

ANNUAL REVIEW 2018



**Missing
Children
Europe**

Who we are

"We enable professionals to better protect children from going missing through research, training, advocacy and awareness efforts."



Translating our 2018-2022 strategy into action, 2018 marked the start of a new and promising period at Missing Children Europe.

In addition to continuing our core business of providing general support and training for the 116 000 hotlines, we focused our activities on three thematic areas: parental abductions, missing children in migration and runaways.

Our advocacy achieved significant impact on EU policies in two areas. The updated European Electronic Communications Code emphasises Member States' responsibility to ensure visibility, resourcing and quality assurance of the missing children hotlines. In addition, the Council of the EU approved updates to the Brussels IIa regulation obliging courts to invite parents to consider mediation and to encourage the hearing of children in cases affecting them.

We had impact on the ground by engaging with frontline professionals: fifty seven organisations participated in six simulation exercises on cross-border cases of children going missing in migration; seven training sessions on tools, cross-border cooperation, child participation, family mediation, and more, were each attended by twenty to thirty professionals.

Our research on the well-being and the involvement of children in parental abduction cases helped us understand the grave impact that abductions have on children as well as what they need and how they want to be involved.

Indeed, in 2018 we took our first steps towards developing child participation as a cross-cutting priority for all our activities. With young people in migration, especially those travelling alone, we worked on a mobile application addressing their information needs upon arrival in Europe. We also invited young people to share their experiences and recommendations at the Lost in Migration II conference and at our 116 000 awareness raising event on runaways at the European Parliament.

The publication of this report on International Missing Children's Day 2019 coincides with European elections at a time of increasingly divisive political discourse, with human rights at risk of erosion. Now is the time for strong political commitment to deliver on the protection of the rights of every child. Missing Children Europe remains committed to its aim of delivering the necessary data, tools, training, expertise and cross-border network to support this.

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

Missing Children Europe connects 30 grassroots NGOs in 26 countries in Europe who work towards the prevention and protection of children who go missing.

We create the link between research, laws 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.

European hotlines for missing children worked on a total of 8 845 missing children cases in 2018. 889 of these cases were cross-border in nature. This is why we focus our efforts on cross-border projects to ensure that missing children and their families get the same quality of support no matter where they are in Europe.

Check out the Figures and Trends on missing children in Europe for 2018 report on www.missingchildreneurope.eu

"Throughout my government sector career of 28 years, I have held a passion to help protect the most vulnerable people in our society, including children. I have had the privilege to work with many committed individuals and excellent organisations in the field of child protection. Missing Children Europe ranks among the finest I know. Through my work at Europol I have been impressed by its work in this field. To have the opportunity now to support it more directly and on a personal basis is a great honour."

Sir Rob Wainwright, Member of the Patron's Council of Missing Children Europe and former Executive Director of Europol

"Children's Rights are not a soft nor a small issue. As Chair of the Child Right's Intergroup and European Parliament Coordinator for Children's Rights, I have had the pleasure of working closely with Missing Children Europe. Through events like Lost in Migration, Missing Children Europe plays a powerful and essential role in promoting the rights of all children. The human face of migrant children should never be forgotten. It is essential that we continue to work together at the European level to determine long-term solutions for prevention and for better cross-border cooperation when children do go missing."

Anna-Maria Corazza Bildt, Member of the Patron's Council of Missing Children Europe and European Parliament Coordinator for Children's Rights

"In the United Kingdom, every 1 in 6-7 unaccompanied children went missing in 2017. These figures are much higher than missing children in the general population, where 1 in 200 children go missing. Working with Missing Children Europe, through the AMINA project, is assisting frontline professionals to develop tools on the ground that address the gaps when working with children in migration. It is also providing an essential evidential base to support wider policy recommendations in migration, which have been shown to place children at risk of missing and exploitation."

Laura Duran, Project Partner from ECPAT UK

"Even in cases where mediation fails, the process prepares fertile ground for people with parental authority to better accept my decision. Moreover, mediation makes the enforcement of a family case decision easier, which is imperative because the decision in itself is not enough if it is not enforced."

Daniel Van den Bossche, Family Court Judge in Ghent, Belgium

Our impact in 2018

From improving the quality of the services that support children and families, to providing recommendations to policy leaders, here is the impact that Missing Children Europe has had on preventing and supporting missing children in 2018.

Supporting frontline professionals



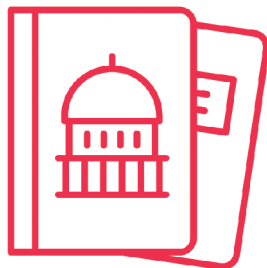
208 people benefited from training across

- 3 workshops
- 5 expert webinars
- 2 cross-border family mediator trainings
- 1 training for legal professionals

54 organisations from 6 countries have been empowered to improve cross-border cooperation for missing children in migration.

Advocating for child-centred policy

The **European Electronic Communications Code recast** was published, requiring all 28 Member States to **support the 116 000 hotlines**.



The Council of the EU approved the **Brussels IIa recast**, requiring judges to **propose mediation and include the child's views** in international parental abduction cases.

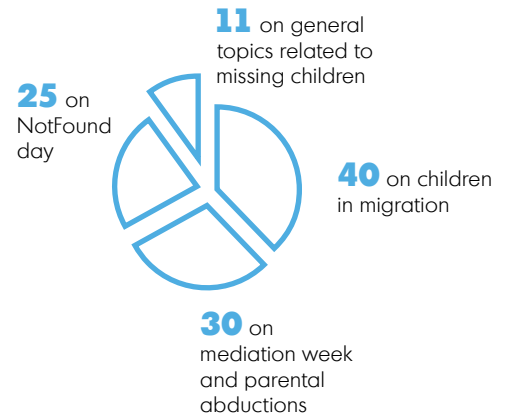
The European Parliament adopted a **resolution on the protection of children in migration** influenced by the Lost in Migration II conference recommendations.

Raising awareness and challenging narratives

likes up by **436**
followers up by **730**
subscribers up by **662**

3.1 million people were reached on social media through the first annual **NotFound Day**

106 articles about our work appeared in the press



Using scientific data to define priorities



15.5% more children were supported through the **116 000 hotline network** for missing children, compared to 2017.

26 hotlines, including **2 law enforcement agencies**, provided us with data about children who went missing in 2018.

40 cross-border family mediators provided data about the parental abduction cases they handled in 2018.

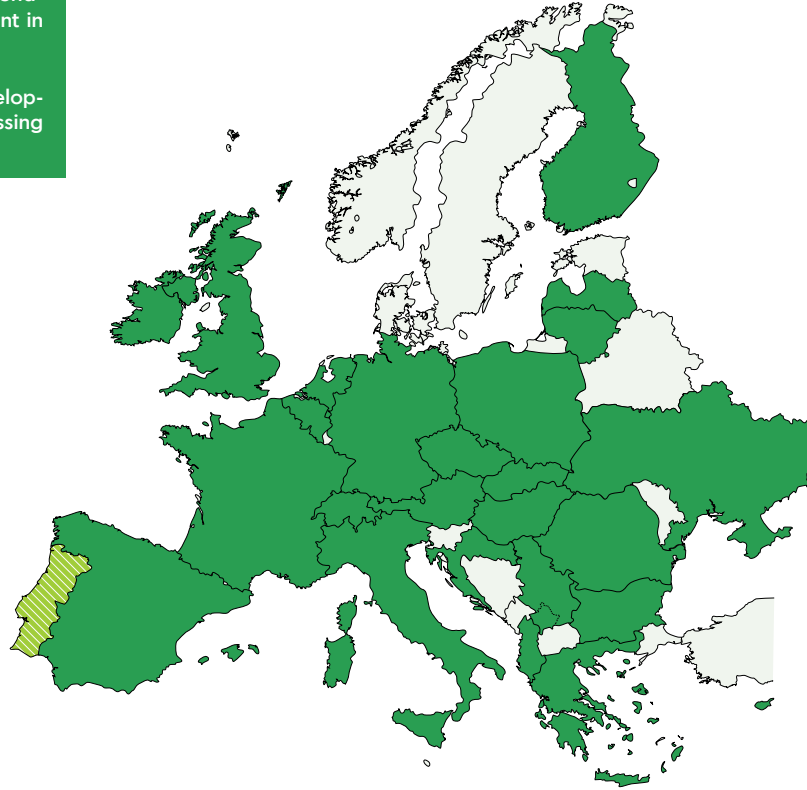
Members

Missing Children Europe supports a network of 30 grassroots organisations that work on the ground with children and families in 26 countries. Our members work to prevent, protect and support missing and sexually exploited children and their families by sharing publicity appeals, providing free 24/7 support through the 116 000 hotline for missing children, enabling support across borders, linking parents up with law enforcement in investigations and more.

We invest in research, training, cross-border coordination and the development of new projects to support our members in tackling the most pressing and ever-evolving issues that lead to child disappearances.

Where our members are

- Member
- Member + Applicant member



Our national members

- Albania** ALO 116
- Austria** 147 Rat auf Draht
- Belgium** Child Focus
- Bulgaria** Nadja Centre Foundation
- Croatia** Centre for missing and exploited children
- Cyprus** Consortium: SPAVO & HFC
- Czech Republic** Cesta z krize, z. ú.
- France** APEV, 116 000 Enfants Disparus, La Mouette
- Finland** Lasten perusoikeudet, Kaapatut Lapset ry
- Germany** Weisser Ring
- Greece** Smile of the Child
- Hungary** Kék Vonal
- Italy** SOS Il Telefono Azzurro Onlus
- Ireland** Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- Latvia** Bezvests.lv
- Lithuania** Missing Persons' Families Support Centre
- Portugal** Instituto de Apoio à Criança
- Poland** Itaka
- Romania** Salvati Copiii
- Serbia** Astra
- Slovakia** Linka detskej istoty, n. o.
- Spain** Fundación ANAR
- Switzerland** Missing Children Switzerland, Fondation Suisse du Service Social International
- The Netherlands** The International Child Abduction Centre
- Ukraine** NGO Magnolia
- United Kingdom** Missing People

Applicant members

- Portugal** Associação Portuguesa de Crianças Desaparecidas

100%

of members surveyed agree that our work is very or extremely influential in helping them stay ahead of issues, challenges and projects relevant to missing children trends.

89%

of members surveyed think our General Assemblies are very or extremely useful.

79%

of members surveyed consider us to understand their organisation's needs very or extremely well.

"During our years of contact with Missing Children Europe, we have seen that the team constantly pursues improvement and growth. At this year's General Assembly, for example, they included workshops that were incredibly useful for members. As members, we always feel encouraged to participate in Missing Children Europe's efforts and are especially happy to learn from the monthly webinars, which we find very helpful."

Fundación ANAR, Spanish member of Missing Children Europe

84%

of members surveyed are very or extremely satisfied with our team and would describe our work as **reliable, useful, and friendly**.



Parental abductions

Our work

While it may seem instinctive to go to court in the aftermath of a parental abduction, the experience is often traumatic for the child, who ends up caught in the middle of the custody battle. As an alternative, cross-border family mediation proves to be a more efficient and less conflictual procedure. Trained mediators engage directly with the parents to find a solution that reflects the specific family situation. Since the mediation process is voluntary and places the needs and well-being of the children at its centre, it is more effective in the long-term. Despite its success rate, mediation remains relatively unknown to the public and is not used sufficiently in Europe.

Missing Children Europe coordinates the European network of **Cross-Border Family Mediators (CBFM)**. CBFM is a growing network of **193 trained bi-cultural, cross-border family mediators representing 40 countries**. In 2018, we welcomed our first Peruvian and Norwegian mediators, organised two trainings for the existing network and presented our study on the well-being of abducted children at a training for judges in Paris.



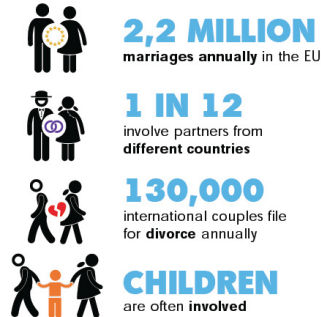
15-year-old Victoria, who was abducted as a baby, testifies about the impact that her abduction still has on her.

We also advocated for the use of mediation in international child abduction cases, which resulted in the Council of the European Union approving a set of **amendments to the Brussels IIa Regulation (ECIN*2201/2003)**. The Brussels IIa Regulation is the most important judicial instrument used in cases of international child abduction, 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 the court cases that affect them. The recast marks a significant step forward for mediation as a prominent alternative to dispute resolution.

"I wasn't heard by any judge or lawyer. I even went to the courthouse to request the judge to hear me, but the judge did not want to listen to a child."

Noah, aged 13 at the time

The situation today



What is parental abduction?

Children taken to or kept in a country other than that of their normal residence by one parent against the will of the other

THE SOLUTION? CROSS-BORDER FAMILY MEDIATION

Court proceedings are often used to resolve cross-border family conflicts but they are often slow and expensive. Cross-border family mediation can prevent and resolve family conflict including parental abduction.

Between 15-18 October 2018, we commemorated **International Mediation Week, to raise awareness of family mediation as a solution to parental abduction cases**. During Mediation Week, we promoted the advantages of mediation over court proceedings in custody battles. With the support of ten members, our efforts resulted in a successful campaign, garnering 30 press mentions across Europe.

Ania and Maya are abducted by their father

When a pair of four-year-old twins were abducted from their home in France and taken out of the country by their father in 2018, a coordinated European media campaign helped see their safe return to their mother.

In March 2018, the father of four-year-old twins, Ania and Maya, failed to bring the girls back home to their mother after a scheduled visit over the Easter holidays. Tanya, the girls' mother, was particularly concerned due to ongoing health issues faced by the children and the recent behaviour of the father. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Tanya was originally from Poland, the father from the UK and his girlfriend from Greece.

The mother had tried, in late 2017, to restrict the father's access to the girls, but the French family court had granted both parents full legal rights. The girls were scheduled to stay with their father every other weekend and for half the holiday period. This was granted on the special conditions that the children were forbidden to be taken out of France and were to be included on a special list for potential abduction.

At first, when the children failed to be returned at the expected time, Tanya did not know what to do. At that point, there was no way of her knowing whether the girls had been taken to the UK or Greece, to a neighbouring country or if they were still in France. She contacted the French police and the Polish missing children hotline run by Missing Children Europe's member organisation, **ITAKA**.

The police were able to quickly establish that the girls and their father had been in Luxembourg a week after. The Polish hotline team, meanwhile, opened a missing children case and supported the mother through the process of completing the necessary formalities in different languages.

The authorities and the Polish hotline published publicity appeals of the children on the internet and sent them to the media agencies across Europe, especially in Luxembourg, France and the UK. They also contacted UK and Irish authorities to confirm that the mother did not give permission for the children to be taken to a different country. In May, sightings of the father and twins were reported in the UK and by the middle of June the children had been found and returned to Tanya.

European coordination between hotlines can be crucial when children abducted by a parent are taken into different jurisdictions. Without effective cross-border communication and cooperation, the children might never have been found.

Missing children in migration

Our work

23 organisations including Missing Children Europe, civil society and UN organisations, issued a **joint statement in February 2018 against the EURODAC proposal**. EURODAC would allow the use of coercion to take children's fingerprints and photographs. The joint paper stated that the coercion of children in the context of migration violates children's rights, which EU Member States have committed to respect and uphold. The EURODAC Regulation is still under negotiation.

In April 2018, we hosted the **second edition of the Lost in Migration conference: From European priorities to local realities** in Brussels, in cooperation with the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society (Malta). At the conference, key stakeholders assessed the local realities that children face upon arrival to Europe and developed proposals for their protection. Ahead of the conference, we worked with Leiden University, the Urban Agenda Partnership for the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees and Ecorys on the **Lost in Migration** publication. The publication looked at case studies from 15 European cities and reflected on how these cities provide real protection and a welcoming environment to young newcomers. The recommendations from **Lost in Migration** helped shape the **resolution of the European Parliament on protecting children in migration (2018/2666(RSP))**.



Workshop participants develop recommendations to protect children at lost in migration II.

Many young newcomers have access to a smartphone to navigate towards safety and speak with family back home. However, they lack access to trustworthy information while on the move. This forces children to rely on unverified information and on those who profit from their vulnerability, such as traffickers. In cooperation with youth who have gone through these experiences, Missing Children Europe is working on developing **Miniila, a child-friendly app for children and youth in migration**. Miniila presents regional and up-to-date information on support services like shelter, food etc. in English, French, Arabic, Farsi and Tigrinya. By easing young newcomers' access to information, Miniila empowers them to make informed decisions so that they can find safety in Europe. The app will be launched in eight countries in 2019.

Finally, we held a series of **cross-border simulations across six countries for the protection of missing children in migration**. During the simulation, guardians, migration authorities, law



enforcement, missing children hotlines, child protection agencies and NGOs joined forces to find Abena and Qiro, two fictitious children. Thanks to this project, we will be able to identify the gaps in frontline workers' knowledge and develop a practical toolkit that could prevent children from going missing, being trafficked or re-trafficked.

Syed flees the Taliban

Syed's story shows many of the risks facing unaccompanied migrant children searching for safety in Europe. As a child fleeing the Taliban by himself, Syed was subjected to exploitation by traffickers as well as immense physical risks.

Syed was born in 1989 in Afghanistan's Helmand region. Aged ten, his mother helped him escape the country as family members began pushing him to fight for the Taliban. He lived in Pakistan for four years, working in a restaurant before moving to Iran to work in a factory. He had to hide from authorities and the police, constantly exposed to labour exploitation.

After three-and-a-half years, aged 17, the Iranian police arrested and deported him. Still fearing the Taliban, he once again fled Afghanistan passing through Iran and into Turkey, where he paid traffickers 4 000 euros to take him to Europe. "There is no protection from authorities and police, so you are obliged to trust smugglers," explains Syed. "They have organised everything."

After a long and dangerous boat journey, he arrived in Athens. He had no contact with any reception centres. Instead, he was taken by truck to a dorm run by the smugglers where he was charged to stay.

Out of money and with no access to support, Syed went with others, like him, to a small village to work in the fields. He found work, but also labour conditions that were worse than in Turkey or Iran. "It was very disappointing to be on European soil, but still be abused and trafficked. Only the friends I made helped me."

When he had put together enough money, he decided to escape Greece and travelled through informal networks to the coast. "I had to pay traffickers to sleep in a small tent in a camp, while I waited for an opportunity to get onto a truck going on a ship to Italy," recalls Syed. After several attempts, he undertook the extremely dangerous journey.

"I had to hide under a truck near its engine. It was the most dangerous thing I had to do and the whole thing was paid, not free. But making it to Italy was the most important part of my journey," says Syed. He had hoped to join friends in the UK, but he met an Italian restaurant owner who gave him food and somewhere to sleep. "It was the first time that someone had shown me kindness like this," remembers Syed.

The man also took Syed to a small centre that provided assistance to migrants. Through the kindness and support he received, Syed worked towards achieving the right to stay legally in Italy. Aged 18, Syed successfully received refugee status and finally started to enjoy the hope of a new life.

"It's very difficult to get out of the circle of traffickers. They are very dangerous people who stop you from contacting any support services."

Syed, aged 17 at the time

Runaways

Our work

In 2018, Missing Children Europe commemorated International Missing Children's Day with a **symposium at the European Parliament titled "Runaways: Unseen and Unheard"** hosted by Julie Ward, a Member of the European Parliament Intergroup on Child Rights. The event focused on the largest group of missing children: children running away from or thrown out of home or care institutions. The symposium urged European leaders to support better policies by showcasing the trends related to runaway children. Three members of Missing Children Europe's network, Magnolia (Ukraine), Missing Persons' Families Support Centre (Lithuania) and Instituto de Apoio à Criança (Portugal) presented their local initiatives in support of runaways. At the symposium, poet Ben Westwood also shared his personal experiences of running away from home and living on the streets of London since he was ten years old, emphasising how easy it was for him to pretend to be an adult and live undetected by the authorities.



Poet and ex-runaway Ben Westwood stands with MEP Julie Ward following 'Runaways: Unseen and Unheard'.

Alex runs away

When Alex, a 16-year-old American citizen on a three-month student exchange programme in Europe, went missing in June 2018, the 116 000 European hotline for missing children was able to advise the parents and coordinate an appropriate response that helped find the boy.

Alex had recently travelled to Greece with his mother, with whom his relationship had become strained in recent months. He was due to attend a high school in France. Alex had already suggested to his mother that he did not want to return to America. On the day he went missing, Alex had become angry with his mother for calling him on his phone. However, when he did not return later and his mobile phone had been switched off, his mother became increasingly worried.

Alex's mother called the 116 000 hotline. Hotline staff were able to advise her on what to do and coordinated an appropriate response with the relevant authorities. As a first step, they instructed her to make an official report of her son's disappearance to the local police.

Both the boy's mother and the hotline received information that the boy had started working at a bar and had been seen under the influence of alcohol. There were suspicions that he was engaging in sexual encounters with strangers for money and some friends said they thought he wanted to travel to France.

Increasingly worried about Alex's safety and whereabouts, his mother continued to communicate any new information with the missing children hotline staff, who coordinated with the police and other competent authorities to obtain the necessary permissions to proceed with the dissemination of the child's information.

The Smile of the Child disseminated Alex's information via the website, Facebook and Twitter as well as to the appropriate police authorities in both Athens and Thessaloniki International Airports, so that posters could be put up of the missing boy. Operators also coordinated directly with Missing Children Europe's French member, 116 000 Enfants Disparus and the high school in France that the boy was due to attend.

Two days after the boy's disappearance, The Smile of the Child, received a call from the police informing them that Alex had been found in a shelter in San Francisco. Thanks to the efforts of the 116 000 hotline network, the manager of the shelter had recognised the boy from the posts on social media.

The 116 000 European hotline for missing children provides a vital central contact and coordination point for cases that are cross-border.

116 000 European hotlines

Missing Children Europe actively promotes and supports the improvement and coordination of the European network of hotlines for missing children available through the 116 000 number. In June 2018, we constructed a **large-scale installation of the clothing books and toys "children leave behind" in the form of the 116 000 number** in front of the European Parliament. The installation helped raise awareness of these essential hotlines, operated by grassroots organisations across Europe, that offer free and immediate emotional, psychological, legal and administrative support to children and their families.

We also successfully **advocated for changes to the European**

Electronic Communications Code recast. The updated regulation requires national governments to make every effort to ensure the visibility, financial resources and quality services of the missing children hotlines. The EECC also emphasises efforts to ensure access of the hotlines to people with disabilities.

Finally, we further developed our **customised Client Relationship Management (CRM) tool for missing children hotlines and successfully deployed it in Croatia**. The CRM helps hotlines record coherent and consistent data related to missing children. Reliable data allows us to compare and analyse trends and better understand how to address and support the needs of children and their families.



The large scale "What children leave behind" art installation of the 116 000 hotline in front of the European Parliament

Behind the scenes as of April 2019

Team members

Aagje Ieven, Secretary General
Federica Toscano, Head of Programme for children in migration
Gail Rego, Head of Communications & Membership
Hilde Demarré, Cross-Border Family Mediators' Network Project Officer
Andrea Tedde, Partnership & Fundraising Officer
Kalim Ullah, Acting Finance & Payroll Officer
Nathalie Suvéé, Office Manager & Administration
Laure Vierset, Junior Project Officer for children in migration
Ariane Poisson, Junior Communications Officer
Reinhold Erdt, Project Assistant for children in migration
Frédérique Badin, Supporting Committee Coordinator (Volunteer)
Francis Herbert, Legal Counsel (Volunteer)
Rebecca Granshaw, Partnership & Fundraising Officer (Maternity)

Patrons' Council

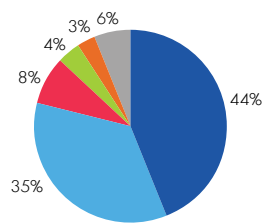
H.M. Queen Paola, Former Queen of Belgium
H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, Former President of Malta
Sir Francis Jacobs, Former President of Missing Children Europe
Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Former President of Latvia
Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, European Parliament Coordinator for Children's Rights
László 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

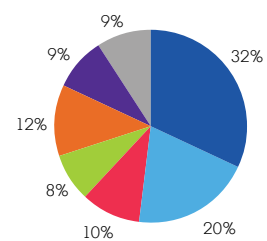
Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, President of Missing Children Europe
Heidi De Pauw, Vice President of Missing Children Europe, Belgium
Coskun Çörüz, The Netherlands
Piji Protopsaltis, Greece
Sheila Donovan, Spain
Stefano Ficorilli, Italy

Our finances

Income sources 2018



Expenditure 2018



Support Missing Children Europe

Make a donation

Help us to continue protecting missing children:
IBAN: BE41 3630 2576 0210
BIC: BBRUBEBB

Donations over 40 euros made by residents of Belgium, France and Luxembourg are eligible to receive a tax exemption certificate.

Run, golf or play bridge with us

Participate in a fundraising event at missingchildreneurope.eu/fundraisingevent and make a difference in children's lives.

Celebrate your birthday with us

Make a little noise, do a little dance and create a fundraiser for your birthday through our [Facebook](#) page.

Donate a service

We always need generous volunteers with skills in web development, photography, videography, translation, copy editing and IT support. Get in touch at info@missingchildreneurope.eu

Sponsor us

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

Support young newcomers with Miniila

Does your organisation provide support to young newcomers in Europe? Add your support services to the Miniila app to help children in migration find their way to safety. More information via miniila.com

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Improve your website's Google ranking by downloading NotFound to your website. NotFound replaces your website's 404 error pages with posters of missing children. Go to notfound.org

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