than once

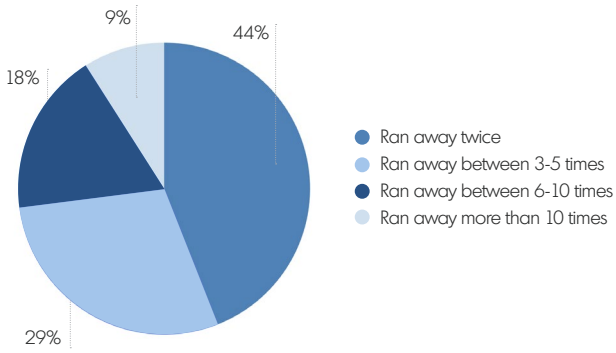
Of the total amount of children who ran away, 10 hotlines were able to show that 12% (451 children) ran away more than once. Of those children, 44% ran away twice and 29% ran away between 3 and 5 times. 18% of these children ran away between 6 and 10 times. These figures are alarming as they show that children who run away are repeatedly exposed to risks of violence and abuse, and call into question how effectively the root causes of running away are addressed.

Timeline of when children were found

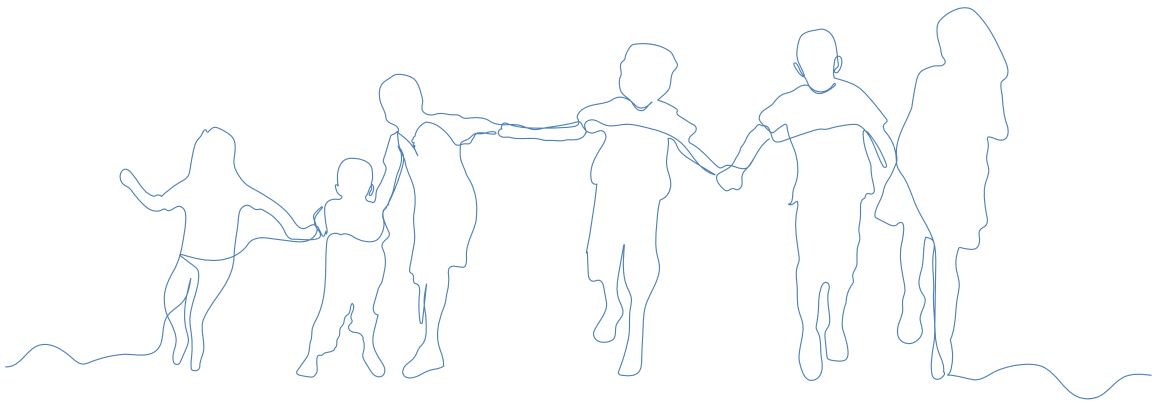


*Data from 13 hotlines

Running away more than once



*Data from 10 hotlines



CHILDREN MISSING IN MIGRATION

Missing Children Europe defines a child missing in migration as 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.

› Between 2021 and 2023, more than 50,000 unaccompanied migrant children in the EU disappeared from the radar, according to Lost in Europe.[13]

› In 2023, over 250,000 asylum applications involved children[14] and more than 40,000 unaccompanied minors applied for international protection in the EU.[15] These figures call attention to the grave risks faced by children on the move, including the escalating trafficking risks and the likelihood of disappearing.

› Trafficked children often struggle to disclose their abuse due to trauma, fear, and mistrust in authorities. When met with disbelief or stigma, they may go missing to escape environments where they feel unsafe or unsupported.[16]

Caseload, age and gender

In 2024, although 14 hotlines reported collecting data on children in migration, only 8 had figures on newly opened cases, amounting to 428 cases. This represents an increase from the 356 cases reported in 2023 but is a number that's very low compared to other sources, suggesting underreporting of this group of children at risk. The hotlines had more detailed information about 350 children missing in migration, including 265 boys (76%) and 84 girls (24%), with one unidentified child. Similar to previous years, boys continue to represent the largest proportion of missing migrant children.

Information on children missing in migration is seldom shared across borders, which makes children vulnerable and hinders child protection.

The median age range for children missing in migration was between 12-17 years old, according to reports by 9 hotlines.

This year, 6 hotlines identified Morocco, Afghanistan, Algeria, and Syria as the most common countries of origin for children going missing in migration.

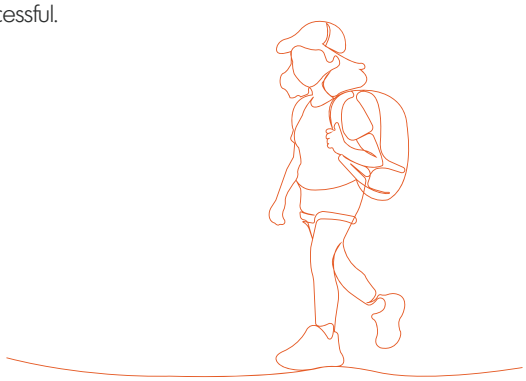
The lack of comprehensive data on children in migration limits our understanding of how many disappear. Combined with reporting barriers and limited awareness of support services, this leaves migrant children vulnerable to going missing and makes them invisible to protection systems.

Why migrant children go missing and how long it takes to find them

Hotlines ranked the top three reasons for migrant children to go missing: 1. because they want to reunite with family members (or peers), 2. because of a lack of educational or work opportunities and 3. due to bad living conditions (reception conditions, lack of shelter or support).

According to data provided by 5 hotlines, 69 of these children were found alive, 46 of which were found in less than a week and 3 children were found between 1 and 12 months after their disappearance. Two hotlines were not able to provide further information on the length of disappearance for the remaining 20 children. As many of these disappearances have a cross border element and such cooperation in cases of children going missing in migration is sometimes lacking, hotlines often receive no information on these children's outcomes, their whereabouts or the duration of their disappearance, which is why such details cannot be always provided.

Hotlines indicated that migrant children return of their own accord as often as being found by law enforcement. Other methods, such as publicity appeals or rescue teams, are reported to be far less commonly successful.



Most common reasons why migrant children go missing

(Based on responses from 6 hotlines)

Cited by 3 hoteline

LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES

Cited by 3 hoteline

TO REUNITE WITH FAMILY/ PEERS

Cited by 2 hoteline

BAD LIVING CONDITIONS

Each cited once

OTHER LESS COMMON REASONS

Violence, procedural issues, trafficking or smuggling, pressure from guardians, lack of autonomy in care or other unknown reasons.

[13] Lost in Europe (2024) – Data Explained
[14] Eurostat (2023) – 24% of first-time asylum applicants were children in 2023 - News articles - Eurostat
[15] European Union Agency for Asylum (2024) - Data analysis of unaccompanied minors in 2023.
[16] Missing Children Europe (2019) - Interact Report.

(INTERNATIONAL) PARENTAL CHILD ABDUCTIONS

Missing Children Europe defines a child missing due to parental abduction as a child that is taken away to, or kept in, a country or place 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]

› A severe form of escalated conflict can occur in cases of parental abduction, where one parent removes a child to another country or retains them there without the other parent's consent or knowledge. [...] In such a situation, the involvement of a skilled mediator can ensure a neutral handling of the dispute and help reach an agreement that serves the best interests of all parties involved, especially the children.[18]

« Children should not be put in a position where they should choose between two parents or in any position where they would be psychologically threatened.[19] »

Thomas (14), Cyprus
(Name changed to protect the identity of the individual)

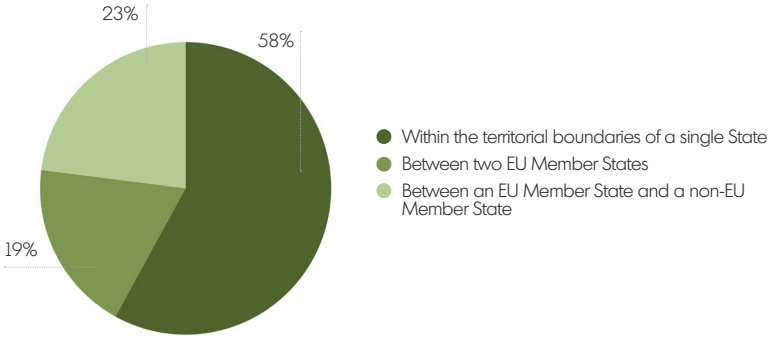
Caseload, age and gender

In 2024, hotlines recorded 1,014 new cases of international parental abduction, along with 178 ongoing cases from previous years, indicating that cases can take several years to be resolved. Data from 14 hotlines showed that 1,040 children received support, suggesting that abduction cases may involve siblings or repeated abductions. Among the identified children, 399 were boys and 370 were girls, while the gender of 271 children was not reported. Women (46%) are found to be more likely to abduct their child compared to men (29%).

The youngest child abducted by a parent was 0 years old, as reported by France. The median age of children abducted by a parent ranged from 1 to 12 years old, indicating that younger children are more frequently affected (information from 13 hotlines).

Although not all hotlines collect or are able to provide information on whether abducted children experienced abuse, data from seven hotlines indicate that 14% of all abducted children were exposed to some form of violence.

Location of parental child abduction cases



*Data from 13 hotlines

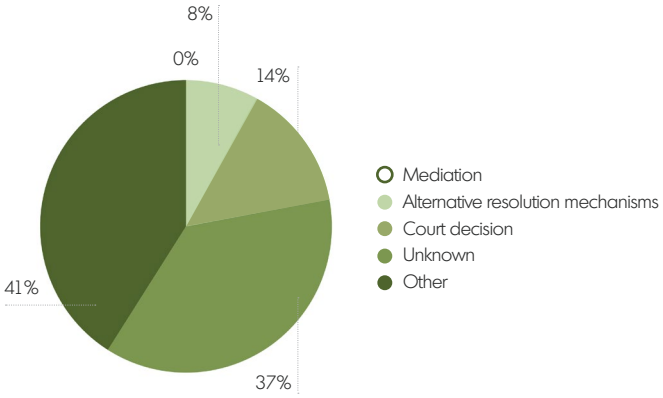
Some hotlines were able to provide further detail for 643 parental abduction cases, showing that the majority of parental abduction cases recorded in 2024 happened within the territorial boundaries of a single state (58%), compared to 23% of cases where abductions happened between an EU and a non-EU State. However, abductions between two EU Member States are less likely (19%).

How children were found and cases resolved

Where the data is available, 34 children were found alive, none were found deceased and 14 remain missing, with no further information on the remaining 992 children. Of those found alive, 38% were located between one week and one month, 29% were found within one week, and 20% between one and six months.

Of the 180 cases with detailed information on resolution methods, court decisions (14%) were the most common, followed by alternative resolution mechanisms (8%). However, since few hotlines collected this data, it is challenging to get an accurate understanding of the available resolution methods and their effectiveness.

Resolution methods of parental abduction cases



*Data from 5 hotlines

[17] Vermeulen (2005) - Missing and sexually exploited children in the enlarged EU: epidemiological data in the new member states.
[18] Missing Children Europe (2021) - iCare: Mediation Week 2021: Benefits of mediation as an alternative to court proceedings in family conflicts.
[19] Missing Children Europe (2021) - Guide to Good Practice: Recommendations Based on the Views of Children and Young People Involved in International Child Abductions

CRIMINAL ABDUCTIONS

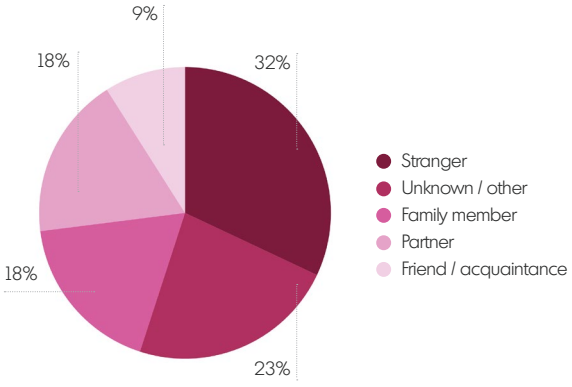
Missing Children Europe defines criminal abduction as the abduction of a child by anyone other than a parent or person with parental authority.[20]

Caseload, age and gender

In 2024, 14 hotlines reported data in this category, covering 38 cases and providing support to 53 children. Some hotlines reported details about the abductor's relationship to the child, where individuals known to the child, such as family members, partners, or family friends, were more likely to abduct a child, as evidenced in 15 cases. Abductions committed by a stranger accounted for 11 cases. For the remaining cases, the hotlines were unable to provide further detail on the abductor's identity. The fact is that children are far more likely to be abducted by someone they know, than by a stranger. This should inform prevention efforts, which ought to be geared towards empowering children to be assertive and fostering close relationships with trusted family members, rather than talk about 'stranger danger'.

Of the 7 hotlines that provided information on children's gender, 25 were girls and 9 were boys. For 19 children, no gender information was available. The youngest child criminally abducted was 1, and the median age recorded by 5 hotlines ranges from 2 to 15 years old.

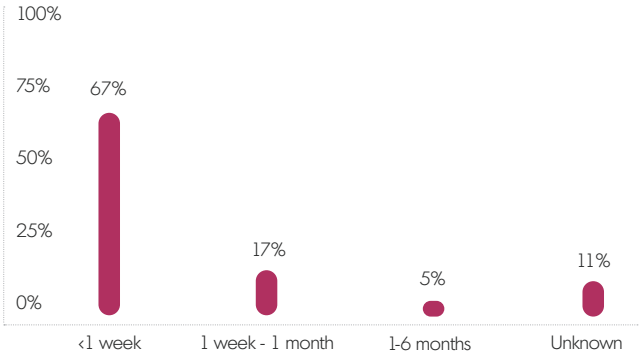
Relationship of the abductor to the child



*Data from 6 hotlines

Few hotlines have information on the outcomes of criminal abductions, as these cases mainly fall under the responsibility of law enforcement and victim support services. Of the 4 hotlines that recorded information on the condition of these missing children, 17 were found alive, one child was sadly found deceased, while 8 remain missing. Because not all hotlines collect this type of information, the status of the remaining 27 missing children is still unknown. Of the children who were found (alive and deceased), 67% were located within a week, 17% were found between one week and a month after being kidnapped, and one child was found between one to six months after the disappearance.

Timeline of when children were found



*Data from 4 hotlines

The majority of criminally abducted children were found by law enforcement agencies. Early interventions and strong coordination between hotlines and law enforcement agencies are crucial to ensure rapid responses and to locate children quickly, as the data shows that 67% of children are found within a week. Strengthening communication between children and trusted family members is essential for helping children recognise early warning signs and indicators that may lead to going missing, especially when abductors are often known to the child.

Children are far more likely to be abducted by someone they know, often a family member or close acquaintance.

[20] Vermeulen (2005) - Missing and Sexually Exploited Children in the Enlarged EU: Epidemiological Data in the New Member States.

LOST, INJURED OR OTHERWISE MISSING

Missing Children Europe defines a lost or injured child as the disappearance 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 be children who got hurt and cannot immediately be found such as accidents during sports activities or youth camps, but 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.[21]

Caseload, age and gender

Children who were lost, injured, or otherwise missing made up 561 of new cases recorded by 9 hotlines. 7 of those hotlines supported 231 children in this category.

These types of missing cases are the most complicated to deal with as the reasons for the disappearance are unclear, making it difficult to know how to search for them. When available, the hotlines' data showed that about as many boys go missing compared to girls (47 and 46 respectively), along with 2 non-binary or transgender children. The youngest child lost, injured, or otherwise missing was 1 years old, the median ages across Europe in this category (based on information from 9 hotlines) ranged between 12 and 16 years old.

In 2024, the outcomes for the majority of these children remained unknown. Amongst the children about whom such information was recorded, 42 children were found alive, and 7 children were confirmed deceased. Of those found alive, 71% were located within a week, and 10% between a week and one month.

Why children went missing or were injured, and how they were found

According to just three hotline respondents, getting lost in a crowded place and experiencing mental health issues that limited their ability to return home are the most common reasons children are lost injured or otherwise missing. This underscores the need for hotlines and support services to be adequately trained and equipped to provide inclusive support, integrated with mental health services. Most children were found by law enforcement agencies, with children returning on their own being another common way for these cases to get resolved, according to four hotlines.

Children with mental health issues or a physical disability may be much more vulnerable to going missing, underscoring the need for accessible services.

Most common reasons why children were lost or injured

Cited by 2 hotlines
GOT LOST IN A CROWDED PLACE

Cited by 2 hotlines
EXPERIENCED A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM

Cited by 1 hotline
HAD A PHYSICAL DISABILITY

Cited by 1 hotline
DID NOT KNOW THE WAY HOME

*Data from 3 hotlines

[21] Vermeulen (2005) - Missing and Sexually Exploited Children in the Enlarged EU: Epidemiological Data in the New Member States.

HOTLINES SUSTAINABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

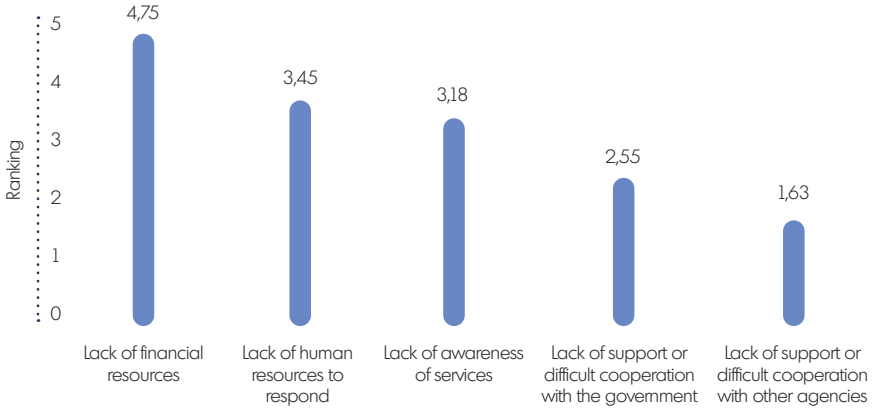
Based on data provided by 12 hotlines, 50% of hotlines receiving funding from local/national governments or statutory agencies stated that the funding from these agencies was insufficient to provide minimum quality services. They pointed to the negative impact this has on their human resources, staff, and working hours. One hotline explained that they are unable to operate 24/7, meaning that there are hours in a day when contacts are not attended to. Hotlines facing funding shortages often respond by partnering with volunteers, corporations, and private foundations to sustain their services. Many Member States are thus not living up to their responsibility, as set out by the European Electronic Communications Code, to ensure the hotlines are adequately funded.

Lack of funding threatens the hotlines' sustainability, and impacts both their human resources capacity and the ability to raise awareness of their services. These are indeed the three challenges most commonly mentioned by hotlines. Overcoming these barriers is crucial to ensure that all children and parents, regardless of their characteristics and circumstances, can access appropriate support offered by the 116 000 hotlines.

« If we had more human resources, we would have more time to do awareness events, and to be accessible 24/7 for everybody. »

**Hotline*

Ranking of the challenges faced by hotlines

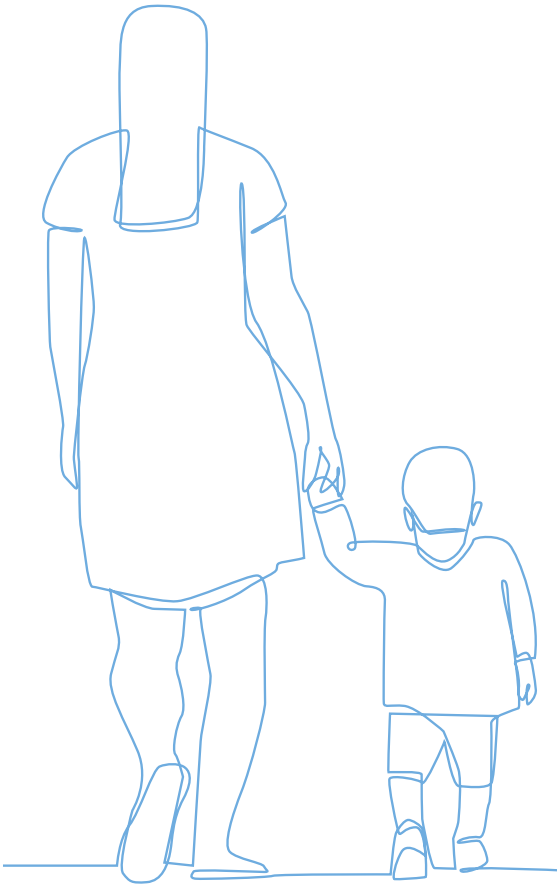


*Data from 12 hotlines

Missing Children Europe strongly urges Member States to fulfil their obligations under Article 96 of Directive 2018/1972, which establishes the European Electronic Communications Code, by ensuring that the 116 000 hotline for missing children is free of charge, accessible to children with disabilities, adequately funded by the designated provider, and widely promoted. This should be done in parallel with the 116 111 child helpline to ensure broad public awareness and equal access across the EU.

Of the 12 respondents, 75% stated that they offer support through various means such as chats (9 hotlines), emails (4 hotlines), or other online platforms such as websites (4 hotlines). When asked about specific vulnerabilities (such as children with neurodivergences) 92% stated that they don't offer specific services to accommodate for them. Some hotlines (8%) stated they offer specific tools, such as language interpretation and visual services for deaf children.

One of the main challenges that hotlines face in improving accessibility is, once again, the lack of financial resources, human resources, and public awareness of their services. Nevertheless, progress has been made over the past year to enhance accessibility, with several hotlines implementing effective measures such as multilanguage support (67%), gender sensitive response training for staff (50%), partnerships with CSOs working with vulnerable groups (42%), and culturally sensitive training (33%).



HOTLINES FOR MISSING CHILDREN

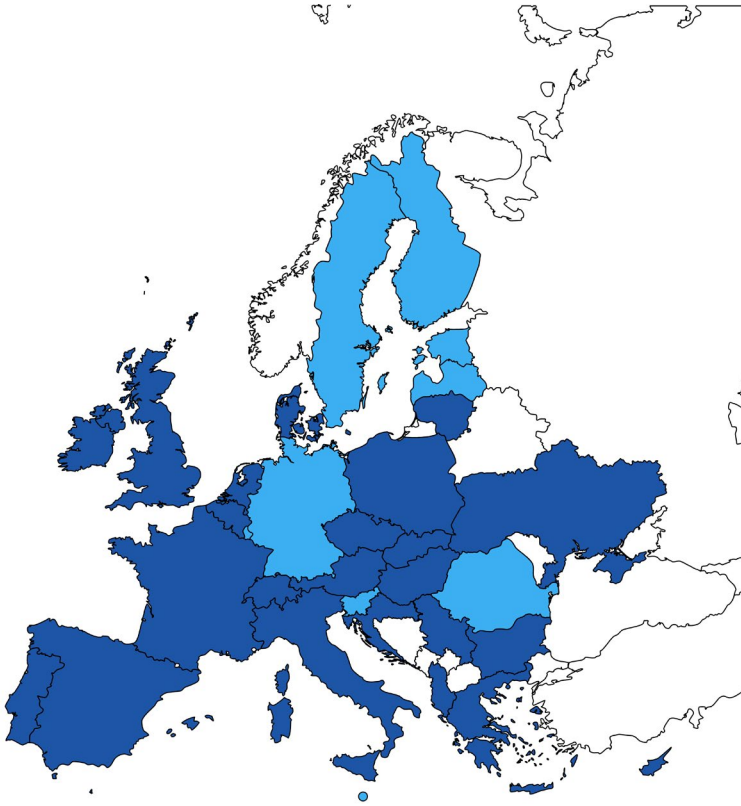
Hotlines run by members

Albania: ALO 116
Austria: 147 Rat auf Draht
Belgium: Child Focus
Bulgaria: Nadja Centre Foundation
Croatia: CNZD - Centar za Nestalu
Cyprus: Consortium: SPAVO & Hope for Children
*Czech Republic: Cesta z krize, z.ú.
Denmark: Børns Vilkår
France: Droit d'Enfance
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, n. o.
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
*Luxemburg: L'Office National de l'Enfance
*Malta: The Malta Police Force
Romania: Asociatia Telefonul Copilului
*Slovenia: Zavod 116
*Sweden: SOS Alarm

*Did not provide data for this report



Hotlines run by members

Hotlines are not run by members

SUPPORT MISSING CHILDREN EUROPE

Make a donation

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

For donors residing in Belgium who require a tax certificate - please make your donation through The Friends of Missing Children Europe Fund managed by the King Baudouin Foundation. Belgian donations of €10 or more per year to the Foundation benefit from a tax reduction of 45% of the amount actually donated (art. 145/33 CIR).

DONATE

For all other donors
Missing Children Europe
IBAN: BE43 3101 6583 2401
BIC/SWIFT: BBRUBEBB
Communication: "Donation"

Missing Children Europe is able to provide a tax certificate for residents of France. For more info, visit the website: https://missingchildreneurope.eu/donate/

Get involved

Find out about our campaigns, fundraising events, and initiatives at www.missingchildreneurope.eu/get-involved/.

Interested in making a lasting impact? You can sponsor a fundraising event, organise one, or support one of our meaningful projects.

You can also celebrate special moments like birthdays, weddings, or graduations by encouraging your friends and family to donate to this important cause. Together, we can make a change!

Contact us at info@missingchildreneurope.eu for more information.

Volonteer with us

We are always looking for dedicated volunteers with expertise in areas like website development, photography, videography, translation, interpretation, copy editing, and IT support. Could you lend a hand?

If so, we would love to hear from you!
Reach out to us at info@missingchildreneurope.eu

Download 404 NotFound

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

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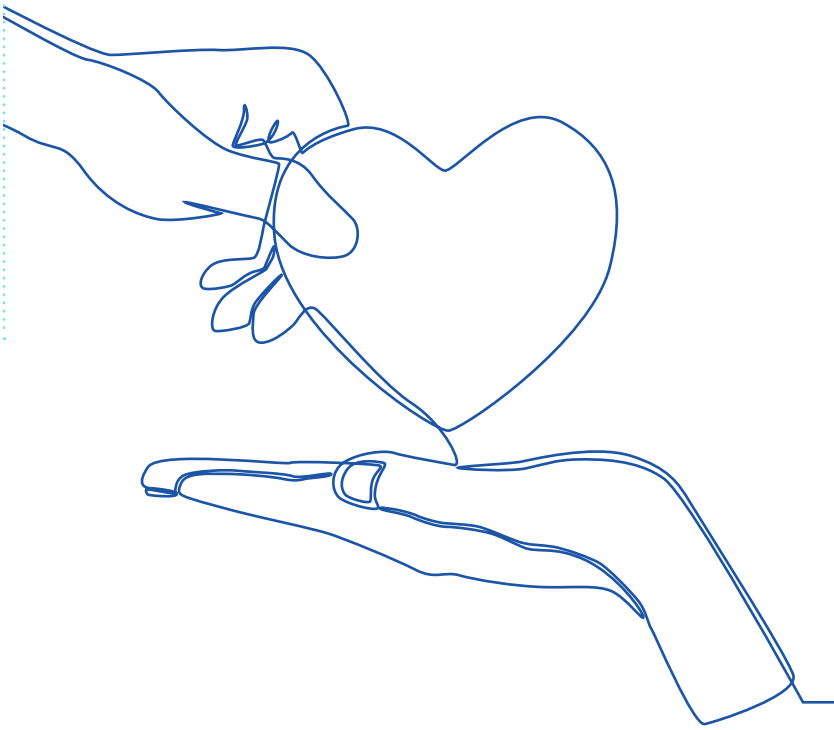
Special thanks to our sponsors and donors

A heartfelt thank you to our donors

Mrs Irène Mathieu, Mrs Véronique Emsens, Mr. and Mrs. Mediavilla, Mr Olivier van Regemortel, Mrs Sandrine Blaton, Mr. Alain Fayard, Mr. Petr Kharitonov, Mr. and Mrs Didier Berthelemot, Mrs. Tora Hylkema, Mr Philippe Feller; and our photographer, Mr Alain Sannen (www.alainsannen.be), as well as all volunteers who supported our projects, events, campaigns, and the organisation of the golf event.



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