Vulnerable children on the run, a European challenge

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Missing People

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Contents

Executive Summary

This paper provides a summary of a speech given by Martin Houghton-Brown to representatives of Member States (MS) of the Council of Europe during the Belgian Presidency on the 17th November 2010. Martin Houghton-Brown was asked to be a special rapporteur on the subject of runaway children. The speech presents the findings of a brief study of MS.

Definitions, Information and Data Collection

The study highlights the inconsistency of definitions of young runaways in MS. Many MS fail to distinguish a young person who has run away from missing children. MS should strive to develop a robust data collection framework for children who run away from home and care. This framework should contain elements that identify where a child has run away from (including home and care settings), the level of reported and assessed risk, and evidence of high risk outcomes such as exploitation or abduction. Data collection frameworks should support local operational responses to the problems of children who run away. Further attention should be paid to processes for collating local information at a national level.

Services

The study suggests that risks are inherent in running away and that children need to be able to access help when they run away. The single most evidenced access point for identifying services was the availability of the 116 000 and 116 111 telephone numbers.

It is suggested that return welfare assessments and, where appropriate, breathing space accommodation for children without alternative safe places to stay, are important mechanisms for safeguarding young people.

Inter-Agency Working

The responsibility for young people who run away lies with law enforcement, police or judicial led investigative agencies, and social care agencies from the state and from non governmental organisations (NGOs) which can provide helplines and direct interventions for young people. Where children have run away across borders the capacity to share information in a timely and effective fashion is key to safeguarding those children.

European Background

A 2001 Council Resolution[1] on the contribution of civil society in finding missing and exploited children was adopted under the former Belgian Presidency. This provided that the:

- Justice & Home Affairs Council request that the Commission analyse the actual extent of the phenomenon of missing and sexually exploited children
- European Commission fund research on epidemiological data missing and sexually exploited children
- Research adopt the definition "*Runaways: This category concerns all minors who voluntarily run away from home or from the institution where he/she has been placed*"

This study builds on the recognition that children running away are not exclusively linked to trafficking or sexual exploitation and that the actions required of European MS go beyond the *search* for missing or sexually exploited children.

European Survey

The Belgian Presidency 2010 sought a better understanding of the scale of the problem of children who run away in MS. Missing Children Europe asked Martin Houghton-Brown from Missing People (UK) to act as special rapporteur. The approach proposed by Missing Children Europe was to undertake a study to understand what definitions, data and good practice were available in MS. It was also proposed that the study should examine any opportunities that might exist for work at the European level that could not be achieved better at the local level in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

The selected method of enquiry involved inviting MS to complete a questionnaire and to participate in telephone interviews. Surveys were sent to MS government agencies though the Belgian Ministry of Justice and telephone interviews were set up with NGO members of Missing Children Europe. A total of 21 MS participated. 19 MS completed a survey and 11 NGOs participated in telephone interviews.

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[1]2001/C 283/01, OJ C 283/1 of 9.10.2001

Background

Case Study: The Experience from UK Surveys of Young Runaways

The survey questions in Appendix 1 and the interview questions in Appendix 2 were prepared by Missing People (UK) after examining the United Kingdom's (UK) experience of measuring the prevalence and characteristics of young runaways. The UK NGO The Children's Society conducted two self-report surveys[2] in which they used the term running away to refer to,

> *"Young people who have defined themselves as either having run away from home or having been forced to leave home, on at least one occasion at some point before their 16th birthday."*

The restriction to children under 16 years of age was because domestic legislation differentiates access to services for 16 and 17 year old children. For the purposes of measuring the prevalence of young runaways in a broader European context, this age limit would appear too low and unnecessary.

The 2005 UK study[3] found that a total of 100,000 young people under the age of 16 ran away overnight each year. Of these girls were more likely to run than boys and children were more likely to run after their 13th birthday with a peak at ages 14 and 15. Rates were consistent from different communities, rural and urban, wealthy and deprived.

Children were most often found to run away for reasons associated with problems at home, particularly strained family relationships. Conflict in the home and maltreatment were the most common causal factors. Children described personal problems including depression as the second most prevalent group of reasons for running away. Finally school related problems were the third largest group of reasons for children to run away.

A quarter of children who reported running away overnight said they had been forced out of home. This may account also for the high incidence (two-thirds of young runaways) who stated they had not been reported as missing to the Police.

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[2] *Still Running* by Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999; and *Still Running II* by Rees and Lee, 2005

[3]Ibid

The majority of children reported returning safely to their home or carer within 48 hours of leaving, and with no further incidence of running away and no intervention from statutory or non governmental service providers. However 1 in 6 stated they had to sleep outside (on the streets or in unsafe places), 1 in 8 reported begging or stealing to survive and 1 in 12 were hurt or harmed whilst away. In total, the survey found that 25% of all young runaways adopted one or more risky behaviours or were harmed whilst away. In the UK, that equates to 25,000 children at risk of harm as a result of running away per annum.

Running away, and the survival strategies adopted by young people whilst away from home, can lead to children being targeted for sexual exploitation, particularly when a child repeatedly runs away. Children who go missing from care institutions may be particularly vulnerable. Whilst their disappearances may appear to be voluntary, many may in fact have been abducted from their care home with a view to the child being trafficked or because they were in the process of being trafficked[4].

When a child runs away or appears to have run away state agencies should recognise the inherent risks and in particular recognise that there will always be an underlying cause for concern that should be appropriately investigated and supported.

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[4] 2007 *Missing Out* Christine Beddoe ECPAT UK (p6).

Definitions and Data Collection

The survey of MS attempted to discover if there were common themes to the way MS described children who ran away. The approach was to seek out any definitions used and to compare and contrast these. The data below demonstrates the varying approach to describing children who run away.

Member States Government Agency Definitions

19 MS provided a response to the question in the survey about definitions. The responses showed that several MS had no separate definition for children who run away from children who go missing, and that in many of those MS the definition for children who go missing is the same as that for adults who go missing.

Government Definitions

- No definition
- Missing person (in lieu)
- Young runaway
- Did not answer
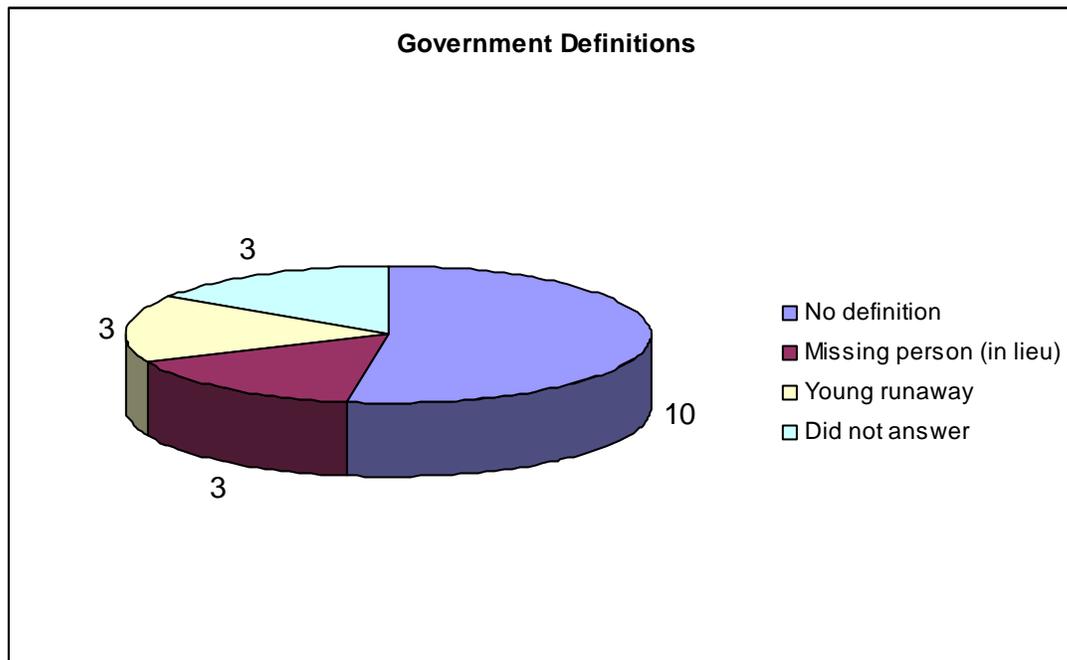
Common Approaches to Definitions

Most MS locate the issue of runaway children within the broader category of occurrences of missing children. However, many lack the ability to differentiate between a child going missing because of, for example, an accident or an abduction, from a child who runs away.

It is common across MS to accept that a key factor in any definition relating to a missing person is that their *"whereabouts is unknown".* Variations and additions on this theme include:

- They are deemed to be at risk
- Someone is looking for them
- There is a concern for their safety
- It is in their best interests to look for them
- They are absent from where they are expected to be

Where a MS did define a young runaway apart from a missing child, they were described as;

A young person / child who runs away from home, foster home or institution (without permission)

Problems with Definitions

Most definitions are focused on providing law enforcement with an effective threshold for intervention rather than being child centred. Definitions tend not to provide a focus on the needs of the child. A definition that requires a parental intervention, i.e. the parent must be concerned for the child's welfare, poses potential difficulties particularly where a parent has forced a child out of home or the parent does not trust state agencies. A Southern European NGO stated, "*A lot of runaways are not reported, because they ran away after a dispute and the parents expect them to return*". These factors can lead to significant levels of under reporting[5].

In at least two MS[6] the term 'voluntary departure' is used which can disguise the reality they some may have departed because they feel forced out of home or care, or because they are fleeing abuse, and therefore feel their action is not voluntary. Definitions of running away based solely on 'voluntary departure' would appear problematic.

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[5] For example, the UK surveys found that 68% of child self-reported incidents of running away were not reported to the Police.

[6] Survey responses from one Southern European MS and one Eastern European MS.

In some MS, the use of missing person definitions may also mean that, at an operational level, children who run away are not recorded as missing to reduce the burden on the police and any investigative actions that follow[7].

There appears to be considerable variation amongst MS in the definitions of young runaways, the agencies involved in constructing and applying definitions, and the arrangements for collecting information on those incidents which meet the definitions.

A Possible Framework for European Data Collection

In addition to the need for clear definitions, effective problem analysis and policy development requires the collection and analysis of a broader set of data on young runaways and their experiences. Surveys can provide a rich source of data, but are comparatively expensive, and may be limited as a source of regular or local level data. Only two MS reported the existence of any survey data in their country.

In the absence of regular surveys, steps should be taken to develop robust data collection frameworks that could be employed by agencies dealing with young runaways, e.g. the police and NGOs. The development of data collection frameworks should support local operational responses to the problems of children who runaway. Elements might include the characteristics of young runaways, where they have run away from, the level of reported and assessed risk, and evidence of high risk outcomes, such as exploitation or abduction:

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[7]A Central European MS NGO reported "*when a child is treated as a misper first they get risk assessed as a priority but runaways are often not given the missing priority*".
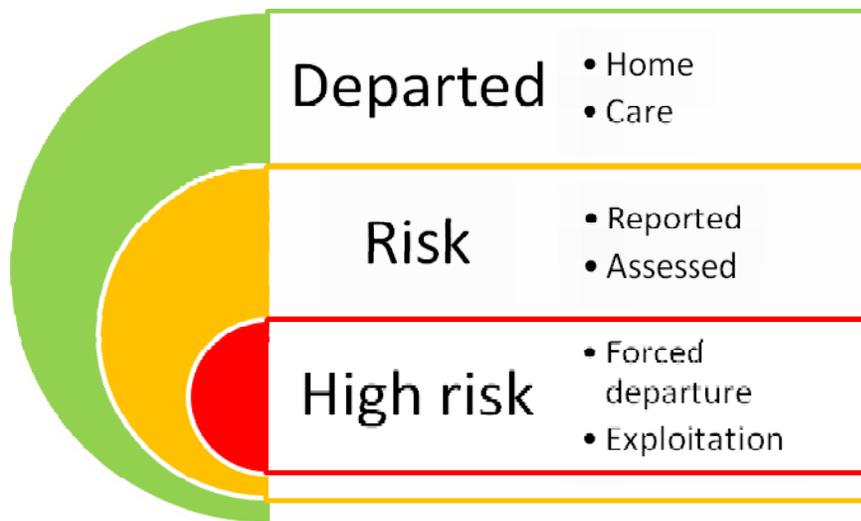
It is therefore the proposal that a common data collection framework identifies where a child has run away from; their home, carer or care setting. Other personal characteristics such as age, sex and ethnicity should also be captured to enable more detailed profiles of young runaways to be completed.

The second element of any framework would identify the level of risk faced by a young person who has run away. Assessing risk is routine where an agency accepts a report of a missing child and therefore there is a cause for their concern. However where a child was not reported as missing then it will be necessary for the responsible agency that has identified their departure to undertake a risk assessment.

The third element would seek additional information on high risk factors associated with some disappearances, for example a young person's mental health, or indicators of likely involvement in trafficking or exploitation. In addition, the framework should capture, where known, the actual outcomes of young people running away, for example injury or exploitation. This third element would assist in prioritising those children who are at high risk of harm.

This framework goes beyond counting incidents according to a simple definition and aims to enable informed policy and practice responses.

Findings on Prevalence of Young Runaways

Most MS did not have exclusive data on the prevalence of young runaways in their country. Data were collected, where available, from both the MS government (or other statutory source, e.g. the police) and from NGOs. In four MS no data were available on the prevalence of young runaways from either source.

Source of data
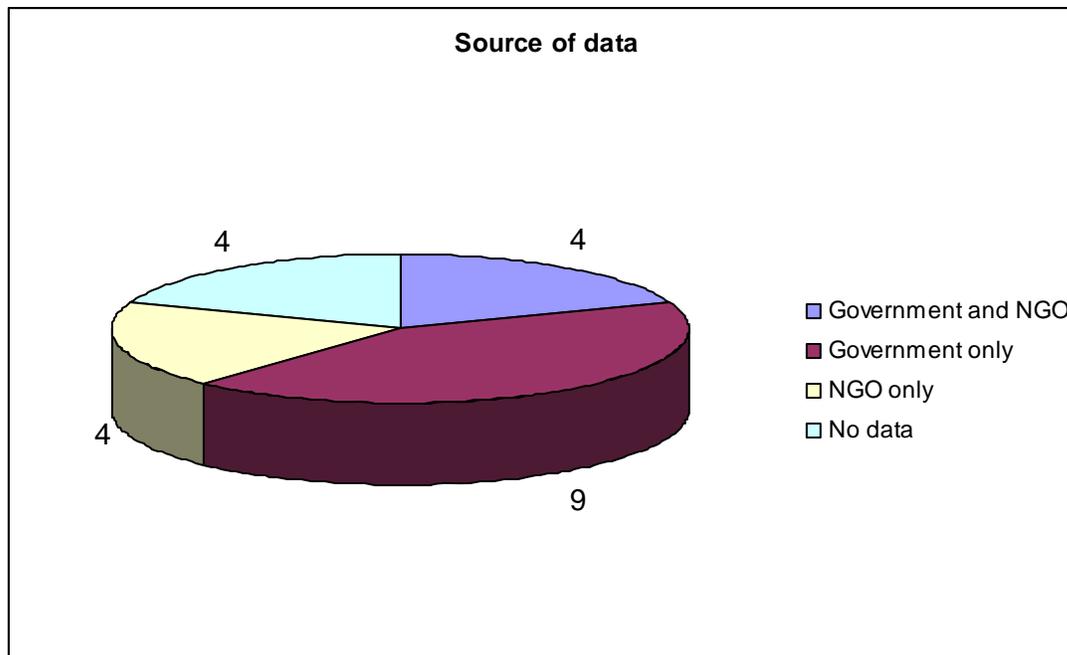
The data collected in the course of this study do not make a comparative analysis of the prevalence of young runaways in different MS possible. Only three responses from government or statutory sources in MS used data specifically on young runaways rather than the broader category of missing children. Most MS who provided data did so from Police data sets concerning missing children. Where the numbers related to reports of missing children in lieu of young runaways these figures could not be compared across MS as reporting thresholds varied. There was little consistency in any definitions employed.

MS also reported different processes for the collation of local information into a single national count. In some MS local information on running away (or going missing) is only collated centrally if it meets certain criteria, for example if the disappearance was over a

certain duration (for example 72 hours), if the incident was deemed high risk, or if the child had gone missing from state care institutions.

Some MS returns are based on estimates of prevalence rather than an actual count. At least two MS provided data based on self report surveys. However, even the returns from these MS may not be strictly comparable, given different definitions, criteria for inclusion and survey questions. For example, findings from the UK surveys are based only on incidence of running away for children under the age of 16.

Nonetheless, the chart and table below show the figures provided by each MS on the basis of a rate per thousand in the under 18 population.
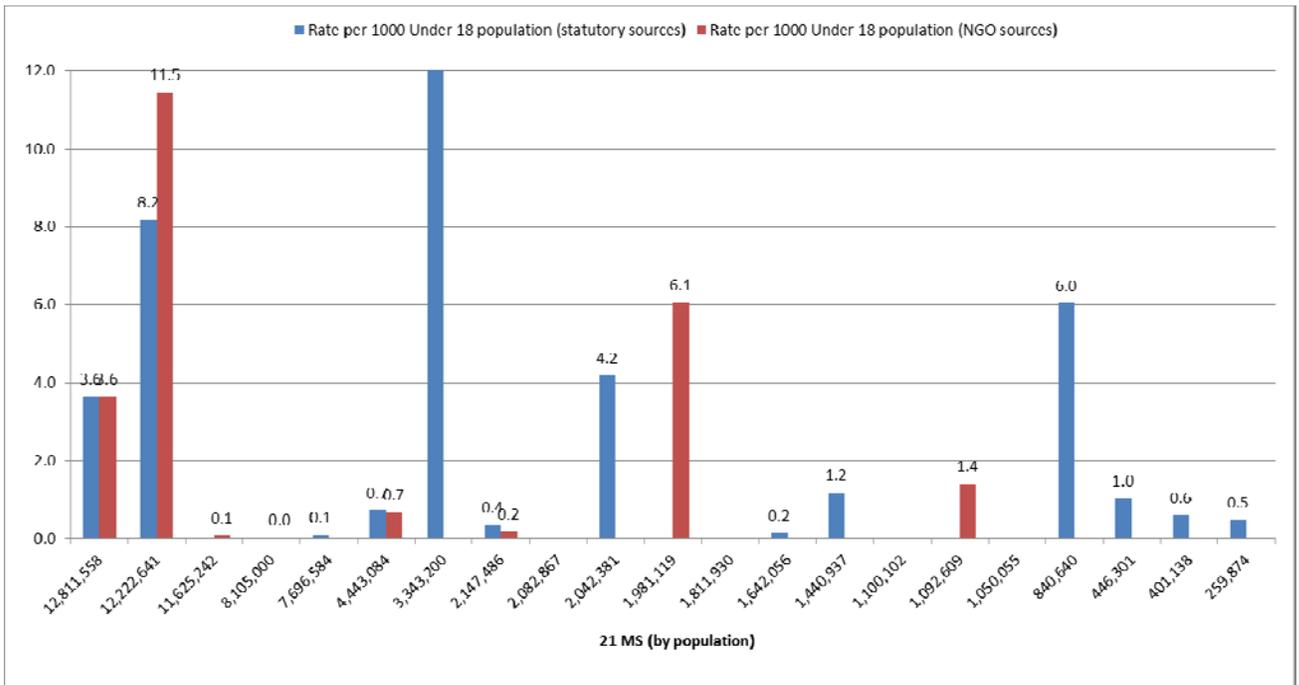
The following table provides a different presentation of the rate per thousand.

Estimated under-18 pop (20% of total estimated pop.)	Rate Per 1000 under-18 pop (statutory)	Rate Per 1000 under-18 pop (NGO)
12,811,558	3.64	3.64
12,222,641	8.18	11.45
11,625,242	-	0.09
8,105,000	-	0.04
7,696,584	0.10	-
4,443,084	0.72	0.68
3,343,200	20.00	-
2,147,486	0.36	0.19
2,082,867	-	-
2,042,381	4.19	-
1,981,119	-	6.06
1,811,930	-	-
1,642,056	0.15	-
1,440,937	1.18	-
1,100,102	-	-
1,092,609		1.42
1,050,055	-	-
840,640	6.04	-
446,301	1.04	-
401,138	0.60	-
259,874	0.47	-

Variations

Three of the four MS in which data were available from both sources, showed relatively similar rates of running away between the government and the NGO response. In one MS the data from the statutory source indicated a rate of running away nearly twice that

of the NGO response. Some of the relatively low rates of running away reported by NGOs may be attributed to the organisation providing data on their case work rather than a fully national picture of the prevalence of running away.

There is enormous variation in the rates of running away amongst MS where some data was available. The data are more likely to demonstrate fundamentally different approaches to the definition, reporting, recording and collation of incidents of young runaways. The variation in government responses alone is striking. The rate of running away in one MS is 200 times higher than that in another MS. Whilst real differences in rates of running away are likely, it is impossible to tell how marked these differences are.

Children in care

The study indicates that where a child is living in a state care setting when they run away there is an increased likelihood that the episode would be recorded in a central data set. One Eastern European MS stated, "*information available to State Police shows that the most part of the runaways minors are from social care centers and boarding schools and similar institutions*" This is often linked to central monitoring of care settings and the requirement on care providers to notify absences in line with MS legislation relating to children in state care. Evidence from the UK survey[8] would indicate that whilst children are more likely to run away from care, the picture is distorted by the significant levels of under reporting of children running away from home to official agencies.

Self-reporting surveys

In at least two MS, the UK and a Central European MS, where self-reporting surveys were undertaken there was a much fuller picture available of the true nature of children who run away. The UK sample of 10,000[9] children gave a reasonably representative view of the scale and nature of the problem, and the risk factors and outcomes associated with running away.

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[8]Op.Cit. *Still Running II*: Children who are 'looked after' are three times as likely to run away (p12).
[9]Op Cit p1

Self-reporting surveys rely on evidence from children which has not necessarily been verified by agencies. However the level of detail this method brings is likely to assist policy makers in understanding what services and interventions should be made available to children who run away.

Overall scale of the problem

From the data available, it is difficult to give an overall estimate of the scale of the problem of running away across Europe.

The average rate of running away across those MS providing government data is approximately 5 per 1,000 of the young person population, indicating that around 0.5% of the child population may be affected each year.

However, this disguises wide variations in recording and collation practices, and different definitions based on running away or on children going missing.

Whilst with the data available it is impossible to provide reliable estimates of the prevalence of running away across Europe, it is clear that many thousands of young people will face the risks associated with leaving home or care each year.

Examples of Best Practice

Reporting

MS who indicated that their reporting practices were taking into account the reasons for a child running away and the risks they faced whilst away showed a responsible view of the role of data collection as both an intelligence tool and an opportunity to assess the needs of a vulnerable young person. In the United Kingdom a Police computer system offers the opportunity for 'closing codes' to show what factors were involved so that law enforcement can analyse any data trends or compile a local problem analysis.

> *Using the Compact missing persons database we were able to compile statistical data trends relating to individual state care homes for children. This data showed which homes had problematic trends of young people running away from care. This data was made available to the relevant inspectorate ensuring in one case that that an unsuitable private provider of state care had to close their institution.*
> *UK Police Force Representative*

Crisis Responses

The findings indicate the important role of telephone hotlines and helplines in providing immediate support to young people. The 116 000 telephone hotline provided both an immediate support to families of children who had run away and were understood to be missing and in many cases there were examples of children who themselves used either the 116 000 number or the 116 111 number to seek assistance whilst away from their place of care and safety.

> *"National Children's helpline 116111 was established in beginning of 2009. This helpline provides support and information about all issues concerning the question what to do if a child is on the run or missing. The helpline is available 24-hours a day and both adults and children can call. Right now 116000 missing children hotline is not running yet in our country. We plan to start the service in the beginning of 2011. This will be state financed service."*
> *Eastern European MS*

One dramatic example of how the pan-European nature of the access to cross border services was provided by the Romanian member of Missing Children Europe.

> *"On 30 January 2008 the Romanian Police received the report on the disappearance/ departure from home of the young girl Z.A.F, aged 17.*
>
> *"Following investigations carried out by the police officers, it was concluded that the minor had left the country and reached Italy, so it was ordered at international level the immediate localization of the girl.*
>
> *"At the same time, the support of the Romanian Centre for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children - FOCUS was requested; the Romanian NGO asked for the*

support of the equivalent Italian NGO (TelefonoAzzurro ONCUS), which took measures in order that checks at a certain address be performed. Following the checks, the girl was found at the indicated address.

"With the view of her protection and return in the country it was necessary the involvement of ANPFDC and the Romanian and Italian Ministries of Foreign Affairs, so that on 31 March 2008 the minor was returned."

The process of searching for a child and locating the child required systematic and integrated Police working that where appropriate used international links.

Some MS also indicated their use of shelters and social care support services to provide a place of safety for children in a range of settings. In some instances the support of children who had been trafficked to return to their country of origin was integrated into this process.

Vienna's "Drehscheibe" (est 2001) is "a socio-pedagogic institution" which provides "minors who are not resident in Vienna and are apprehended by the police because of stealing, pick pocketing or begging etc…" with "accommodation, shelter, food protection and tries to determine their identity and learn more about each child's individual personal story. If possible, they are returned to their country of origin, the focus being on safeguarding the best interests of the child". The "Drehscheibe" works jointly with relevant institutions/ministries in, particularly, Romania and Bulgaria, has substantially reduced the number of unaccompanied children cared for in Vienna.
Austrian Submission

Welfare Services

Once a child is found the most developed MS provided social care support to identify any additional needs for that child and address underlying causes for the child running away. This process is sometimes known as a "Safe Return Welfare Interview" and was an integral part of the process in some parts of the UK and in an integrated youth programme in the Flemish community in Belgium. The French approach was also a process of integrating law enforcement search with social care support.

"At the heart of the Ministry of the Interior, a practical guide for the search for missing people (including those who run away) was co-edited in 2003 by the national police and gendarmerie.

"The national gendarmerie put in place 43 squads for the prevention of juvenile delinquency (BPDJ) which essentially act in a preventive capacity but which can also be used to help judicial investigations (minors' hearings). In addition, correspondantsvictimes were put in place by the national gendarmerie within each department so that the authorized associations for victims can have a known point of contact. Also 46 social workers are present within the gendarme units of 36 departments to encourage the social treatment of certain events who don't

necessarily have a criminal response, such as runaways. Finally, at the time of worrying minors' disappearances, the national gendarmerie use, with magistrates' permission, their public internet site to publish appeals:
http://www.gendarmerie.defense.gouv.fr/judiciaire/index.html

"After several decades, minors' squads, specialised in child victim affairs, were put in place in each department of the national police. They are made up of civil servants who have completed a specific training taking into account notably the psychology of minors, hearing techniques and the specificities of minors' speech.

Finally, an internet site of criminal research (IRC) administered by the central service of criminal documentation of the technical and scientific police division, has been open since the 13 of February 1998 on the Ministry of the Interior's website, accessible from www.interioeur.gouv.fr/avisde.recherche. This site notably allows the public, through the intermediary research category of missing people or the identification of unknown people, to help investigating officers with their investigations." France, Ministry of the Interior

Breathing Space

The interviews with NGO's indicated that most children return safely after a brief time away and that they were unharmed. NGO's indicated that in many cases a child requires some 'breathing space' and in some instances it is the parents or carers who are overwhelmed and reach a breaking point who need the space. In these instances there are few options for children and it is often the case that children will reach out to helplines, both 116 000 and 116 111 to find support. However in some cases the overwhelming desire of the young person or the carer is to have a short period of time apart. Most of these episodes are facilitated by family and friends but in fractured families or communities this can be more difficult to access. The Flemish example of an Integrated Youth Programme indicated that alongside social care interventions for young people who had been referred into the programme because for example of repeated running away episodes, they had access to a "Time Out" facility. The Time Out project enabled children to take a few days residential break in which underlying causes were identified and support offered. Sometimes this was combined with activities that helped children to achieve more effective self-actualization.

Future Themes

Information and data collection

MS should pay particular attention to developing a robust data collection framework for children who run away from home and care. This framework should contain elements that identify where a child has run away from (including home and care settings), the level of reported and assessed risk, and evidence of high risk outcomes, such as exploitation or abduction. The development of data collection frameworks should support local operational responses to the problems of children who runaway.
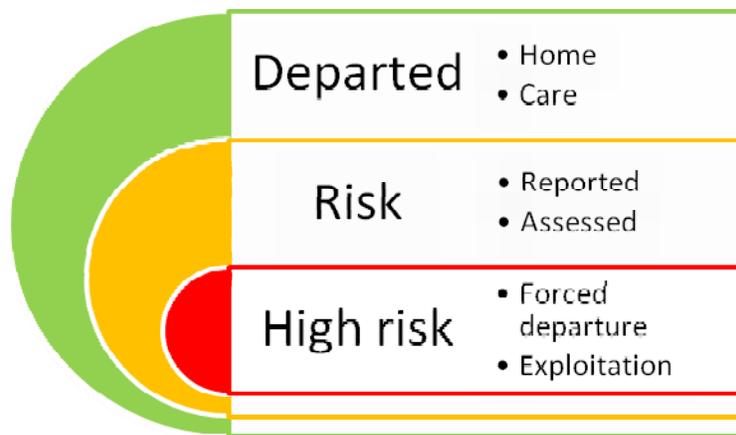
MS should also endeavor to have common recording practices that enable local problem analysis and the collation of information at a national level.

Services

It is critical for the safety of children that they can access suitable services. The single most evidenced access point for identifying services was the availability of the 116 000 and 116 111 telephone numbers.

The capacity of service providers to deliver return welfare assessments and where appropriate breathing space accommodation should be reviewed in every MS.

Inter-Agency Working

The shared responsibility for young people who run away lies with law enforcement, police or judicial led investigative agencies and social care agencies from the state and

from NGO's who can provide both helplines and direct interventions for young people. Where children have run away across borders the capacity to share information in a timely and effective fashion is key to safeguarding those children.

Integration

In these austere times it is understood that more service provision is unlikely to be resourced. However more effective use of existing resources will provide better safeguards. In particular requiring the recording of children who run away and are likely to be at risk; the use of 116 numbers and the recognition of integrated youth services will provide important safeguards.

Missing Children Europe

European responses to young runaways questionnaire

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. The study aims to examine how different countries in Europe respond to young people who run away.

Please feel free to express your views and opinions openly as your answers will not be attributed to you, but will be aggregated and analysed as part of the reporting process.

The aims of this study are:

1. To explore definitions, reporting data collection and analysis processes

2. To explore the policy context in each country

3. To understand the patterns in service provision

4. To identify good practice examples across Europe

If you would like to give your answers in a telephone interview instead, please contact Grace Collins, PA to Martin Houghton-Brown, Chief Executive, at grace.collins@missingpeople.org.ukor by telephone on +44 208 392 4503.

Please complete the answers and return to the above email address by Friday 18th June.

Questions

Country:

What is your role?

Data

What is the definition of 'young runaway' in your country?

Is there a separate definition of young runaways from missing children?

Which agencies receive reports of young runaways in your country?

Is national-level data on young runaways available?

If so, how many reports of young runaways are received each year? Or, how many young people run away each year?

Does the data distinguish between people running away from care and those running away from home?

Policy

Which agencies are involved and what specific responsibility does each have for young runaways in your country?

Does a particular individual have responsibility on young runaways? If so, what is their role?

Is there a police lead (individual or department) on young runaways (national or local)?

Is there a national government department that takes responsibility for young runaways? If so, which?

Are there any national policy statements on running away? If so, please provide titles and where they can be accessed.

What could be added to improve does your country's policy and systems for responding to young runaways?

Services

What services exist for young runaways at the national, regional and local level?

Who provides them?

Is emergency accommodation available for young runaways?

Is there a telephone helpline available for young runaways? If so, which?

Is the 116000 missing children hotline already running in your country, and which organisation runs it?

Who funds services?

What are the main issues facing service providers in your country?

What gaps are there in service provision?

Good practice

Finally, please use the box below to describe any examples of good practice in your country. You can include examples of good data collection, analysis and reporting, examples of good service provision, and/or examples of good policy development and delivery.

<u>**Process for submission**</u>

Please send the completed questionnaire to:<u>martin.houghton-brown@missingpeople.org.uk</u>by Friday 18th June.

If you would like to give your answers in a telephone interview instead, or if you have any questions, please contact Grace Collins, PA to Martin Houghton-Brown, Chief Executive Missing People, at <u>grace.collins@missingpeople.org.uk</u>or by telephone on +44 208 392 4503.

The results of this study will be available in November 2010.

Thank you.

Missing Children Europe
Telephone Interview Guide

Introduction

We would like to invite you to take part in a telephone interview about the response to young runaways in your country. We hope to speak to you between Monday 21st June and Friday 27th August.

This study will examine how different countries in Europe respond to the problem of young runaways. The aims of this study are:

1. **To explore definitions, reporting data collection and analysis processes**

2. **To explore the policy context in each country**

3. **To understand the patterns in service provision**

4. **To identify good practice examples across Europe**

Below is a topic guide that may help you to prepare for the interview, or to direct us to someone more appropriate to take part.

Topics

1. Data

- In your country what is the definition of a 'young runaway'.
- Are there any other definitions used in your country? Who uses the definitions?
- Is there a separate definition of young runaways from missing children?
- At what age may a young person legally leave home?
- Is there any difference between young people missing from home and those missing from another institution?
- Which agencies receive reports of young runaways in your country?
- Does each agency record incidents of young runaways?
- Are any data on young runaways available as a result? If so, how many reports of young runaways are received each year? Or, how many young people run away each year?

- Are any other efforts made to count the number of young runaways? Using what measure?
- Is there information about young people's experiences whilst away in your country?

2. Policy context

- Which agencies are involved with young runaways in your country? What responsibility does each one have?
- Does any individual person have responsibility on young runaways nationally? If so, what is their role?
- Is there a police individual or department with responsibility for young runaways?
- What role do the police have in informing policy?
- Is there a national government department that takes responsibility for young runaways? If so, which?
- Are there any national policy statements on running away? If so, please provide titles and where they can be accessed.
- What is it about the characteristics of the country that have led to the current situation?
- What could be added to improve does your country's policy and systems for responding to young runaways?

3. Service provision

- What services exist for young runaways at the national, regional and local level?
- Please could you describe the sorts of services that are available, how they operate and what areas they cover?
- How would young people find out about those services?
- Is there a telephone helpline available for young runaways? If so, which?
- Is the 116000 missing children hotline already running in your country, and which organisation runs it?
- How are the services you described funded?
- And how are they provided?
- Is there any emergency accommodation provision for children? And is that statutory or voluntary?
- Are there any service reviews published and available?
- Is there any information available about the people who access these services?
- What gaps are there in service provision?
- What are the main issues facing service providers in your country?
- What is it about the characteristics of the country that have led to the current situation?

4. Good practice

- **Please describe any examples of good practice in your country. You can include examples of good data collection, analysis and reporting, examples of good service provision, and/or examples of good policy development and delivery.**
- Why do you consider it to be good practice?

Process for taking part in an interview

We will contact you in due course to arrange a time to interview you by telephone. We are only able to conduct interviews in English. However, if you wish, you may arrange for an interpreter to accompany you and conduct the interview by conference call.

We hope to speak to you between Monday 21st June and Friday 27th August.

Please feel free to express your views and opinions openly as anything you say will not be attributed to you, but will be aggregated and analysed as part of the reporting process.

Contact details

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The results of this study will be available in November 2010.

Recommendations from the EU Conference on 17th November 2010

A. General recommendations :

- The European Commission needs to recognise runaways as a specific category of vulnerable children whose specific needs should be taken into account when developing policies.

- The European Commission has in the past drafted best practices / guidelines on dealing with missing children, in particular through the use of child alert systems. Similar guidelines must be drafted on the problem of runaways, to be discussed and adopted at Ministerial level under the Hungarian Presidency.

- The EU must fund projects[10] which aim at acquiring a better understanding of the problem of runaways.

- The Council is urged to underline the importance for MS to continue prioritising support to young people in crisis and their families (including prevention as well as i.a. emergency accommodation), despite economically challenging times.

Specific recommendations:

A. Definitions & data

- Agree on a common (European) definition for runaways.

- Promote the appointment of one single focal point per MS to take the lead in collecting data on runaways from all national agencies involved.

- Facilitate the collection of data at EU level.

B. Understanding the problem / prevention

- Fund EU wide research on runaways, including self reporting surveys and research on children running away from care.

C. Awareness raising

- Change the general perspective on runaway children: the approach must address the risk of running away while, at the same time, identifying the causes of the running away and the needs expressed by it. Once identified, these needs must be covered by appropriate services.

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[10] Research could focus on achieving a better understanding of the problem, epidemiology, divulging links between socio-economic backgrounds and runaway behaviour, etc. See also B. Understanding the problem / prevention

- Raise awareness among young people (1) about the risks of running away, (2) about the ways of seeking alternative solutions to running away and (3) about the available help if they have run away.[11]

- Promote the role of 116 000 (and 116 111) regarding runaways, especially in view of implementing obligations regarding 116 000 listed in the Universal Services Directive by 25 May 2011.

D. Services

- Recognise and reinforce the understanding that the problem of runaways is a social welfare and child protection issue, rather than a law enforcement issue only. Promote a balanced approach, based on the best interest of the child, in order to avoid (1) ignorance of the reasons why children run away, (2) trivialisation of the importance of the runaway behavior and/or (3) stigmatisation of the runaways.

- Reinforce the message of Council Resolution 2001/C 283/01 on the contribution of civil society in finding missing or sexually exploited children, which refers among others to runaway children, to further promote a multiagency approach in dealing with runaways.

- Further facilitate the implementation of 116 000 / 116 111 hotlines and helplines, in particular by providing funding for the cost of operating the services as well as for the European coordination of the network.

- Strengthen the expertise of 116 000 and 116 111 hotlines and helplines regarding the possible risks linked to running away, as well as waus of addressing these.

- Add 116 000 sms range to 116 000 / 116 111 telephone range.

- Pay more attention to the most vulnerable group of unaccompanied minors, who run away from the shelters provided for them in the Member countries and leave no traces. As these children are of nobody's concern, they are extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

- Promote, at MS level, cooperation structures allowing national consistency of services.

- Promote, at MS level, the establishment of national law enforcement missing persons' units.

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[11] Examples could include the use of "Laura's lost", the enacted reading on a real runaway case brought in the occasion of the conference of 17 & 18 November, as a starting point for discussion groups with parents and children in schools.

- Promote the development of a European network of these specialized national missing persons' units.

- Promote a balanced synergy between organisations dealing with runaways and Safer Internet Centres, allowing cooperation and exchange regarding ways of contacting young people through new technologies as well as sharing already available expertise.

- Include information on risks and ways of addressing problems related to running away in awareness raising activities already undertaken by Safer Internet Centres.