



Spotlight on Parliaments in Europe

Drafted by the Directorate Relations with National Parliaments - Institutional Cooperation Unit
Source: European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation

N° 26 - February 2020

Missing refugee and migrant children in Europe

On 15 April 2019, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe submitted a request (4067) concerning missing refugee and migrant children in Europe in order to prepare a report on the topic by Ms Serap Yasar (Turkey). The report can be found [here](#)¹. The request deals with the number of missing refugee and migrant children. It also explores who is responsible to notify the police in cases of disappearance and how refugee and migrant children are registered and identified. In total 37 Parliaments/Chambers from 32 countries replied. The variety of replies from the national Parliaments reflect the different criteria of national legislations and regulations and explain why the figures reported by the responding chambers cannot be summarized in a harmonised statistical manner.

1. How many refugee and migrant children are missing in your country?

Overall, the definitions used to describe missing refugee and migrant children vary from country to country. First, the countries differentiate between unaccompanied children and accompanied children in families. Furthermore, the definition of being missing differs. One definition is leaving the reception center either without consent of management (Romania) or without giving any future address (Norway). Children who are accompanied by their family can still be considered missing when they leave with their families without notice. In other cases, a child is considered “missing” when there is no contact for 2 months (Finland). In the Czech Republic and Poland, they calculated the number by counting the escape cases from reception centers. In Croatia, Slovakia and France, it was in general leaving the institution under unresolved circumstances or leaving the institution voluntarily. In Spain, the number of missing refugee or migrant children is defined by looking at the complaints filed.

In the following table, the number of missing children for every country is given as mentioned in their parliament/chamber’s responses. Taking into account the different definitions used and the different years about which the numbers speak, we cannot compare these numbers.

Country	Number of missing children	Year
Austria	393	On July 2019
Belgium	1021	2018
Bulgaria	- ²	-
Canada	2 ³	-
Croatia	144	September 2015 - April 2019
Czech Republic	11 ⁴	2018
Estonia	0	-
Finland	380	2017
	164	2018
	33	April 2019
France	5.544 Adults + children	-
Georgia	0	-
Germany	6.212 (364 unsolved)	2017
	3.969 (435 unsolved)	2018
	1.048 (294 unsolved)	May 2019
Greece	1.110	On December 2018

¹ <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=28308&lang=en>

² Bulgaria had no data on missing children. However, they did provide the number of actions undertaken by the Child Protection Agency for unaccompanied children, foreign citizens, including refugee children, 2016 - 18 cases; 2017 - 20 cases; 2018 - 24 cases; the first quarter of 2019 - 11 cases.

³ NCMPUR missing children webpage shows the current cases of missing children. There were 2 cases found using the advanced search tool using refugee/migrant.

⁴ Unaccompanied minors of foreign nationals are accommodated in this Facility up to the age of 18 (regardless they apply for the international protection or not). There were 30 minors from the third countries accommodated in the ZDC in the last year. 11 escapes were reported (one client escaped twice, 9 clients were from the third countries, 2 clients from the EU member states)

		January - May 2019
Iceland	404	-
Ireland	0	-
Ireland	10 (8 unsolved) ⁵	-
Israel	-	-
Italy	82.239	Since 1974
	7.929	2018
	12.006	2017
Latvia	0	-
Lithuania	-	-
Moldova	-	-
The Netherlands	1.600	2015 - 2019
North Macedonia	0	-
Norway	4.659 (2.033 unsolved)	2010 - 2019
Poland	28 ⁶	2018
Portugal	8	2017
	20	2018
	15	2019
Romania	122	2018 - May 2019
San Marino	0	-
Slovakia	23	2017
	14	2018
	19	2019
Spain	9.218	On 2018 ⁷
Sweden	6.612	2009 - 2019
Switzerland	213	2018
Turkey	-	-
UK	122 (under asylum seeker)	2015 - 2016
	1.215 ⁸ (under unaccompanied juvenile)	

2. If a refugee or migrant child disappears, who is legally obliged to notify such disappearance to the police?

In some countries, the notification of the disappearance of a refugee or migrant child entails no legal obligation (Austria, Croatia, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Spain, UK), where in others it does (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, North Macedonia and Turkey). In general, however, there is a sense of duty or expected behaviour for the person/institution in charge to notify the competent authorities (police, childcare and protection organisations or services).

In many countries certain protocols, laws or other legislation are put into place to arrange the over-all protection of children in general (Bulgaria, Canada, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Moldova, Romania, Spain, UK). Only Belgium and Norway mentioned specific legislation on refugee and migrant children, this concerns the children staying in a reception/accommodation centre.

Those responsible for notifying the competent authorities are in general the ones who are tasked with the care of the child, for example the centre in which the child is staying. The authorities that are contacted differ from country to country. In Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania and Sweden, the police was mentioned as competent body. In Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Slovakia, they mention the police and other bodies such as governmental bodies dealing with migrants and refugees, social services and childcare/protection agencies.

⁵ Unaccompanied minors not known to the authorities or referred to the SWTSCSA are not accounted for in data.

⁶ Remarked that the statistics are not collected systematically.

⁷ Complaints on minors missing with a nationality other than Spanish, 85% of these complaints were established in 2017 & 2018.

⁸ The National Crime Agency have given the advise that it is generally safe to interpret 'unaccompanied juvenile' as referring to unaccompanied migrant children, although it is feasible that the category may be used in other circumstances. Please note that this information relates to cases in which the person has been found. We can say that in 2015/16, at least 1,215 unaccompanied migrant children were reported as missing and subsequently found but there may be others who went missing and had not yet been found.

3. How are refugee and migrant children registered and identified in your country?

When it comes to registration, many countries have similar procedures. Not every country gave an extensive description of the procedure. Overall, the first point of contact is where the refugee or migrant child is registered. This could be the refugee/reception centre or the police (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Norway Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, UK). The UK notes that those who are illegally in the country are not necessarily known.

The collection of data is done in similar ways in all countries: through written questionnaires, oral interviews with the child or legal guardians, research of international and national databases (Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Sweden) and documents provided. Depending on whether or not the child was accompanied, the information is gathered via legal guardians. The UK, Moldova and Turkey mention that accompanied children can be registered by a family member. Turkey adds that the consent of the juvenile is not required. Fingerprints are only taken when the child is older than 14 years in Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Portugal, Romania and Sweden. Bulgaria, Canada, Moldova, Spain and Turkey mentioned the issuing of an ID or document to prove identity.

The refugee and migrant children are registered in some sort of register or database in the following countries: Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Moldova, Norway, Spain and Sweden. Greece mentions three different databases: register of guardians, unaccompanied minors register and register of unaccompanied minors' hospitality centers. Norway and Switzerland note that they are only registered in a database when they apply for a refugee status or a resident permit.

When it comes to unaccompanied children, many countries mentioned that they are placed under care or custody right after arrival and registration (Czech Republic, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Moldova, The Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Turkey).