



**Missing  
Children  
Europe**

## **Towards a more efficient cooperation within and across borders for the protection of children in migration from trafficking and exploitation**

20 February 2020



**H&M FOUNDATION**



With financial support from the "Rights, Equality and Citizenship 2014-2020" Programme of the European Union

# Children in migration – missing and exposed to abuse

- from 2014 to 2017 more than 30,000 children went missing after their arrival in Europe
- According to Europol, children in migration are at higher risk of trafficking and exploitation and that they are likely to be increasingly targeted by traffickers in the future
- In the United Kingdom, 1 in 4 trafficked children and 1 in 6 unaccompanied children placed in care are reported missing
- unaccompanied children as young as 13 have been identified in Italy as child victims recruited into sexual exploitation and child labour

# Children in migration – missing and exposed to abuse

## Reasons for going missing:

- Poor reception conditions
- Lack of information
- Length & complexity of procedures
- Interest to apply for protection in another country
- Fear of being sent back to another EU country/country of origin
- Lack of coordination at national and cross border level
- Victim of trafficking or other forms of exploitation

Only 1 to 2% of the cases reported to hotlines until 2015

Now, around 5% of the whole caseload

# The INTERACT Project

- ✓ improve the day-to-day practice
- ✓ improve the national and international procedures on prevention and response
- ✓ To raise awareness on the gaps and needs in transnational cooperation



# The INTERACT Project

An innovative methodology:

- 2 fictive cases
- Simulations
- 6 countries (BE, UK, EL, FR, IT, SW)
- 54 organisations & agencies
- 88 participants



# The partnership

Country	Civil Society Partner	Governmental Partner
Belgium	Child Focus	Belgian Migration Office
Italy	Telefono Azzurro	
Greece	The Smile of the Child	Office of the Rapporteur on Human Trafficking
UK	ECPAT UK	The Home Office Modern Slavery Unit
France	ECPAT France	La Sprene
Sweden	The Child Rights Bureau	The County Administrative Board of Stockholm



# The cases

Abena – 14 years old

from Eritrea to Italy, France  
and Sweden



**Missing  
Children  
Europe**

# The cases

Quiro – 15 years old

From Iraq to Greece, Belgium and the United Kingdom

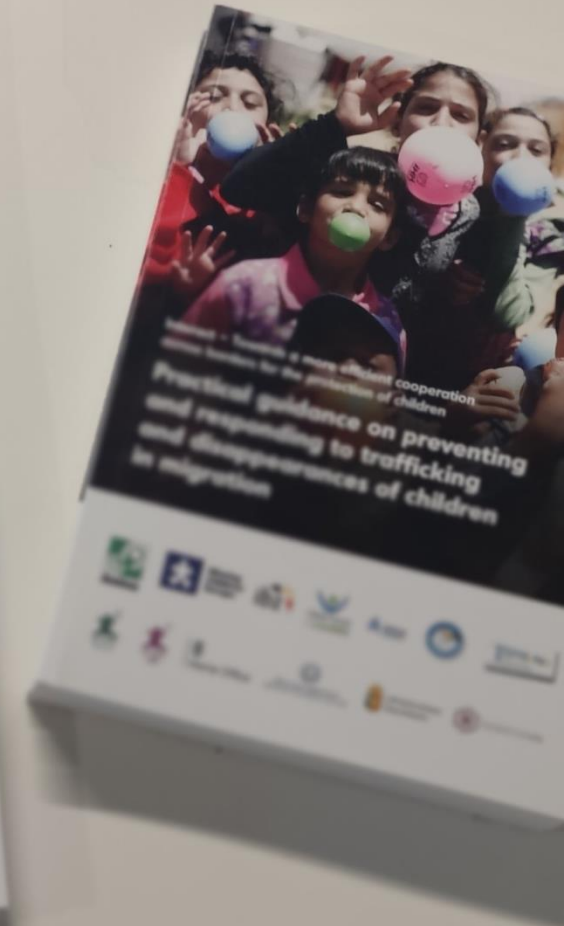


**Missing  
Children  
Europe**



# Outcome of the simulations

- INTERACT Simulations report
- INTERACT Handbook
- A cross-border network of key stakeholders (including child protection authorities, civil society, law enforcement and agencies such as Europol, Interpol and Eurojust)
- Training & Policy event



# Current barriers to cross border cooperation

Lack of clear procedures within and between Member States

Legal and procedural gaps in protecting the child's information when cooperating across borders

Guardians: a key actor and prevention measure that is not always available

Lacking legal provisions and multi-agency cooperation in finding a durable solution for the child

Insufficient training for frontline professionals



## RECOMMENDATIONS – 10 key steps



a firewall between immigration enforcement, child protection and other services when handling data of children in migration



collect and exchange data on missing children in migration in a harmonized and systematic way



A qualified, trained and independent guardian for all unaccompanied children



Strengthen best interest assessment in all Dublin procedures



Ensure a continuum of non-discriminatory care and protection along the journey



## RECOMMENDATIONS – 10 key steps



Support children to move safely from one country to another when it is in their best interests



Develop cross-border case management services and information sharing



Formalise the cooperation nationally and across borders



Support access to funding for the national civil society organisations that are part of cross-border networks



Develop and raise awareness on existing initiatives, tools, standard operating procedures and joint investigations



Interact – Towards a more efficient cooperation  
across borders for the protection of children

**Practical guidance on preventing  
and responding to trafficking  
and disappearances of children  
in migration**

---

## The Interact Handbook: purpose and target

---



**Missing  
Children  
Europe**

# Practical toolkit

P.149

- ❑ Contact booklet
- ❑ Flowchart of standardized processes in-country
- ❑ Clarification of roles and responsibilities



# Prevention

Housing facilities <sup>37</sup> and social workers	Guardian	Lawyer	Hotline for missing persons	Law enforcement
Build trust with the child and respond to immediate needs, including the provision of adequate housing	Safeguard the child's best interests	Inform the child of their rights	Provide child friendly information on services available across the 116 000 network	Inform partners of known risks, specific target groups related to trafficking and/or smuggling rights operating in the country
	Promote the child's safety and wellbeing as well as their participation	Liaise with the guardian and/or legal representative to assist the child in the asylum procedure or in the court proceedings related to the recognition of the status of victim of trafficking		
	Act as link between the child and others			
Gather information from other EU countries the child is known to have moved through, in line with their best interests in order to avoid re-traumatisation through multiple interviews, to inform the counterparts on the status of the case, and to have the most complete information from the child				
Hear the child → see best practices in hearing the child on page 45				
Collect information on the child > see template for collection of information about a child page 39			Inform guardians and carers of the role of hotlines and functioning of the European network	Immediate identification of risks and appropriate referral to child protection systems
Assess risk of child going missing > see checklist page 55			Work with law enforcement to make sure general missing children responses are also provided in cases of missing unaccompanied children	
Provide information on procedures in age and gender appropriate and culturally sensitive ways > see checklist: information to unaccompanied children as means to prevent disappearance page 54			Train carers and guardians on identifying risks and responding to disappearances	
Support the child in maintaining family links, when in their best interests				
Discuss alternatives to unsafe migration, including the proposal to discuss risks for unsafe migration with the child's family				
Highlight that other children have gone through similar experiences and establish the contact				
	Assist in identifying a durable solution in the child's best interest			
	Foresee provision of healthcare, education and training			
Specific care in preparing the child to pass from childhood to adulthood				
Draft an individual care plan				



# Spotlight: risks assessment

## Promising practice – Safeguarding Children who May have been Trafficked

The Glasgow Child Protection Committee (CPC) developed a Child Trafficking & Exploitation Inter Agency Guidance for practitioners in Scotland who may come into contact with child victims, which includes the safeguarding toolkit [matrix](#) of child trafficking indicators for practitioners conducting an assessment.

### CHILD TRAFFICKING MATRIX (from NRM referral form for children in Scotland)

Exploitation	Y	S
Claims to have been exploited through sexual exploitation, criminality, labour exploitation or domestic servitude by another person		
Physical symptoms of exploitative abuse (For example sexual or physical)		
Underage marriage		
Physical indications of working (For example overly tired in school, indications of manual labour – condition of hands/skin, backaches)		

- Assessing the risk of disappearance and trafficking (p.54)
- Actions to be taken when the child is at risk (P.62 & 73)



# But also...

---

- Tips for detecting, identifying and referring the child
- Appointing a guardian
- Hearing and informing the child
- Family tracing
- Multi agency and cross border cooperation in prevention activities

## Template for collection of information on a child in migration

The following form can be used as a common template to collect and share information about the child between different agencies and across borders. You can use the form as it is, or adapt it to your needs and systems. For instance, it can be filled in by authorities or institutions in charge and should be sent to child protection authorities (e.g. the service responsible to appoint a guardian).

Consent for collecting and sharing a child's information should always be sought so that, when and if necessary, their information can be shared between agencies and borders (for instance, if requested by a counterpart in another EU country where a missing child has been found again).

### Identification of the child

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Appearance

(tattoos, scars, etc.):

Documents?



**Missing  
Children  
Europe**

# Response

Housing facilities and social workers	Guardian	Lawyer	Hotline for missing persons	Law enforcement
Immediately alert law enforcement and provide information on the child > see template for reporting a disappearance, page 96		Provide information on the child to the police, hotline, and guardian in the best interests of the child and in view of safeguarding the child	Provide legal and administrative support to reception centre operators and guardians	Identify who is missing, what is the profile of the missing child, and what are circumstances of the disappearance
Request that the case is entered in SIS II and if applicable, Interpol yellow notice if the child is suspected to have left the country, in line with the child's best interests and with the condition of a strict applicable firewall -> see section on information sharing page 81			Act as contact point between carers who reported the disappearance and agencies involved in the missing child's case, such as police, social services and prosecutors	Assess the extent to which the disappearance should be considered as worrying. Do not take lack of information as a sign that there is no harm
Inform hotline for missing children 116 000			Provide actors expertise on procedures related to missing children's cases	Assess investigative procedures to be triggered, including the need for SIS II art 32 alerts, Interpol Yellow notices
Consistently request updates				If the child has been previously exploited, ensure going missing is seen as a strong indicator of re-trafficking
If not done before, gather information from other EU countries the child is known to have moved through, in line with their best interests, by contacting guardians and social workers across borders -> see section on information sharing page 81			Activate the network of hotlines for missing children (if appropriate relevant) > see Cross-border cooperation template, page 114	Initiate search actions
	Consider informing members of the EGN network in countries concerned with the case of the child if the child is assumed to have left the country		Collect data for further analysis	
			Collect testimonies (if appropriate and relevant)	
			Manage public appeals (if appropriate and relevant)	
			Support efforts in family tracing or matching for separated children, in cooperation with ICRC, if appropriate - in line with the best interests of the child and in liaison with the guardian and/or social worker, see page 111	Periodically inform partners of the development of the investigation
			Provide emotional and psychological support to families in cases of separated children, where possible in coordination with the SCEP member active in the country	Reject culture of professional misconceptions, minimisation of risk and disbelief
			Monitor the advancement of the investigation and use of rules and procedures for missing children in	Keep cases open



# Spotlight: multi-agency and cross border cooperation

- Making use of the existing networks and tools
- Preliminary identification of roles and responsibilities – the importance of formalised cooperation
- Cooperating proactively and keeping the communication channels open

## European network of 116 000 hotlines for missing children Cross-border cooperation template

This document is the tool that a hotline for missing children will use in the event of a cross-border disappearance, to send key information about the missing child to another NGO running the hotline in a foreign country, and if necessary ask for action. A copy of the template is sent to the Missing Children Europe Secretariat.

### Requesting organisation:

Country: .....

Date: .....

### Contact details responsible case manager:

Name: .....

Direct phone: .....

Email address: .....

### To – contacted organisation:

Country: .....

Date: .....

### Purpose of contact:

---



**Missing  
Children  
Europe**

# Aftercare

Housing facilities and social workers	Guardian	Lawyer	Hotline for missing persons	Law enforcement
Immediately identify who is responsible for the child's protection and care and inform hotline		Inform the child of their rights	If the child is found in another country, maintain an open line and exchange of information on the child's case with hotlines from other country concerned	Share relevant information with guardians and carers in charge of the case, to make sure elements of risks receive due consideration in new care arrangements
Identify who was responsible for the child previously and inform them of the situation		Liaise with the guardian and/or legal representative to assist the child in the asylum procedure or in the court proceedings related to the recognition of the status of victim of trafficking	Ensure a return interview is conducted within 72 hours and, if not possible, as soon as possible, in a child friendly way and by a specialist trained professional in trafficking and migration issues	
Identify support services and best way forward				
Assess the child's physical and medical needs			Ensure relevant information on the child is shared with those in charge of their care	If necessary, undertake investigative action regarding trafficking or smuggling
Hear the child and take their views into account --> see best practices in hearing the child on page 45				
Assess the child's psychological needs				
	Contribute to providing appropriate follow up to prevent the child's repeat disappearance (back to beginning: prevention of disappearance)			



# Spotlight: return home interviews

- Attention points
  - Introduction/rapport
  - Free narrative
  - Clarification
  - Closing

## **Promising practice for return home interview with runaways – also to be considered for missing children in migration**

The Department for Education (DfE) describes return home interviews as in depth discussions with the purpose to 'identify and deal with any harm the child has suffered... understand and try to address the reasons why the child or young person ran away, help the child feel safe and understand that they have options to prevent repeat instances of them running away [and] provide them with information on how to stay safe if they run away again, including helpline numbers' (DfE, 2014:15). Local authorities are responsible for ensuring protocols are in place to enable return interviews to be undertaken, and the guidance states that it is advantageous for these to be conducted by an 'independent person'; that is, someone not directly involved in the care of the child or young person.

- > When: Return interviews should take place within 72 hours of a child or young person being found or returning from running away or going missing, according to statutory guidance (DfE, 2014:14).
- > Who: statutory guidance suggests that it is advantageous for an independent person (that is, someone who is not involved in caring for the child or young person) to conduct the return interview (DfE, 2014:14).

*Source: Missing People Information Sheet: Return Interviews*



**Missing  
Children  
Europe**

A photograph of four children holding hands in a circle on a paved path. The children are dressed in winter clothing, including jackets and hats. The background shows a building and bare trees, suggesting a park or public square in a city. The text "Thank you!" is overlaid in the center of the image.

# Thank you!

federica.toscano@missingchildreneurope.eu  
+32 2 894 74 77

 [www.missingchildreneurope.eu](http://www.missingchildreneurope.eu)

 missingchildreneurope

 MissingChildEU