



# Missing Children Europe



# **Child abduction and sexual abuse of children**

Root causes and main tendencies  
in Central and Eastern Europe  
after the EU enlargement

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# Missing Children Europe



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- Since 2001
- 23 organizations in 16 countries  
Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, United Kingdom
- Each organization active in preventing child abduction and exploitation and in supporting victims at a grassroots level
- Unified definitions for the different phenomena of disappearance and sexual exploitation of children
- Minimum criteria for professional operation
- Harmonized European number (116 000) in 10 countries
- Child Alert system in 4 countries

# Missing Children: what are we talking about?



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Child Trafficking in the European Union - Challenges, perspectives and good practices (July, 2009) by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights:

„It is impossible to make even remotely accurate statements concerning the actual prevalence of trafficking in human beings, be it nationally, at the EU level, or globally.”

It is no different for child trafficking or any kind of child disappearance.

# Disappearance of children



- Runaways (national/international)
- Abduction by third person
- National and international parental abduction
- Missing unaccompanied migrant minors
- Lost, injured or otherwise missing children

# Sexual exploitation of children



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- Sexual assault
- Child prostitution
- Child pornography (child abuse images)
- Sex tourism
- Trafficking of children for the purpose of sexual exploitation
- Solicitation of children for sexual purposes /  
Grooming

How prevalent are the phenomena of child disappearance and sexual abuse?





Thousands of  
children are  
affected

(but no data on them...)

Éva Kerpel Missing Children Europe  
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# Why do children go missing?



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- Vulnerable due to:
  - Political unrest or instability, war
  - Economic conditions, poverty
  - Unstable / abusive family
  - Insufficient social care
- At risk because of:
  - Demand for child labor / -prostitutes /-organs
  - Profitable source of income for organized crime

# Are children more at risk in Central and Eastern Europe?



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- Sudden changes in political environment
  - Open borders
  - Looser registration /watch of persons
  - Freedom a movement, information, trade etc.
  - Skeletons from the cupboard (ethnic tensions, etc)
- Sudden changes in social and economic situation of individuals and families
  - Widening gaps between social strata
  - Increasing unemployment
- Unstable / changing values
  - New challenges without much training /preparation to face them
- Slow adjustment of social care system

# Consequences for children



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- Higher risk of becoming a victim or a perpetrator of crime, due to
  - Less stability in family and society
  - Less care and attention to the individual child
- While there are:
  - More temptations
  - More opportunities
  - More predators

# Consequences for Europe



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- Strong movement, including trafficking, of people, with or including children, from East to West
- More beggars with children or child beggars in the streets
- More prostituted children in Western countries
- Apparent presence of organized crime in all countries

# Status quo



- National level
  - Low level of awareness of the problem both by authorities and the population in most member countries
  - Lack of national strategy to address the problem in the majority of the EU countries
- European Community level
  - There is more awareness of the problem
  - Lack of unified (or any) data collection
  - Lack of uniform definitions
  - Lack of unified / harmonized legislation
  - EU legislation tends to focus on the criminalization of traffickers of children, rather than the protection of victims
  - Lack of harmonized action

# Where does legislation stand?



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- All Member States ratified the relevant general human rights treaties
  - European Convention on Human Rights
  - the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
  - the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
  - ILO Convention 182 (concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour)
- Twenty-four Member States ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (+ 3 signed it)
- 23 Member States ratified the ‘Palermo Protocol’ (Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children), 4 signed it.
- Only 20 Member States ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, with the remaining 7 having only signed it.

# Council of Europe



- CoE Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) goes further:
  - not only transnational, and not only organized crime
  - Most comprehensive definition of child trafficking and exploitation to date
  - Has only been signed (not ratified) by 11 members and not even signed by a further 3)
- CoE Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2007 Lanzarote)
  - Clear common standards and definitions
  - each Party has to ensure that the following offences are criminalised:
    - (a) recruiting a child into prostitution or causing a child to participate in prostitution;
    - (b) coercing a child into prostitution or profiting from or otherwise exploiting a child for such purposes; and
    - (c) having recourse to child prostitution
  - Only Greece ratified the Lanzarote Convention and 19 other countries signed it.

# The Role of the EU



- The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights provides in Article 5 expressly prohibits trafficking in human beings. In 1999 Tampere Presidency Conclusions of the European Council asked for close co-operation between countries of origin and transit.
- The Lisbon Treaty calls for co-ordinated, cross-national response between the various investigating and prosecuting authorities.
- Two Framework Decisions destined to fight against trafficking in children
  - the Council Framework Decision on combating trafficking in human beings of 2002 (2002/629/JHA) and
  - the 2003 Council Framework Decision on combating the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography (2004/68/JHA).
- For both framework decisions new proposals were made by the European Commission in 2009:
  - a proposal for a new Council Framework Decision on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings, and protecting victims,
  - and a proposal for a new Council Framework Decision on combating the sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography

# More guidance needed from the EU



- Uniform definitions of the phenomena and categories
- Harmonized data collection
- One central piece of legislation
- Criminalization of child trafficking
- Protection and care of victims

# Who else can help? The role of NGOs



- **2004:** Childoscope:
  - over 300 organizations (not all NGOs) in 29 countries
- Plus other NGOs that are not included in Childoscope
- In **2009:** a new project proposal to update Childoscope
  - New organizations have emerged
  - Some earlier ones do not operate any more

# Contribution of Missing Children Europe



- Core activities:
  - Awareness raising in the European Institutions and in the member countries
  - Providing / organizing immediate help to children and their parents in national and cross-border cases
  - Sharing experience and best practices
  - Cooperating with the global movement ICMEC

# Ongoing Policy Projects of Missing Children Europe



- European Financial Coalition against online commercial sexual exploitation of children
- Stimulation the establishment and interconnection of Child Alert systems
- Harmonized European telephone number for missing children: 116 000
- Contribution to the improvement of European policies and legislation



# Belgium Child Focus



- DATA concerning unaccompanied minors

• Year	Total 0-18 Disappeared from shelter	Worrying cases
• 2006	1753	1264
• 2007	1576	919
• 2008	1887	702
• 2009	1542	268

- Child Focus believes there are more cases to worry about
  - Protocol with the Police 2008 November
  - Taskforce with all stakeholders to improve identification and reception of unaccompanied minor and, in this way to help preventing their disappearance



# Greece

## The smile of the child



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- Street children
  - Runaway children
  - Trafficked and unaccompanied children (from: Albania, Moldavia, Serbia, Croatia, FYROM, China, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Somalia).
- Help by the Smile of the child:
  - Consultation to parents
  - SOS 1056 helpline
  - 116 000 hotline
  - 9 community homes
  - Street program:
    - Special bus with professionals and supply care for street children
  - Prevention:
    - Mobile medical units
    - Social supermarket program
    - Daily care program



# Ireland ISPCC



- Child begging program
  - Since 1997, 24/7 emergency service for children, young people and their parents begging in the streets of Dublin
  - Ethnic minorities, travelling people, since 2007 roma children from Romania
  - Supportive service
  - Education
  - Monitoring
  - Prevention
  - Referrals, intervention
  - Advocacy: raising public awareness

# Portugal IAC

- Projecto Rua for street children since 1998
- Problems with Roma immigrants from Romania before Romania joining the EU
- Begging is not a crime; but making children beg is
- NGO and Police actions with little effect
- Children taken into care – but abducted by parents
- Training program for parents – they left the programs



# Romania

## Save the Children



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- About half of street children in Romania cannot read and write
- 16 educational centre in 13 cities: 3400 children educated
- Emergency mobile team to provide emergency help to street children
- Mobile school – an alternative program adjusted to street realities