

Motion

An active approach against child abduction in Europe

signed by: Dutch National Youth Council
(DNYC)

co-signed by: International Federation of
Liberal Youth (IFLRY)

More than 100,000 children and adolescents are missing each year in the European Union according to data for 2019 (Council of the European union, 2021). In 2022, 733 cases of wrongful removal of children were recorded in Slovenia, 604 in Germany, 314 in Belgium. We could fear that the number is much higher due to lack of registration and differences in reporting. Even with the high numbers available, refugee orphans are not considered. Thousands of young newcomers fleeing violence or poverty in their home country, remain unaccounted for during their journey throughout Europe. Children who go missing in migration are underreported and face a very high risk of trafficking and exploitation (Missing Children Europe, 2022). Austria reported 88,4% of the 13151 orphans who filed for asylum cannot be found, 11629 children (Asyl Koordination Österreich, 2023).

In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is stated that states must combat the wrongful removal of children too, and the non-retention of children from abroad. The last years have seen a growth in the number of child* abductions. This problem has been raised by the council of the European Union and in the council conclusion on 9th December 2021; it states that Europe should step up cross-border police cooperation in the area of missing persons (*Council of the European Union, 2021*). Given the numbers above and their increase since the Council's conclusion, it is clear that the European Union and its member states are not taking sufficient action to address this growing problem.

A big part of the growth in the amount of child abductions is due to the number of child abductions by a parent. Parental child abduction is the hiding, taking, or keeping hold of a child by a parent while defying the rights of the child's other parent or guardian. The only Europe wide report that exists and collates the fully detailed data of child abductions by parents is old – we did see a 'steady increase' from 3748 cases in 2009 to 4062 cases in 2011 in those data. (Note about those data: a single case may be recorded in multiple countries, and one case could involve more than one child). However, in the last couple of years a lot of European countries have seen an increase in child abduction by parent cases. Some examples are:

	2021	2022	2023
Poland	150 cases	160 cases	175 cases
Netherlands	178 cases	188 cases	260 cases
Spain	434 cases	397 cases	477 cases

Table 1. Number of child abduction cases by parent per country per year

The EU strategy on the Rights of the Child states that missing children are treated as particularly vulnerable. Parental child abduction can be detrimental to the growth and well-being of these vulnerable children and also has far-reaching impact and consequences for the child's environment. Some of the effects that have been researched entail depression, PTSD, reactive attachment disorder, anxiety and excessive fearfulness (Freeman, 2024) . The children facing this problem are European youth whose voices are being taken. YFJ should stand up for youth that can no longer do it for themselves.

Call to action:

We urge YFJ to promote and call for the following points:

- The appointment of a Child Abduction Coordinator in the European Commission. Whom is responsible for the coordination and cooperation of, and between, the information points which are called upon. This coordinator is responsible for creating a detailed report on child abductions across Europe. The report will gather data to better understand the extent of the issue, raise awareness, and provide a clear picture of the problem.
- **Furthermore, this coordinator works to ensure a high level of security for its young citizens in freedom, security and justice by promoting the strengthening of police cooperation** as set out in Title V of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Advocating for joint police patrols, specialized units, operations centers, and investigations within existing frameworks such as INTERPOL and EUROPOL. Which creates a layer of expertise within police units at European level that handles these types of cases professionally. We encourage discussions with PEN-MP where

* Children in this case are of all ages up to eighteen.

relevant, in the drafting and the implementation of specific actions falling within its mandate.

- Set up an information point in every European country, if not already available such as in the Netherlands or Germany, where parents and professionals can go if they have questions about (imminent) international child abduction. These information points must be staffed with knowledgeable staff whom follow the good practice guide from The Hague Convention on Child Abduction. The information point should offer a preventive information service and other preventive services (such as mediation) for parents.
- A specific focus on prevention and mediation should be maintained and enlarged through the work of the Child Abduction Coordinator and the information points. As the commitment to preventive mediation and training professionals in the European context can lead to the recognition of signals and the prevention of child abduction in the parental context.
- Lastly each member state should put child protection first and take children's rights into consideration at all times. Focusing especially on those children that are more vulnerable such as refugee children.

References:

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Missing Children Europe, 2022. *Figures and tables 2022*. [Annual Reports - Missing Children Europe](#)



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



The European Youth Forum is funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the Council of Europe or the European Youth Foundation. Neither the European Union nor any other granting authority can be held responsible for them.

