

ANNUAL REVIEW 2019



**Missing
Children
Europe**

Who we are

“Our mission is to enable professionals to better protect children from going missing through research, training, advocacy and awareness efforts”



We started the year successfully with the 3rd Lost in Migration conference in Malta. Young newcomers conducted their own session and formulated recommendations to the European Union (EU). Our “Hear Me Out” conference made headlines with research on the voice of

the child in international parental abductions.

Together with other child rights organisations we ensured the re-establishment, after the elections, of a child rights intergroup in the Parliament, and the promise of a comprehensive child rights strategy and a child guarantee. We presented our EU memorandum 2020-2024.

Other advocacy successes include the Brussels II ter regulation on jurisdiction, recognition and enforcement of judgments on divorce and parental responsibility, which now requires judges to propose mediation in cases of international family conflict; and a reminder to Member States of their obligation, under the Electronic Communications Code, to ensure adequate funding for the 116 000 hotlines in the Parliament’s declaration on the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We ran successful campaigns for NotFound day, which AS Roma supported, and Mediation Week, with Snapchat, and kicked off the Tiny and Apollo campaign in Belgian cinemas, promoting a positive narrative on young migrants.

To close the year, our INTERACT training and policy event presented results of simulations on two fictional cases of young newcomers disappearing upon arrival in Europe.

Having received the green light this year on funding for the RADAR project co-creating research and training with children on running away, we have made sure that as of 2020, we will have, for the first time, active programmes on the three most important categories of missing children. Unfortunately, the final weeks of 2019 also brought about the COVID-19 pandemic, which is changing our society, and also exacerbating the risks of children in already vulnerable situations. The closing of borders caused new cases of international child abductions, and aggravated existing international family conflicts. Lockdowns did not prevent children from running away, and caused a surge in domestic violence, increasing risks of running away once measures are lifted. Migrant children’s access to support, legal aid, services and care is further limited, and they are more at risk of trafficking and exploitation.

In this situation, helplines and hotlines for children (at risk of) going missing are essential, and potentially lifesaving. It also brings intensified pressure on hotlines, with parents needing more support under social distancing measures. Like our health workers, food supply chain workers and safety force, the hotlines are a key service to society.

We therefore already know our most important challenge for 2020: to convince national governments and European decision makers to resource the national 116 000 hotlines so they can face the ongoing emergency and remain available for free, 24/7, to all children and families in need.

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

Missing Children Europe (MCE) connects 31 grassroots NGOs in 26 countries in Europe that work towards the prevention and protection of children who go missing.

We create the link between research, law and professionals on the ground to better safeguard children from any violence, abuse or neglect that is caused by or results from them going missing.

18% of missing children cases reported to our hotlines in 2019 were cross border in nature. That is why we invest in cross-border projects to ensure that missing children and their families get the same quality of support no matter where they are in Europe.

Our programmes focus on runaways, parental abductions and children in migration, and support the 22 national 116 000 hotlines in our network.

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www.missingchildreneurope.eu



“Parental child abduction has a devastating impact on children. It is important that parents and decision makers understand the consequences for children. I welcome our continued collaboration with MCE to promote meaningful ways to both prevent abduction and to provide the best possible outcome for children already affected by such action and in particular, to promote the use of mediation and hearing the child, especially in any proceeding where decisions are made that directly concern them.”

Ewa Kopacz, Vice President and European Parliament Coordinator on Children’s Rights

“Participatory research is essential to identify the needs of young people who run away or are at risk of running away and to further understand the triggers for running away, including protective factors. This approach conducted through the RADAR project with Missing Children Europe and partners, will enable for developed tools and training for professionals and to improve awareness of these issues, in a co-construction process with young people, based on their experience and competences, and most importantly, to involve them in prevention”.

Professor Fabienne Glowacz, Project Partner from University of Liege

“Among the thousands of migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Europe, escaping conflicts, violence or poverty, the most vulnerable are children and unaccompanied minors. Their life is put at risk in dangerous journeys and traffickers force them into sexual and labour exploitation. We need a real Common European Asylum and Migration policy, based on human rights, international law and solidarity among MS, and it is fundamental to draft it in cooperation with civil society organisations. As member of the EP, I found [it] very important to work with MCE, within the ‘Initiative for Children in Migration’, and to count on their expertise to ensure a better protection for these children.”

MEP Javier Moreno Sánchez, Head of the Spanish Delegation in the S&D Group of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of the Intergroup on Children’s Rights

Our impact in 2019

From improving the quality of the services that support children and families, to providing recommendations to policy leaders, here is the impact Missing Children Europe has had on preventing and supporting missing children in 2019.

Supporting frontline professionals



345

people benefited from training across

- 3 workshops and trainings
- 7 expert webinars
- 4 cross-border family mediator trainings
- 1 legal training for professionals

68

professionals from 14 countries have been empowered to improve cross-border cooperation for missing children in migration under the INTERACT project.

160

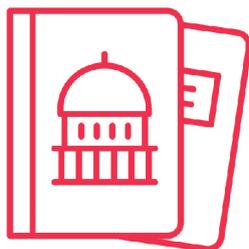
stakeholders were brought together from 36 countries for the third edition of Lost in Migration.

Advocating for child-centred policy

Successfully advocated with other child rights NGO's for **re-establishment of European Parliament Child Rights Intergroup** after the elections.

Secured a reminder of **Member States' responsibilities towards 116 000 hotlines** in Parliament resolution for 30th Anniversary of the UNCRC.

Presented our **EU Memorandum** to the new European Parliament.



Advocated for the **implementation of mediation framework** required by **Brussels II ter regulation** on matters of divorce and parental responsibility at national level.

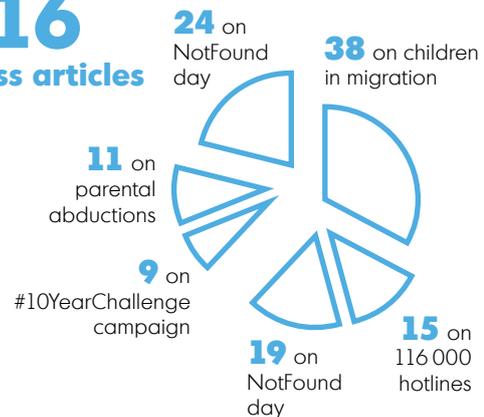
Raising awareness and challenging narratives

likes up by **785**
followers up by **422**
followers up by **365**

Over **800k** people were reached through **Tiny and Apollo campaign** launched in November 2019.

Garnered a total of

116 press articles



Using scientific data to define priorities



Over **55k** calls have been answered by **116 000 hotline operators**.

23 hotlines, including **three governmental agencies**.

Surveyed **34** cross-border mediators about parental abduction.

Members

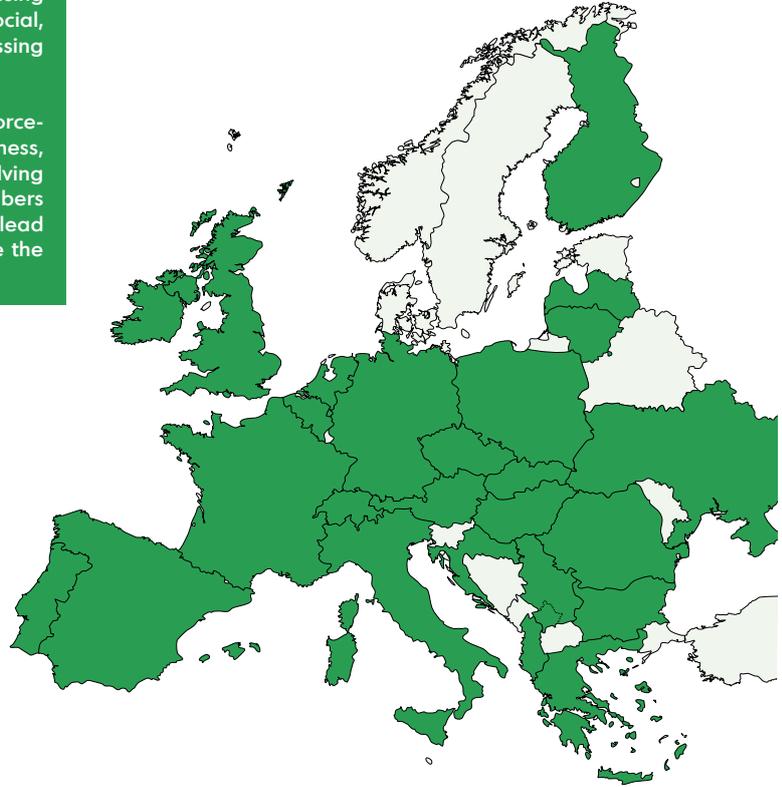
Our 31 member organisations work on the ground in 26 countries across Europe for the prevention, protection and support of missing and sexually exploited children and their families.

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

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

Where our members are

Member



Members

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

89%

of members surveyed consider us to understand their needs very well, and say our projects are based on the real and current needs of missing children and their families

95%

of members surveyed are very satisfied with the overall support provided by our team

89%

of members surveyed consider MCE's joint communications campaigns to be very well organised

"We highly appreciate MCE's lobbying to change procedures in European Union countries and their work to protect missing children. We also fully support MCE's important campaigns such as the one for mediation week. Their webinars give us opportunities to exchange experiences with other organisations and "to think outside of the box". We also admire that MCE gives a real voice to the children and teenagers they serve and makes them an important part of the whole process."

ITAKA foundation (Polish member)



Parental abductions



What is mediation?

Trained and qualified mediators help find a solution which is negotiated by both parents and reflects the specific situation of the family, for the benefit of the children.



75%

of the cases are **solved** by a full (48%) or partial (27%) mediation agreement

60%

cheaper than court proceedings

7x ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶

faster compared to court proceedings (43 days instead of 18 months)

How to get help?



Cross-Border Family Mediators

A network of 178 bi-cultural family mediators from 37 countries to prevent, support and protect children from harm related to cross-border family disputes

Call the hotline for missing children

116 000 ☎

Find a mediator near you

<http://crossbordermediator.eu>

Snapchat filter for the Mediation week 2019

Missing Children Europe coordinates the European Cross-Border Family Mediators (CBFM), a growing network of over 200 trained bi-cultural, cross-border family mediators representing 40 countries. In 2019, MCE welcomed the first Ukrainian mediators and held two trainings for the network.

A parental abduction occurs when one parent or guardian takes their child to another country without the permission of the other parent or person with parental authority. This is the second most common form of missing children in Europe. While it may be instinctive to start a legal battle in the aftermath of a parental abduction, the experience is often traumatic for the child, cross-border family mediation proves to be a more efficient and peaceful alternative. Trained mediators engage directly with the parents to find a solution that reflects the specific family situation. Since mediation is voluntary and places the needs and wellbeing of the children at its centre, it is more effective long-term. Despite its success rate, mediation remains relatively unknown to the public and is not used sufficiently in Europe.



Cross-Border Family Mediators training

The new **Brussels II ter Regulation** (EC) N°2201/2003 is the most important judicial instrument in cases of international child ab-

duction, setting the rules for immediate return of the abducted child amongst EU Member States. The new amendments oblige courts to invite parents to consider mediation at any stage of the court proceedings and encourage the hearing of children in court cases that affect them. This marks a significant step forward for mediation as a prominent alternative to dispute resolution, but only be effective when structures for cross-border family mediation are available in every member state. In 2019 we therefore started advocating with members states to make this effort before the Regulation enters into force.

In October, MCE kicked off the **INCLUDE project** which, in cooperation with children, will develop good practice guides with a specific focus on safeguarding the wellbeing of children during enforcement of return decisions.

Between 14-18 October 2019, we commemorated **International Mediation Week by raising awareness of family mediation as a solution to parental abduction cases**. Together with national missing children organisations, we spoke about the advantages of mediation over court proceedings in custody battles, such as its relatively lower cost and higher efficiency. MCE also launched a campaign in collaboration with Snapchat, to raise awareness about what children want in a family conflict.

In 2019, MCE completed a **research and training project on the voice of children in international child abduction cases**. A case law analysis in 17 EU member states showed that the best interest of the child is not taken into account in almost half of all child abduction cases. This research resulted in two training sessions for legal professionals and two trainings for mediators to equip them with the necessary tools to include the voice of children and the best interest of the child in all cases of international child abductions. The results of this project were presented at a closing **"Hear Me Out" conference** in Ghent, on May 30th and 31st.

Desperate mother reunited with son, Angelo, in time for Christmas

Nine-year-old Angelo, from Bristol UK, was reported missing on March 2 when he did not return home from football practice with Bristol Central FC. Angelo's mother had almost given up hope of ever seeing her abducted son again before she called 116 000 for Missing Children who were able to advise her and coordinate an appeal which led to their reunion on December 2, 2019.

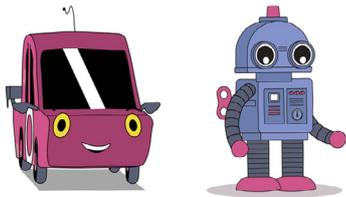
When Angelo did not come home, it was suspected that he may have visited his father. His mother reported him missing and worried about his welfare as Angelo's father had breached a court order put in place to protect Angelo. It was an extremely unsettling experience for Angelo who was taken away from his family home, his primary school, and his friends. The authorities and British hotline, Missing People, launched publicity appeals, which included a march, to raise awareness of Angelo's disappearance, resulting in large media coverage across the UK. They also liaised with MCE's Spanish member, Fundacion ANAR about publicity in Spain as it was later revealed that Angelo had been taken there. Inquiries were made with the Spanish authorities to locate him as soon as possible. A warrant was put out for his arrest on suspicion of child abduction.

MCE's UK hotline member, Missing People, published publicity appeals, which included a march to raise awareness together with our Spanish member, Fundacion ANAR.

Angelo was recovered by Spanish authorities at Madrid Airport on November 30, after he got off a flight from Mexico with his father who was then detained under the terms of a European Arrest Warrant. Angelo was unharmed and reunited with his family just in time for Christmas.

Missing children in migration

Have you met Tiny and Apollo? Find their animated stories which MCE created to support a more empathic and welcoming narrative on children in migration on tinyandapollo.com. The website includes tips on how to speak up for children in migration.



Meet Tiny & Apollo

Stand up for children on the move in Europe today

Between 2014 and 2017, at least 30,000 young newcomers, escaping violence or poverty in their home countries, disappeared on European soil. Despite the enormous risks to which unaccompanied migrant children are exposed, disappearances are usually underreported. This is one reason why children in migration make up only a small percentage of all missing children cases reported. They account for about 1.5% of all cross border cases reported.

In February 2019 MCE hosted the **third edition of the Lost in Migration conference: "Global strategies and political commitments for all children in migration"** in Malta, in cooperation with the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society. The conference discussed the challenges faced by children on their way to Europe and the journey's impact on their well-being and protection, with a group of young refugee advocates. We assessed the impact of the Commission Communication on the protection of children in migration two years after the adoption. The recommendations from this edition were presented to the European Commission in June, and, by those young advocates, to the European Parliament in October.

This year MCE **published two resources to improve multiagency collaboration at national and international level, for the protection of children in migration at risk of trafficking and exploitation.** The [INTERACT report](#) summarises the results of case-based simulations held in 2018 in 6 European countries, and the [INTERACT Handbook](#) includes good practices and tools to address the shortcomings uncovered by those simulations. At the Brussels launch event in December, MCE trained 55 practitioners in child protection, migration management and law enforcement. The training was followed by a policy event, where policy recommendations were discussed to improve cross border collaboration for the protection of children in migration at EU level. Missing Children Europe is also active in Northern France, as we are deeply concerned with the **numerous cases of children who go missing in their attempt to reach the UK.** The cooperation gaps at the border leave



Participants at the INTERACT training

these children without protection. Together with the grassroots organisations working in the region, we developed an action plan including short and long-term solutions.

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

Miniila is a child-friendly app for children and youth on the move in Europe. First launched in 2018, it provides trustworthy information on available support and services in order to keep them safe from those who profit from their vulnerability, such as traffickers. In 2019 we reviewed and re-developed the app based on the feedback provided by its users, young migrants. As of early 2020, Miniila will be available in Arabic, English, Farsi, French and Tigrinya, in eight European countries.

Missing Children Europe coordinates the Initiative for Children in Migration, an informal collaboration between more than 100 migration, asylum and child protection actors at European and national level involved in joint advocacy work on EU law and policy concerning children in migration. Resources for advocacy and a tool to monitor the impact of EU policies and law on the rights of children in migration are available at www.childreninmigration.eu.

Cross-border Cooperation works, Pakistan siblings found and reunited

In October 2019, Missing Children Europe was contacted by the German guardian of 18-year-old Mohammed* who needed help to find his two missing siblings aged 13 and 16.

Mohammed and his siblings had fled Pakistan in 2018, intending to reach Germany with the help of smugglers. They got separated during their journey and the last time Mohammed saw them was in Italy in December 2018.

Mohammed's foster mother promised to help him find his siblings, and followed Missing Children Europe's advice: 1) to file a missing person's report with the police in Italy in order to start the search, and 2) to allow our member Telefono Azzurro to send the information to the Public Prosecutor's Office at the Juvenile Court of Milan.

Telefono Azzurro took the necessary steps to ensure smooth communications and cooperation between authorities. After strong collaboration efforts, the siblings were found and reunited with their brother in early January 2020.

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

Runaways

In 2019, Missing Children Europe continued to advance its agenda on improving policies for runaway children by developing and securing funding for its first project on the topic. It will tackle persistent negative perceptions about runaways and the lack of adequate child protection measures for what is, categorically, the largest group of missing children across Europe.

RADAR (Running Away: Drivers, Awareness, Responses) was developed in partnership with members who run local initiatives in support of runaways, including the Instituto de Apoio à Criança (Portugal), Smile of the Child (Greece), ITAKA (Poland), Child Focus (Belgium), and with the University of Liège and Child Helpline International. It will advance current research on runaways and develop trainings and open

courses for professionals and authorities. The key to success of RADAR will be the participation of children and young people with experiences of running away and their insight, feedback, and opinions throughout the project's lifecycle.

Teen runs away and travels Europe with 24-year-old boyfriend

When 16-year-old Max* ran away from home in Belgium due to a disagreement about his relationship with a 24-year-old, his distressed parents reported him missing to the 116 000 European hotline for missing children.

After a couple of days it became clear, via messages from his peers and the synchronization of his google account, that Max was travelling around Europe with his boyfriend with no access to a phone and therefore could not communicate with his parents. The parents feared that Max would want to return home and that his boyfriend may be preventing him from doing so, an idea which caused particular stress to his mother. She became impatient with the police, taking things into her own hands in desperation. Actions like depositing money to

Max in order to facilitate a return, against police advice, and threatening to contact media outlets, took a toll on the cooperation.

Our member, Child Focus, played a vital role in facilitating smooth communication between the various actors and ensuring that Max's parents were kept well informed.

When the Belgian public prosecutor put in a request for a public appeal, Max was immediately intercepted by the Italian police at a routine control point. Max's return to Belgium was complex as no crime had been committed. There was no judicial framework to determine who was responsible for Max' repatriation costs: his parents or the Public Prosecutors' Office."

The social department of the Belgian police and the Italian juvenile court judge appointed to Max's case, made joint efforts to ensure his safe return. Child Focus maintained the relationships between all parties, made practical arrangements for a smooth return and relayed vital information to Max's parents.

When Max returned to Belgium, the youth court decided to place him in alternative care, where the youth court social service follows up with him.

*The child's name has been changed for protection purposes



Photo credit: Daniel Osorio

European 116 000 hotlines

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

In 2019 we paired new member Ukraine with "buddies" Missing People UK, Smile of the Child Greece, and Centar za nestalu (CNZD) Croatia, to support them in completing a self-assessment as a first step in the **accreditation** process of their hotline.

Our **Client Relationship Management (CRM) tool for hotlines**, allows them to record data on missing children using a common platform and structure, which will improve sharing and comparability of case data. We conducted a workshop "walkthrough" of the CRM, paired with a testimony from our Croatian member, which has been using the system since 2018. This encouraged France to start the onboarding process. In the meantime, Consortium

SPAVO & HFC in Cyprus are finalising the deployment of the tool which they began in 2019.

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



CRM Workshop during General Assembly 2019

Health of the 116 000 Hotlines Under Covid-19

The issue of adequate funding for the 116 000 hotlines is becoming particularly urgent under the current restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19. With domestic violence increasing, children continue to run away from home; border closures spark new parental abductions, and children in migration become even more at risk of trafficking and exploitation. Our hotlines, 60% of which were already underfunded, have to deal with the same volume of cases, needing more time and energy as callers are deprived of other social support. At the same time they have to invest in technology to work remotely and in fast development of chat and other functions to ensure everyone has safe access to hotline services where family could listen in on calls. This puts additional strain on their already limited resources. Member States and the EU must take their responsibility to safeguard children's right to access to these support services, which are key to society.

Read our statement at missingchildreneurope.eu/COVID-19

Behind the scenes as of April 2020

Team members

Aagje Ieven, Secretary General
Federica Toscano, Head of Advocacy and Migration
Hilde Demarré, Cross-Border Family Mediators' Network Coordinator
Kalim Ullah, Finance and Payroll Officer
Laure Vierset, Project Officer for Children in Migration
Andrea Tedde, Partnership and Fundraising Officer
Musu Kargbo-Reffell, Communications Officer
Eugenia Yumi Miyashita, Project Officer for Runaways and Hotlines
Syed Hasnain, Outreach Worker
Jagoda Luto, Communications and Fundraising Assistant
Paola Rando, Policy and Programmes Assistant
Emily Clothier, Operations Assistant
Frédérique Badin, Supporting Committee Coordinator (Volunteer)
Francis Herbert, Legal Counsel (Volunteer)
Rebecca Granshaw, Partnership and Fundraising Officer (Maternity Leave)

Patrons' Council

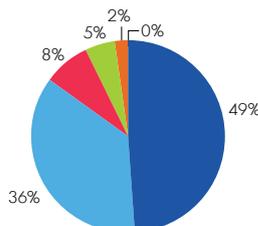
H.M. Queen Paola, Honorary President of the Patron's Council
Sir Francis Jacobs, Former President of Missing Children Europe
Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Former President of Latvia
Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, Former European Parliament Coordinator for Children's Rights
László Andor, Mercator Senior Fellow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

Board members

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

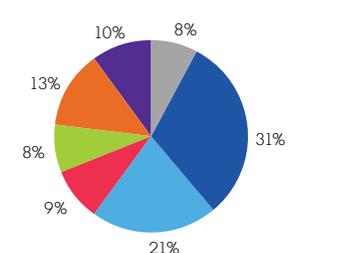
Our finances

Income sources 2019



■ European Commission
■ Foundations
■ Events and sponsorship
■ Donations
■ Member fees
■ Other

Expenditure 2019



■ Children in Migration
■ Parental Abductions
■ Training & Exchange of Best Practices
■ Public engagement in finding missing children
■ Communication & Advocacy
■ Management & Fundraising
■ Hotlines & Runaways

Support Missing Children Europe

Make a donation

Support Missing Children Europe in its work to support children (at risk of) going missing and their families. Together we can make a difference!

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

Are you a resident of Belgium, Luxembourg or France? For donations of 40 EUR or higher, you are eligible for a tax exemption certificate. Please, transfer to:
IBAN: BE 41 363 025 760 210
BIC/SWIFT: BBRUBEBB

Donations via Paypal or credit card
Donate with just a few clicks:
missingchildreneurope.eu/bank

Fundraising events

Participate in our fundraising events or organise your own and help us raise funds for missing children. Learn more at missingchildreneurope.eu/fundraisingevent

Sponsor us

Sponsor a project or become our partner at one of our fundraising events to help create a safer Europe for children. Find out how on missingchildreneurope.eu/partner

Celebrate with us on Facebook

You can celebrate any special occasion with us and encourage your friends to donate for a valuable cause. Set up a Facebook fundraiser. Find out how on www.facebook.com/fund/MissingChildrenEurope

Donate a service

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

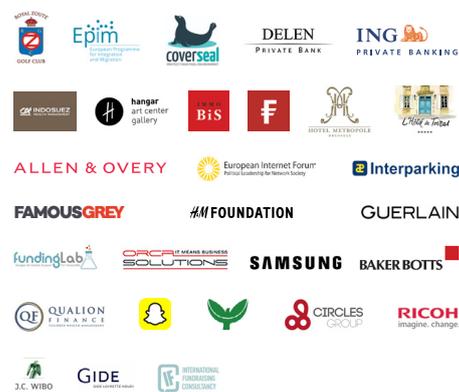
Download 404 NotFound

Help with the ongoing search for 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. Go to notfound.org.

A heartfelt thank you to all our volunteers in 2019:

- Photographers:
Daniel Osorio, www.daniosorio.com
Alain Sannen, www.alainsannen.be
- Artists: Bálint Borókai, Lin Yong Perfetti, Agata Fraczek and Gaetana Poponcini
- Helen Maynard-Hill, the founder of the Funding Lab.

Special thanks to our supporters



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