ANNUAL REVIEW 2016
Who we are

Missing Children Europe brings together 29 grassroots NGOs in 26 countries in Europe to work towards the prevention and protection of children who go missing and are sexually exploited.

We connect research, policy and professionals on the ground to safeguard children from any violence, abuse or neglect that is caused by or results from them going missing.

Our cross-border projects ensure missing children and their families get the support they need anywhere in Europe.

2016 celebrated the 15th anniversary of Missing Children Europe; an opportunity to take stock, and to reflect on the road ahead.

Ever since our establishment, we’ve been driven by our goal to protect children from any harm that leads to or results from their going missing. In doing so, we built bridges between law enforcement, migration authorities and child protection agents, between researchers and practitioners, between the European and the grassroots levels. Together, we collected evidence and data on the complex problem of missing children, and translated them into concrete policies and practical solutions. We helped establish hotlines for missing children, providing psychological, legal and administrative support to children and families 24/7 across Europe, and created a network of Cross-Border Family Mediators covering five continents, specialised in finding sustainable solutions in the interest of children whose parents separate. We provided practical tools and training to professionals faced with the disappearance of thousands of children who arrive in Europe as they escape war and poverty. We listened to children who run away from conflict at home or in care institutions, to understand their suffering and their needs. Over the years, our membership has grown to a powerful network that leads operations at whatever the outcome, wherever in Europe, Missing Children Europe is involved, going missing is often the beginning of a journey of suffering and exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

In Europe alone, at least 250,000 children are reported missing each year, and each disappearance is one too many. In a changing and globalised world, disappearances of children have become more complex, requiring more efficient responses and robust prevention strategies. Ahead of these challenges, we will announce an ambitious new 4-year strategy in the course of 2017, which will continue to strive for integrated child protection systems that better protect children from disappearance, abuse and exploitation. Our work will remain constantly embedded in the UN Child Rights Convention, and align with the Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

For families concerned, the disappearance of a child may very well be the most traumatic experience one could imagine. For the children involved, going missing is often the beginning of a journey of suffering and harm, including exploitation and abuse. Whatever the cause, whatever the outcome, wherever in Europe, Missing Children Europe will continue to work relentlessly to prevent and protect children. To grant every child the right to feel safe and happy.

Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, President of Missing Children Europe and UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

“We help protect children and reunite families”

163,786 calls were received by
23 hotlines for missing children
19% of cases were cross-border in nature

“My husband and I have been involved in protecting children ever since Belgium woke up to the shock of child abductions, sexual abuse and murder, now 20 years ago. Even today, so many children are deprived of a safe relationship with both parents, or see no other option than to run away from the place that should have protected them from harm, to escape conflict or exploitation. Many of these struggles, many of these stories are unheard. These children rely on us to give them a voice and to protect their rights, as children, and as human beings. This is what Missing Children Europe stands for. Whether a child goes missing as it runs away, is trafficked, abducted by a parent following a family break up, or is simply lost. By bringing together organisations from every corner of Europe, Missing Children Europe contributes to the creation of a safety net for children that have slipped through the cracks, and are no longer heard, helped or protected.”

Her Majesty Queen Paola of Belgium, Chair of the Patrons’ Council of Missing Children Europe

“Europe should mean safety for children. A single exploited child is one too many. Member States need to urgently step up action to ensure that unaccompanied minors enter and stay in the protection system. I support Missing Children Europe’s valuable efforts on the ground to concretely help vulnerable children. The EU needs to do more also to tackle trafficking, abuse, child labour and sexual exploitation, forced begging and other criminal activities involving children. We cannot turn our back on these thousands of kids.”

Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, Member of the European Parliament and Co-Chair of the European Parliament’s Intergroup on Children’s Rights

“Being part of the Cross-Border Family Mediators’ network has given me the possibility to exchange information and experience with a group of mediators with the same mission: supporting parents resolve child abduction cases. Being able to work together with a known mediator in another country is one of the biggest advantages of being part of the network. The network provides a solution to parents who are in need of a specialised mediator. I am proud to be one of these mediators.”

Anneke van Teijlingen, Mediator, Cross-Border Family Mediators’ network (Coordinated by Missing Children Europe)
Missing Children Europe’s members work on the ground to prevent, protect and support missing and sexually exploited children and their families through grassroots efforts and programmes.

These efforts include awareness raising, publicity appeals, managing the national hotline for missing children, cross-border support, linking parents and law enforcement during investigations and more. 19% of missing children cases involved a cross-border element in 2016. Missing Children Europe supports cross-border cooperation between 29 members in 26 countries across Europe.

“The support of Missing Children Europe has been crucial to the efforts of “The Smile of the Child” to prevent migrant children from going missing in Greece. The contribution of Missing Children Europe has also been important in communicating the urgent need for cooperation in dealing with the refugee crisis to the European audience. As an organisation working on the frontline of this crisis we felt that our experience, practices and data could be heard and channelled at the European level through the work of Missing Children Europe and that its concrete recommendations and proposals to EU and national leaders reflected the actual needs of migrant children in need of better protection and quality care.”

Piji Protopsaltis, Coordinator, The Smile of the Child (Greek member)
### Running into trouble

When a 13-year-old girl from Hungary ran away from home to be with an adult male she had met online, the 116 000 hotline played a key role in helping her out of this extremely vulnerable situation. The service was able to reassure the girl about her options, support and advise the parents, and ensure a joined-up response from the relevant support services.

Since the divorce of her parents, 13-year-old Carol had been experiencing increasing conflict at home. Unable to communicate with her mother, she found comfort in a closed Facebook group for teenagers sharing their feelings of depression and discussing self-harm. There, she befriended an adult male who had infiltrated the group and eventually ran away from home to be with him.

Her case first came to the attention of the 116 000 hotline in Hungary operated by Kek Vonoll when the man emailed to say that he had Carol with him and was asking for advice on the situation. Hotline operators were suspicious of his motives and explained that he was committing a criminal offence by running away with an underage girl and – after a few exchanges – convinced him to share details about Carol.

The hotline contacted the police and child protection services to confirm that the girl had been reported missing and to inform them that they were in contact with the man that Carol was with. Carol herself then called the 116 000 hotline and was able to speak to one of their trained psychologists. Together, they were able to discuss her situation and options in a way that made Carol feel reassured. Following these discussions, Carol was reunited with her mother.

### One wrong turn

When the father of a two-year-old boy took him abroad and did not return, the mother turned to the hotline for missing children. They were able to offer guidance and advice, which led to the father and son’s safe return.

A young mother, Hilde, living in the Netherlands, was filled with panic when her husband did not return from a trip to his native Ireland with their two-year-old son, John. She had initially agreed to the trip so John could see his paternal grandmother who was unwell at home in Ireland. However, when father and son did not return as planned and her husband showed no signs of returning, she turned to the missing children hotline in the Netherlands run by ‘Center IKO’ for help and advice.

Center IKO first reassured Hilde, who wrongly feared that any legal procedure to ensure the return of her son could take up to ten years, that this wasn’t the case. The hotline advisors explained the 1980 Hague Convention on Child Abduction and its associated rights and procedures. They helped her to understand that the Convention provides for a short and quick procedure in the best interest of the child.

Whilst Hilde wanted to go to the police, the hotline informed her that a police report cannot be withdrawn in the Netherlands and that such a record could complicate the situation with the father in the future. Furthermore, filing a police report was irrelevant towards implementing the Hague Convention.

The recommendation of Center IKO’s trained advisors to the understandably anxious mother was to start by making it clear to the father that they have joint parental responsibility and that she did not accept the change of habitual residence of their son. They also suggested that mediation between the couple could be a useful option, including to help understand the actions of the father and to jointly overcome the issues he is experiencing.

Hilde followed this advice and explained the Hague Convention on Child Abduction and its procedures to the father. Without needing to go to the police or through a difficult legal procedure, the father realised that what he had done amounted to abducting the child and that he was not being fair to John or his wife. He returned to the Netherlands within a month where the family was reunited and where the couple are now working together to try to resolve issues in their relationship.

### What should adults do to prevent children from running away?

“Be more loving, because I know some of those girls think that their parents hate them”

Iris, 14 (Excerpt from “What children think” video)
At a glance

1. Visit to a refugee camp in Greece
2. Out of Focus photo exhibition at Google Belgium
3. International Missing Children’s day event at Egmont Palace for Missing Children Europe’s 15 year anniversary

Escaping the Taliban

Missing Children Europe’s Greek member, ‘The Smile of the Child’ has been working against the odds to support vulnerable migrant children arriving into Europe, such as this 15-year-old boy from Afghanistan.

Sohramp was 15 when he was told to leave Afghanistan by his father. One of his brothers had already been captured by the Taliban and had not been heard of since. His other brother had also disappeared and was feared to have been killed in a bomb blast.

Terrified of being recruited by the Taliban or killed, Sohramp left Afghanistan and headed to Iran where he stayed for a month. From there he travelled through Turkey and took a boat to the island of Chios where he stayed in a refugee camp. He then took another boat to Piraeus, where he stayed for two months in terrible camp conditions.

As Sohramp wanted to eventually get to Switzerland, he left for Thessaloniki where he stayed for one month hoping to find a way to cross the border. However, when he did eventually try, he was caught and sent back to a camp in Attica.

It was in this camp that the Greek organisation ‘The Smile of the Child’ first came into contact with Sohramp. He shared his story and the organisation was able to offer him support with urgent necessities. The organisation also provided counselling support and advice, as necessary.

However, as happens all too often in such cases, Sohramp soon left the protection of the camp to once more try to reach Switzerland. Several weeks later he turned up again having been arrested and detained at a police station while trying to cross the border into Italy through the port of Patras.

Sohramp was then placed in another centre for unaccompanied children. The Smile of the Child has since been unable to access any further update on his well-being or follow up his case.

Sometimes mums and dads don’t get along and separate. What should parents do to make sure their children are still happy?

“Maybe try to be nice to each other when children are around them”

Raphael, 9 (Excerpt from “What children think” video)

“One particularly troubling migration trend in 2016 was the rising number of unaccompanied minors arriving on European shores. In a few cases there are indications that these minors are part of a coordinated human trafficking operation. Even when this is not the case, they are nevertheless vulnerable to exploitation while in transit and once they reach Europe. Missing Children Europe is doing admirable work to shine a light on these risks and working with a range of actors, including Europol, to help protect these young people who, after all, come to Europe in search of physical and material security.”

Rob Wainwright, Director, Europol

“The 116 000 hotline accreditation process has helped us to see the operation of our organisation from a completely different perspective. As we went through the criteria we saw that we had managed to build up a good structure with many internal protocols and written processes. So by evaluating our hotline operation we were reassured that we are on the right track, but we could also identify areas for development. The Missing Children Europe accreditation project helped us to see our shortcomings, and grow even better.”

Baranyai Blanka, Project coordinator, Kek Vonal (Coordinates the 116 000 hotline in Hungary)
Missing Children Europe responds to the real needs of children and families on the ground by developing support structures, best practices and quality services that provide children and families with solutions, in the best interest of children. Read more about some of the initiatives we coordinate below.

### European hotline for missing children

What do you do if your child goes missing? Children and families calling the hotline for missing children, available through the 116 000 number, receive free and immediate emotional, psychological, social, legal and administrative support 24/7. These hotlines are operated by local grassroots organisations in 31 countries in Europe. Missing Children Europe promotes and supports the improvement of these vital support services.

Our activities in 2016 focused on developing a project to monitor and improve the quality of services provided by 19 hotlines across Europe. Achieving this quality criteria will ensure that children and families anywhere in Europe will have access to the same quality of support when faced with the unthinkable.

### Network of Cross-Border Family Mediators

A third of the cases reported to the hotline for missing children are those of children abducted by a parent. When a family conflict escalates, it can often lead to a parental abduction.

Missing Children Europe coordinates a network of 157 trained bi-cultural family mediators who specialise in supporting parents find an agreeable solution in cases of international family conflicts. International child abduction cases that solely rely on court proceedings take almost a year to come to a resolution. Family mediation on the other hand brings about significant and measurable time and money savings in resolving these cases. In 2016, 41% of all mediated cases were undertaken between two EU Member States.

### Response to missing migrant children

Tens of thousands of unaccompanied migrant children have continued to go missing while in Europe. Concern over the fate of these children relates to the increasing crossover between smugglers, who bring these children into Europe in very risky and dangerous conditions, and the traffickers who then force these children into sexual and labour exploitation as well as criminal and begging gangs.

In 2016, we monitored and advocated for better policies and laws developed at European level that affect children in migration. Field visits were made to camps in Greece and Italy with local member organisations, to obtain first-hand information from professionals and talk to the children affected, to understand their needs and embed them into our initiatives. Training was delivered to professionals to prevent and respond to the disappearances of migrant children based on research findings from the SUMMIT project.

### Publicity appeals

Publicity appeals call upon the public to provide information that could help find a missing child through the use of media such as posters, social media posts, broadcast media etc. Publicity appeals were used in 71% of missing children cases reported to hotlines for missing children in 2016. The notfound.org app is a publicity appeals tool launched by Missing Children Europe that replaces a website’s ‘404 error page’ with posters of missing children. So far posters of 919 children have been shared over 79 million times.

Despite the use of posters and other publicity appeals as common practice in finding missing children, very little research has been done to understand the impact of these appeals on actually finding children or the long-term impact on children and their families. A scoping research was undertaken in 2016 to answer these questions.

### Capacity building

Missing Children Europe supports a network of 29 grassroots organisations that work directly with children and families across 26 countries. Because of the large number of cross-border cases of missing children, Missing Children Europe continues to invest in research, training, cross-border coordination and development of projects that tackle the most pressing and ever evolving nature of child disappearances to deliver the relevant support to children and families.

In 2016, we continued to enable exchange of best practice between our member organisations through workshops, webinars and newsletters. Members were also linked up to funders and funding opportunities.

### Campaigning

Missing Children Europe together with its network of 29 grassroots organisations develop and launch awareness raising campaigns. These campaigns raise awareness of the complex issue of missing children and the tools available to prevent and respond to the issue aimed at children, families and other child protection authorities.

Several European campaigns were launched in 2016 including ReMUMber, an app that teaches children their parent’s phone number available in 15 languages, the Bambini sticker campaign where missing European championship stickers could be found through the campaign and proceeds went to finding missing children in 5 countries, a video that asked children themselves what they thought should be done to protect children in Europe and the coins of hope campaign developed by Belgian member Child Focus where a million euro coins were minted with the face of Liam, a 2 year old boy who went missing 10 years ago.
Our impact in 2016

From improving the quality of the services that support children and families to providing recommendations to policy leaders, Missing Children Europe focuses its work on the 4 strategic pillars mentioned below. Here are some of our highlights in terms of impact on missing children.

1. Developing cross-border solutions

- Ensured the quality of services provided by 19 hotlines for missing children through a monitoring and accreditation project
- Expanded the Cross-Border Family Mediators’ network to 37 countries with a total of 157 trained mediators
- 62% of the parental abduction cases handled by bi-cultural mediators had been referred by the Cross-Border Family Mediators’ network
- Trained 60+ professionals including guardians, police, carers and hotlines for missing children at a 2 day event on preventing and responding to the disappearance of migrant children
- Launched tailored video training material and best practices to professionals on preventing and responding to the disappearance of migrant children

2. Raising awareness and prevention

- Featured in the press online, print, TV and radio such as BBC, Guardian, Reuters, AP on 99 occasions in at least 13 countries
- Screened ‘Sarah-Cecilie’, a documentary about the impact of a parental abduction on a child, at the European Parliament
- Made 2.2 million impressions through tweets raising awareness of the causes and solutions available to missing children
- Launched the ReMUMber app, that has been downloaded 500+ times teaching children to remember their parents’ phone number
- Showcased our “Missing Children: Out of Focus” exhibition based on 3 real stories at the Google offices, the Patrons’ lounge at Bozar, the centre for fine arts and at the International School of Brussels

3. Supporting research and evidence

- Collected data from 27 hotlines and published the annual figures and trends of missing children report for 2015, viewed over 26K times through our publication hub
- Supported a research project to assess and ensure the well-being of children in cases of international child abduction
- Launched research on the impact of publicity appeals such as posters, website and social media posts etc. in finding missing children and the long term impact on children and their families
- Published a practical guide on the prevention and response to unaccompanied children going missing available in 6 languages and viewed over 39K times

4. Promoting policies and laws

- Co-chaired the Child Rights Action Group (CRAG), a collection of 18 child rights organisations advocating EU leaders for the better protection of children
- Published 10 newsflashes to influence stakeholders on topics related to migrant children in Calais, the link between smuggling and trafficking of migrant children, Brussels IIa bis amendment, funding cuts for hotlines, sexual abuse and exploitation of children etc.
- Presented and participated at 30+ conferences, hearings and events about the needs of missing children and recommendations to ensure their protection
- Organised a seminar at the European Parliament with the participation of 25 Members of the Parliament on the issue of unaccompanied migrant children going missing
Behind the scenes

General Secretariat

Delphine Moralis, Secretary General
Hilde Demarré, Project Officer, focal point for parental abductions
Federica Toscano, Project Officer, focal point for missing migrant children
Mette Drivsholm, Project Officer, focal point for runaways
Gail Rega, Communication Officer
Rebecca Granshaw, Fundraising Officer
Valentina Morese, Finance and Human Resources Officer
Nathalie Suvée, Office Manager
Kalim Ullah, Finance Assistant
Francis Herbert, Legal Counsel (Volunteer)
Frédérique Badin, Supporting Committee Coordinator (Volunteer)

Our finances

Annual expenditure by activity in 2016

- 28% Missing unaccompanied migrant children
- 13% 116 000 hotlines for missing children
- 10% NGO capacity building and exchange of best practice
- 9% Public engagement in finding missing children
- 7% Cross-Border Family Mediators’ network
- 6% Communication and advocacy
- 5% Management and fundraising

Total annual expenditure for 2016 was €79,616 euros. Find our complete Auditor’s report on www.missingchildreneurope.eu

“...missing children Europe to be a significant and valued grantee...”

Michael Diedring, Director, The European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM) (Foundation)

Board members

Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, President of Missing Children Europe
Heidi De Pauw, Vice President of Missing Children Europe, Child Focus, Belgium
Alexandra Simões, Instituto de Apoio à Criança (IAC), Portugal
Coskun Çörüz, The International Child Abduction Centre (IKO), The Netherlands
Ernesto Caffo, Telefono Azzurro, Italy
Piji Protopsaltis, The Smile of the Child, Greece
Sheila Donovan, Ayuda a Niños y Adolescentes en Riesgo (ANAR), Spain

Get involved and keep in touch

Make a donation
Help us continue protecting missing children:
IBAN: BE41 3630 2576 0210
BIC: BBRUBEBB
Donations over 40 euros made by residents in Belgium, France and Luxembourg are eligible to receive a tax exemption certificate.

Join the Notfound campaign
Download the free notfound app, on your website and give missing children another chance to be found. Go to notfound.org to learn more.

Participate in a fundraising event
Run, cycle, golf or play bridge at one of our fundraising events this year. Register now to make a difference in children’s lives.

Partner with us
Sponsor a project to create a safer Europe for children or become a partner at one of our fundraising events. Find out how on our website.

Volunteer to do good
Have time and passion to dedicate to the cause? Get in touch at supporting.committee@missingchildreneurope.eu

Fundraise in fun ways
Do something fun, get your friends involved and fundraise for us via missingchildreneurope.givengain.org

Download the ReMUMber app
Make it easy for your children to learn your phone number. ReMUMber is a fun app, that will help children memorise your phone number in no time.

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