

Searching for Missing Persons in Europe

A Guide to National Systems and Cooperation
Models

Report

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Abstract

The disappearance of a person is a complex and transnational social and security phenomenon that affects tens of thousands of families every year in Europe. Although there is a harmonised emergency number for missing children (116 000), a similar tool for adults is lacking, highlighting the need for a more integrated approach. This research aims to map and comparatively analyse the alert and search systems for missing persons in a large sample of European countries, with the objective of identifying best practices and models of cooperation.

The analysis shows a considerable heterogeneity in national models, ranging from strongly state-led systems, such as the Italian one coordinated by the Prefectures, to models where organised volunteering acts as an indispensable operational partner for the police. Three main models of collaboration with citizens were identified: community apps targeted at specific vulnerable groups (e.g. Purple Alert in Scotland); highly professionalised volunteer search teams (e.g. Missing People Sweden, Vapepa in Finland, Bezvests.lv in Latvia); and digital mobilisation platforms exploiting the virality of social media (e.g. Deutschland findet euch in Germany, SOSdesaparecidos in Spain).

At the supranational level, the EU acts as a facilitator through cooperation instruments such as the Schengen Information System (SIS) and support agencies such as Europol, while leaving operational responsibility to individual Member States. This paper **explores the working hypothesis** that the formal integration of Neighbourhood Watch networks can represent a strategic development to enhance the effectiveness of searches, **proposing a model for turning** civic awareness into an active and widespread contribution.

Methodology

This research was conducted in three distinct phases to ensure both the breadth of the data collection and the analytical rigour of the findings.

Phase 1: Automated Information Retrieval The initial phase employed advanced artificial intelligence tools for large-scale information retrieval and semantic analysis. This process scanned a vast corpus of multilingual public sources, including **official government portals, websites of national law enforcement agencies, reports from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), legislative databases, and publications from transnational bodies such as the European Union.** This automated approach allowed us to gather a comprehensive baseline of information efficiently.

Phase 2: Data Structuring and Synthesis Following the data collection, all information was structured within a comparative analytical framework. Our research team systematically organised the data for each country according to key variables, such as the main public authorities, the nature of early warning systems, the role of the third sector, and models of citizen collaboration. This created a consistent dataset for subsequent analysis.

Phase 3: Verification and Internal Peer Review To ensure the highest standards of accuracy and reliability, all structured data underwent a meticulous internal validation process, managed by **EUNWA's dedicated research committee.** This process involved two key stages:

- **Source Verification:** Every key data point and assertion was cross-referenced with its original source document to confirm its accuracy and context.
- **Analytical Coherence Review:** The analysis for each country was reviewed by the committee to ensure a consistent and impartial application of our comparative framework, guaranteeing that the findings are both robust and directly comparable across different national systems.

This multi-phase methodology combines the power of automated data retrieval with the precision of expert human oversight, ensuring the final report is both comprehensive and trustworthy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The disappearance of a person is a complex and transnational social and security phenomenon that affects tens of thousands of families across Europe every year. While the continent benefits from freedom of movement, this very principle can paradoxically complicate the search for vulnerable individuals. The existence of a harmonised emergency number for missing children (116 000) stands in contrast to the lack of a similar tool for adults, highlighting a critical need for a more integrated approach.

This report, promoted by the European Neighbourhood Watch Association (EUNWA), provides a comprehensive mapping and comparative analysis of the alert and search systems for missing persons in a large sample of European countries. It serves as a tool for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and third-sector practitioners to identify best practices and effective models of cooperation. The research is based on an initial collection and analysis of public data using artificial intelligence, followed by a meticulous double-verification and peer-review process to ensure accuracy.

A Diverse European Landscape: Key Findings

The analysis reveals a significant heterogeneity in national models, shaped by local culture, history, and legal frameworks. While the European Union acts as a facilitator through crucial cooperation instruments like the Schengen Information System (SIS) and support agencies such as Europol, the operational responsibility for searches remains exclusively with individual Member States.

Our research identifies three principal models of citizen collaboration currently active across Europe:

- **Targeted Community Apps:** Mobile applications like **Purple Alert** in Scotland, designed to create localised alert networks for specific vulnerable groups.
- **Highly Professionalised Volunteer Search Teams:** Organisations such as **Missing People Sweden** and the **Vapepa** network in Finland, which have become indispensable operational partners for the police.
- **Digital Mobilisation Platforms:** Initiatives like *Deutschland findet euch* in Germany, which leverage the viral power of social media to create vast networks of 'sentinel citizens'.

A Strategic Path Forward: The Report's Working Hypothesis

This report is guided by a central

working hypothesis: that a significant, largely untapped potential lies in the **formal integration of established Neighbourhood Watch networks** into national alert and search frameworks. This approach is not based on creating new structures but on enhancing an existing social infrastructure.

The United Kingdom provides the most mature model of this collaboration, through the established partnership between local law enforcement and the national Neighbourhood Watch Network. The mechanism is both simple and effective: official search alerts are cascaded through trusted local coordinators directly to residents, whose role is to act as trained

'eyes and ears' during their daily routines, not to conduct active searches themselves. This model is rapid, geographically targeted, and highly cost-efficient.

An Invitation to Collaborate

The findings of this report suggest that the working hypothesis is sound and presents a clear opportunity to deepen the synergy between authorities and civil society.

Rather than a definitive recommendation, EUNWA presents this model as a promising working hypothesis to be tested and adapted to diverse national contexts. We invite policymakers and law enforcement agencies to consider collaborative pilot programmes to evaluate the tangible benefits of formally integrating Neighbourhood Watch networks. By experimenting with this structured 'bridge' between official channels and community assets, we can collectively discover the most effective ways to transform civic awareness into an active contribution, amplifying the search network and ensuring no one is left behind.

Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name (as Defined in the Report)	Full Name (English Translation)	Context	Role of the Organisation/System
APA	Austria Presse Agentur	Austrian Press Agency	Austria	The national news agency that receives and distributes urgent alerts on behalf of the Ministry of the Interior.
ARPD	Assistance et Recherche de Personnes Disparues	Assistance and Search for Missing Persons	France	A volunteer association that provides practical support during searches, organises citizen search parties, and supports families .
BKA	Bundeskriminalamt	Federal Criminal Police	Germany	The Federal Criminal Police, which registers disappearance reports and manages the official portal for public searches.
BMI	Bundesministerium für Inneres	Federal Ministry of the Interior	Austria	The central authority that defines strategies and procedures for searching for missing persons.
CNDES	Centro Nacional de Desaparecidos	National Centre for the Disappeared	Spain	The central body of the Ministry of the Interior for coordinating information and managing the national database on missing persons.
CNZD	Centar za nestalu i zlostavljanu decu	Centre for Missing and Abused Children	Serbia / Croatia	A key non-profit organisation that manages the 116 000 helpline and was a major promoter of the AMBER Alert system in Serbia .
CPOZ KGP	Centrum Poszukiwań Osób Zaginionych KGP	Centre for the Search for Missing Persons (Police HQ)	Poland	An elite unit of the Polish police responsible for coordinating the most complex searches and international cooperation.
CRCA	Qendra për të Drejtat e Fëmijëve	Centre for Children's Rights	Albania	A leading NGO for children's rights that supports and promotes the 116 000 helpline and offers counselling to families .
CRI	Child Rescue Ireland	Child Rescue Ireland	Ireland	Ireland's national early warning system for high-risk child abductions, equivalent to AMBER Alert.
CRS	Community Rescue Service	Community Rescue Service	Ireland	A volunteer organisation specialising in operational field searches, assisting the police in difficult terrain.
ESTSAR	Estonia Search and Rescue	Estonia Search and Rescue	Estonia	A non-profit organisation that provides an operational search and rescue service, working in cooperation with the police .
Europol	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation	European Union	Acts as a support and intelligence hub, facilitating information exchange in cross-border cases and coordinating the PEN-MP network .
FedPol	Federal Office of Police	Federal Office of Police	Switzerland	Acts as the national coordination centre, manages the RIPOL database, and is the contact point for Interpol .
FORF	Frivillige Organisasjoners Redningsfaglige Forum	The Forum for Voluntary Rescue Organisations	Norway	A federation of the main voluntary rescue organisations that acts as an operational partner for the police in field searches .

Acronym	Full Name (as Defined in the Report)	Full Name (English Translation)	Context	Role of the Organisation/System
FPR	Fichier des personnes recherchées	Wanted Persons File	France	The central database managed by the Ministry of the Interior where all wanted and missing persons are registered.
GNR	Guarda Nacional Republicana	National Republican Guard	Portugal	Police force with territorial jurisdiction in rural areas.
HGSS	Hrvatska gorska služba spašavanja	Croatian Mountain Rescue	Croatia	The Croatian Mountain Rescue service, which acts as an operational partner for the police in mountainous and difficult areas.
IAC	Instituto de Apoio à Criança	Institute of Child Support	Portugal	The leading Portuguese organisation for the defence of children's rights, which manages the 116 000 helpline.
ICMP	International Commission on Missing Persons	International Commission on Missing Persons	Bosnia-Herzegovina	An international organisation providing technical and scientific assistance for the DNA identification of war victims.
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross	International Committee of the Red Cross	Ukraine	A committee that plays a neutral role in armed conflicts, helping to locate prisoners of war and manage the identification of victims .
ISPPC	Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	Ireland	Manages the European 116 000 helpline in Ireland, offering support to families.
Kripos	National Criminal Investigation Service	National Criminal Investigation Service	Norway	The national criminal investigation service that provides specialist and forensic support in the most complex cases.
LBVP	Landelijk Bureau Vermiste Personen	National Office for Missing Persons	The Netherlands	The National Office for Missing Persons, which acts as a competence and coordination centre for the Dutch police.
MPI	Institut za nestale osobe Bosne i Hercegovine	Institute for Missing Persons of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnia-Herzegovina	The central state institution mandated to search for and identify persons who disappeared during the 1990s war .
MVD	Министерство внутренних дел	Ministry of the Interior	Belarus / Russia	The Ministry of the Interior, the state authority responsible for handling missing persons cases and police investigations.
MVR	Министерство на вътрешните работи	Ministry of the Interior	Bulgaria / North Macedonia	The Ministry of the Interior, the authority responsible for handling missing persons cases (standardised from MUP for consistency).
NCA	National Crime Agency	National Crime Agency	United Kingdom	The UK equivalent of the FBI; the UKMPU is part of this agency.
NENO	Nacionalna evidencija nestalih osoba	National Registry of Missing Persons	Croatia	The National Registry of Missing Persons, an advanced and interactive online platform for the public management of cases.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation	Non-Governmental Organisation	Global	A general term for third-sector organisations that often manage 116 000 helplines and provide support to families.
OPEROG	Operativne Otsingugrupp	Operational Search Group	Estonia	A team of volunteers specialising in operational field research, working in support of the police.

Acronym	Full Name (as Defined in the Report)	Full Name (English Translation)	Context	Role of the Organisation/System
PEN-MP	European Network of Missing Persons Experts	European Network of Missing Persons Experts	European Union	A network of expert investigators who share best practices, coordinated by Europol.
PJ	Polícia Judiciária	Judicial Police	Portugal	The main criminal investigation body, responsible for the most serious missing persons cases such as abductions.
PPA	Politsei- ja Piirivalveamet	Estonian Police and Border Guard	Estonia	The unified agency responsible for security and border control, which handles all missing persons cases.
PSO Angel	Поисково-спасательный отряд «Ангел»	Search and Rescue Team "Angel"	Belarus	The largest volunteer organisation in Belarus for the operational field search of missing persons.
PSP	Polícia de Segurança Pública	Public Security Police	Portugal	Police force with territorial jurisdiction in urban areas.
RIPOL	Recherches informatisées de police	Computerised police searches	Switzerland	The national database managed by FedPol where wanted and missing persons cases are entered.
SA.RI.	Sistema di Allarme Rapido Interforze	Interforce Early Warning System	Italy	The information system that feeds the national database, allowing real-time information sharing among law enforcement agencies.
SAR	Search and Rescue	Search and Rescue	Global	A technical term for Search and Rescue operations, which are being enhanced by new technologies like drones and AI.
SBB	Schweizerische Bundesbahnen)	Swiss Federal Railways	Switzerland	The Swiss Federal Railways, a partner in the dissemination of child abduction alerts.
SIRENE	Supplementary Information Request at the National Entries	Supplementary Information Request at the National Entries	Schengen Area	Offices that manage the exchange of supplementary information related to alerts entered in the SIS system.
SIS	Schengen Information System	Schengen Information System	Schengen Area	The shared database that allows police to enter missing person alerts visible across the entire Schengen area .
SKR	Следственный комитет Российской Федерации	Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation	Russia	A powerful federal investigative agency that takes over disappearance cases with suspicious circumstances, especially those involving minors.
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle	Global	Drones used for advanced aerial reconnaissance in search and rescue operations.
UKMPU	UK Missing Persons Unit	UK Missing Persons Unit	United Kingdom	The central unit that acts as a national centre of expertise, providing strategic support to local police forces.
Vapepa	Vapaaehtoinen pelastuspalvelu	Voluntary Rescue Service	Finland	A network of around 50 NGOs coordinated by the Finnish Red Cross, acting as the main operational partner for the police in large-scale searches.

PREFACE

The disappearance of a person is a silent emergency that tears apart the family and social fabric, leaving behind a void full of anguish and uncertainty. It is crucial to remember that behind every case lies a story of distress, a personal drama, and often, a desperate choice. Especially in cases of voluntary departure, the act of leaving can be an extreme measure, sometimes perceived as the only alternative to even more tragic outcomes. These decisions are often rooted in toxic relationships, relational crises, dysfunctional families, or profound personal failures—dramas that not only deeply affect the individual but also reverberate throughout the community they inhabit and from which they ultimately flee.

Every year in Europe, tens of thousands of families are confronted with this reality, a phenomenon that knows no borders and affects people of all ages and social classes. Despite its magnitude, Europe still lacks a single emergency number for missing adults, unlike the 116 000 dedicated exclusively to children. This absence highlights the need for a more cohesive and integrated approach.

This work stems from the realisation that no single agency, public or private, can tackle such a complex challenge alone. It has been conceived as a tool for policy makers, Law Enforcement, third sector practitioners and concerned citizens, with the aim of mapping and analysing the different national systems, highlighting best practices and the irreplaceable role of collaboration.

The ambition behind this research, promoted by EUNWA (European Neighbourhood Watch Association), is to inspire reflection on how to strengthen the most valuable link in the security chain: the community itself. We firmly believe that there is a huge untapped potential in working with citizens. The aim is therefore to explore how we can create a 'bridge' between informal community watch and official channels, to exponentially amplify the search network and help, all together, to leave no one behind.

The EUNWA Board – October 2025

INTRODUCTION

In a continent characterised by free movement, the search for a missing person can still, paradoxically, crash against the borders of national jurisdictions. While the creation of an area such as the Schengen area represents one of the greatest achievements of European integration, it also complicates the search for vulnerable people who can cross borders in a matter of hours, disappearing from the radar of a single country's authorities. It is to overcome this paradox that the EU, while reaffirming that operational responsibility remains firmly in the hands of individual member states, has woven a sophisticated network of cooperation based on tools such as the Schengen Information System (SIS) and support agencies such as Europol.

But who searches for a missing person? The answer is never simple, since the first few hours are crucial and a complex ecosystem of actors moves behind every search. This comparative analysis aims to map and analyse precisely this mosaic of organisational models. The reader will discover a multi-speed Europe: on the one hand, systems with a strong institutional direction, where figures such as the Italian “Commissario Straordinario” or the Spanish “CNDES coordination centre” centralise the strategy; on the other hand, models where the national police delegate and rely structurally on an imposing operational volunteerism, as in the case of Missing People Sweden or the Vapepa network in Finland. It will also be observed how the historical context can shape unique responses, as in the case of the institutions set up in Bosnia and Herzegovina to deal with the trauma of missing persons in war.

To guide the reader through this complexity, the work is structured progressively. **Part I** sets the context: **Chapter 1** quantifies the statistical dimension of the phenomenon, while **Chapter 2** details the European Union's legal framework and cooperation instruments. **Part II** focuses on comparative analysis and collaboration: **Chapter 3** examines the different models of citizen involvement, and **Chapter 4** looks into the specific integration of Neighbourhood Watch networks. **Chapter 5** then provides a synoptic table for an immediate comparison of all national systems, followed by **Chapter 6**, which explores the technological frontier in search and rescue operations. Finally, **Part III** contains the empirical heart of the analysis, with **Chapter 7** offering detailed sheets for each country.

Despite the richness and diversity of the approaches analysed, an underlying question emerges: how can this research network be made even denser and more effective? The working hypothesis guiding this study, promoted by EUNWA, is that a promising area for future exploration lies in the formal integration of neighbourhood watch networks. The goal is therefore to explore the feasibility and benefits of creating a 'bridge' between informal community surveillance and official channels, to exponentially amplify the search network and turn every citizen into a potential watchful 'eye' on the ground, with the ambition of leaving no one behind.

PART I

CONTEXT AND SYSTEMS

This first part of our study lays the foundation for understanding the phenomenon of missing persons in Europe.

Chapter 1 explores its dimension, analysing the data and statistics available at the national and pan-European levels to provide a framework for its scope and the challenges related to comparability.

Chapter 2 analyses the legal framework and cooperation instruments established by the European Union, clarifying the role of agencies such as Europol and shared databases like the SIS, which make it possible to overcome jurisdictional barriers.

1. THE DIMENSION OF THE PHENOMENON: DATA AND STATISTICS ON MISSING PERSONS IN EUROPE

Quantifying the phenomenon of missing persons at European level is a complex task. Currently, **there is no centralised EU statistical database** that collects and harmonises national data in a single, comparable format. The collection and publication of statistics is the sole responsibility of the individual states, and collection methodologies may vary significantly.

The main differences include:

- **Case definition:** One country might count every single 'report' of a disappearance, while another might count 'individuals' (counting a person only once, even if he or she disappears several times).
- **Timing:** The criteria for considering a person 'missing' are not uniform.
- **Categorisation:** Subdivisions by age group, nationality, or presumed cause of disappearance (flight, abduction, loss) differ from country to country.

Despite these challenges, the analysis of data published by official national sources allows us to outline the orders of magnitude and key trends of the phenomenon.

National Data: An Overview

Consulting the reports of the police and interior ministries of some of the major European countries, a picture emerges of a phenomenon of vast proportions.

- **Germany:** The Federal Criminal Police (**Bundeskriminalamt - BKA**) historically registers about **100,000 reports of disappearances each year**. Most of these cases (more than 95%) are positively resolved within a short time. A significant figure provided by the BKA is the number of persons 'currently wanted' on a given day, which includes long-standing cases and is typically around 15,000. [1]
- **United Kingdom:** The **UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU)**, part of the National Crime Agency, reports approximately **170,000 reported missing persons annually**. These reports correspond to over **350,000 'incidents'** of disappearance, highlighting the problem of repeated disappearances by the same vulnerable individuals. Again, most people are found. [6]
- **France:** According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, tens of thousands of disappearances are registered every year. The phenomenon is characterised by a very high incidence of voluntary departures of minors running away from home (classified as *fugues*). In 2022, for example, there were over 43,000 reported child disappearances, most of which were resolved within a few days. [4, 7]
- **Spain:** The **Centro Nacional de Desaparecidos (CNDES)** publishes a detailed annual report. In the last reporting year, some **24,000 reports** of disappearances were registered. Of these, a small but significant percentage are classified as 'high risk', triggering urgent investigation procedures. [2]

- **Italy:** The Annual Report of the **Government's Special Commissioner for Missing Persons** offers very granular data. In 2023, there were **29,315** reports of missing persons. One figure that stands out is the high number of minors (17,535), of which the vast majority (13,460) are unaccompanied foreign minors, a phenomenon with its own complex dynamics. [3]

A Pan-European Perspective: Network 116 000 Data

To get an overview focused on children, the data collected by the network of 116 000 lines, coordinated by **Missing Children Europe**, are a valuable source. [5]

- The 116 000-helpline network across Europe handles more than **60,000 telephone and online contacts** per year on thousands of missing children cases.
- The main reason for disappearance, which consistently accounts for **more than 60% of cases**, is **running away from home** (*runaways*), highlighting a deep social and psychological distress among adolescents.
- The second fastest growing category across Europe is that of **unaccompanied migrant minors** who disappear from reception centres.
- Kidnappings by third parties (unknowns) represent a very low percentage of the total number of cases handled (less than 1-2%), although they are the ones that generate the most social alarm.

Although unified and perfectly comparable statistics are not yet available, official data from individual countries and transnational networks outline a phenomenon of enormous social significance. The hundreds of thousands of complaints per year in Europe do not only represent a public safety emergency, but are also an indicator of vulnerability, youth distress and migratory crises that require integrated responses, capable of combining active research with prevention and social support.

2. EUROPEAN SYSTEMS FOR ALERTING AND SEARCHING FOR MISSING PERSONS

Introduction to the European context

The disappearance of a person is an emergency that knows no national boundaries, representing a complex challenge for the authorities and a tragedy for the families involved. Within the European Union, the management of this phenomenon is based on a fundamental principle: investigations and search operations remain the exclusive responsibility of the individual Member States. However, to address the cross-border dimension of the problem, the EU has developed a sophisticated ecosystem of shared tools, networks and regulations. The aim is not to replace national Law Enforcement, but to network them, enhancing their ability to work together quickly and effectively.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the main systems and platforms created at European and national levels, highlighting how synergy between the public, private and active citizenship sectors is the key to an effective response.

Pillars of the European Cooperation System

The European model is based on three main pillars: operational cooperation instruments, early warning systems and harmonised support services.

- **Operational Cooperation Instruments:**
 - **Schengen Information System (SIS):** It is the technological heart of cooperation. This huge, shared database allows the police of a member country to enter a missing person alert that becomes immediately visible to every border and police officer in the entire Schengen area. For vulnerable persons, 'alerts for protection purposes' are created, which, in case of identification, trigger a real-time alert. The system can also include biometric data and DNA profiles to facilitate identifications.
 - **Europol:** The EU Agency for Law Enforcement cooperation acts as a support and intelligence hub. It facilitates the exchange of information in cross-border cases and provides analytical support, especially when the disappearance is linked to serious international crimes such as human trafficking.
- **Rapid Alert System for Minors:**
 - **AMBER Alert and National Systems:** For more serious cases of child abduction, many countries have adopted early warning systems known as AMBER Alerts (or by national names such as **Child Rescue Alert** in the United Kingdom, **Alerte-Enlèvement** in France or '**Pronađi me**' in Serbia). These systems spread the alert massively and instantaneously through an extensive network of partners, including media, social networks and variable message boards. The foundation **AMBER Alert Europe** acts as a 'glue', helping to extend a national alert to neighbouring countries when necessary.

- **Harmonised Support Services:**

- **The 116 000 line:** Currently, the only harmonised Europe-wide number for missing persons is 116000, and it refers exclusively to missing children (persons under the age of 18). Managed nationally by specialised organisations, this free 24-hour service number is the most important access point for citizens who want to report a disappearance or receive support. There is still no similar single European number for adult missing persons.

The National Ecosystem: Collaboration and App Development

Going down to the national level, each country has developed its own model, albeit within the European framework. A common feature is the close collaboration between government agencies, Law Enforcement agencies and the voluntary sector. NGOs and voluntary associations play a key role in providing direct support to families, help that government agencies are not always able to cover.

In some countries, specific apps for searching for missing persons have also been developed, albeit with very variable functionality and accessibility. Notable examples include:

- **Child Rescue Alert** in the UK, which sends push notifications to users when an alert is triggered.
- **Purple Alert** in Scotland, a community app dedicated to finding people with dementia, which alerts users around disappearance.

This paper aims to analyse these national models in detail. The goal, which motivates EUNWA's compilation, is to explore how collaboration between existing networks (police and NGOs) and neighbourhood micro-networks (Neighbourhood Watch) could further expand the effectiveness of alerting systems, transforming civic awareness into an active and structured contribution to the search for missing persons.

PART II

INSIGHTS AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Part II focuses on the core of our analysis.

Chapter 3 analyses the different models of citizen involvement already existing in Europe, from specialised volunteer teams to digital mobilisation platforms.

Chapter 4 investigates into our main thesis, exploring the potential of formally integrating Neighbourhood Watch networks.

Chapter 5 provides a synoptic table for an immediate comparison of all national systems, serving as a bridge to the detailed analysis. Finally,

Chapter 6 explores the emerging technologies that are transforming Search and Rescue operations, acting as a 'force multiplier' for both institutions and communities.

3. MODELS OF CITIZEN COLLABORATION IN SEARCHING SYSTEMS

The basic idea behind this paper is the belief that, through increased collaboration between neighbourhood watch micro-networks, Law Enforcement and NGOs, it is possible to expand and strengthen the network of alerting and searching for missing persons in Europe. Although a formal and universal partnership with Neighbourhood Watch networks is still a 'concept to be developed', the analysis of national systems reveals that there are already several successful models that demonstrate the enormous potential of active citizen involvement.

These models can be grouped into three main categories, each with its own specificities and strengths.

1. The Targeted Community App Model

This approach uses mobile technology to create localised alert networks dedicated to specific categories of vulnerable people. The aim is to turn citizens in each area into a network of alert 'eyes', ready to collaborate.

An emblematic example is the initiative **Purple Alert** in Scotland.

- **Purpose:** The app, run by Alzheimer Scotland, was created specifically to help find people with dementia who have gone missing.
- **How it works:** It is a free community app. When a person with dementia is reported missing, a detailed alert is instantly sent to all app users in the area, creating an immediate support network that can assist Law Enforcement in the first, critical hours of the search. The 'Purple Alert' app is available for download on mobile devices.

This model demonstrates how technology can specifically mobilise a community around a specific problem, increasing the efficiency of searches for the most vulnerable.

2. The Operational Search Volunteer Model

In several countries, the collaboration between state and citizen has evolved into a highly structured operational partnership. In this model, volunteer organisations do not limit themselves to provide support but become the operational arm of the police for fieldwork.

Examples of excellence in Europe include:

- **Missing People Sweden (Sweden):** It is the main partner of the Swedish police in search operations. As soon as the police approve a search, this NGO activates its vast network of volunteers to organise and coordinate massive search beats in the field, always acting under the strategic direction of the authorities. Their ability to mobilise hundreds of people in a few hours is considered a key tool.
- **Vapepa (Finland):** It is a network coordinated by the Finnish Red Cross and brings together around 50 non-governmental organisations. When the police initiate a large-scale search, they contact Vapepa, which immediately mobilises volunteers specialised in

ground search, first aid and communications. This collaboration is so well established that the police consider it a standard resource in almost every search.

- **Bezvests.lv (Latvia):** It is the best-known search and rescue team in the Baltic States. It acts as a strategic and operational partner of the police, using professional equipment such as drones and all-terrain vehicles to conduct physical searches in the field.

This model of 'operational public-private partnership' represents the most advanced form of collaboration, where volunteerism becomes a structured, professional and indispensable national resource.

3. The Digital Mobilisation and 'Sentinel Citizens' Model

This model relies on the viral power of the internet and social media to create a vast network of 'sentinel citizens' ready to share research appeals, amplifying their reach exponentially.

The main initiatives following this approach are:

- **"Deutschland findet euch" (Germany):** Started as a Facebook initiative, it exploits the ubiquity of social media to quickly spread search appeals, reaching a wide audience in the critical early hours. It always works in close cooperation with the police and with the consent of the family.
- **Missing People (UK):** In addition to providing direct support, this organisation encourages citizens to become '**Digital Search Heroes**'. By signing up via their website, people commit to actively sharing search appeals on their social profiles, helping to create a digital dissemination network.
- **SOSdesaparecidos (Spain):** This association specialises in the rapid and viral dissemination of digital posters through social media and a large network of contacts, demonstrating great agility and the ability to reach millions of people in a very short time.

These three models, already up and running throughout Europe, provide concrete evidence that collaboration with citizens is not only possible, but already an effective reality. They provide a solid basis of experience from which to further develop and formalise the involvement of neighbourhood networks to make our communities safer and more responsive when faced with the tragedy of a missing person.

4. INTEGRATING NEIGHBOURHOOD NETWORKS: NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH AS AN ALERT CHANNEL

In addition to specialised operational volunteer models and dedicated community apps, there is a third, distinct approach to collaboration that deserves specific analysis: the integration of **pre-existing neighbourhood networks** (Neighbourhood Watch) as official communication channels into the alert system. This model is not based on the creation of new structures, but on the enhancement of an already existing social infrastructure rooted in the territory.

From Watching to Reporting: A Paradigm Change

The traditional concept of Neighbourhood Watch is related to crime prevention through passive observation and reporting of suspicious activities to the police. The innovative model, which is already in place in some contexts, expands its function: the neighbourhood network is no longer just a surveillance tool, but becomes a **rapid and geolocated dissemination channel for official alerts**.

The trust and capillarity of these networks are their strengths. Messages sent through neighbourhood coordinators are perceived by residents as trustworthy and relevant, overcoming the 'background noise' of generalist social media.

A Working Hypothesis: The UK Model

The United Kingdom **would offer** the most mature and formalised model of this collaboration, through the partnership between local Law Enforcement and the national Neighbourhood Watch Network (OurWatch). The mechanism **would be** simple and effective:

- **Official Alert Dissemination:** In the case of a missing vulnerable person, the police **would send** the official search alert directly to the coordinators of Neighbourhood Watch groups active in the geographical area of interest.
- **Cascading Dissemination:** Coordinators, through their established channels (mailing lists, WhatsApp groups, dedicated apps), **would forward** the alert to all members of their local network. Within minutes, hundreds of alert residents **would be** informed and **would know** who to look for.
- **A Defined Role: The Community's 'Eyes and Ears':** It **would be** crucial to emphasise that Neighbourhood Watch members **would not be asked** to organise active searches, so as not to interfere with the professional work of the police and specialist rescue teams (such as Lowland/Mountain Rescue). Their role **would be** to act as trained 'eyes and ears': to observe more carefully during their daily routines and to report any relevant sightings *exclusively* to the police emergency numbers. In this way, the Neighbourhood Watch group **could** indirectly help by spreading **Community Awareness**, a factor that could prove decisive in finding the missing person. Furthermore, neighbours might have noticed something important; Neighbourhood Watch groups, by connecting the community, **would facilitate** the sharing of this **Local Intel** with the police.

Potential Advantages and Development

This collaboration model **would offer** significant advantages:

- **Speed:** It **would leverage** direct and already active communication channels for almost instantaneous dissemination.
- **Geographic Targeting:** It **would allow** the alert to be confined to a specific area, increasing the relevance of the message and reducing the risk of "alert fatigue" on a national scale.
- **Cost-Efficiency:** It **would use** an existing social infrastructure without the need to develop new, expensive technologies or apps.

The UK experience **would suggest** that formalising a partnership with neighbourhood networks **would be** a practical and powerful strategy. For many other countries, where collaboration with Neighbourhood Watch groups is still informal and based on the spontaneous sharing of police posts, the UK model **would offer** a clear path to structuring this synergy, making it an official and potentially even more effective component of the national missing person search system.

5. OVERVIEW OF MISSING PERSONS ALERT AND SEARCH SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

The following table provides a synoptic and comparative overview of the missing persons search facilities in several European countries. For each analysed country, the basic pillars of the response system are illustrated: the public authority of reference, the name and type of the early warning system for minors, the main non-governmental organisations (NGOs) providing support or actively participating in searches, and the presence of mobile applications dedicated to citizen involvement. This tool allows us to see briefly the similarities and differences between the various national models, highlighting how collaboration between institutions and civil society is a common element, although declined in different ways depending on the local context.

Country	Main Public Authority	Early Warning System (Minors)	116 000 Helpline Manager	Main Associations (Support & Research)	App for Citizens
European Union	European Network of Missing Persons Experts (PEN-MP)/ Schengen Information System (SIS)/ Europol	AMBER Alert Europe Network	Standard UE (National Management)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing Children Europe AMBER Alert Europe Foundation 	No centralised app; promotes the development of national apps
Albania	Policia and Shtetit (Albanian State Police)	"AMBER Alert Albania"	ALO 116-111 / CRCA Albania	CRCA/ECPAT Albania: Support and advocacy	No specific country app
Austria	Ministry of the Interior (BMI)	Alert via news agency (APA)	Die Möwe / Rat auf Draht (The Seagull/ Advice on the Wire)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Österreichisches Rotes Kreuz: searching Österreich findet uns: social 	No specific country app
Belarus	Ministry of the Interior (MVD)	No EU system	None	PSO "Angel": operational search in the field	No specific country app. PSO "Angel" coordinates via social media and forums
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Entities Police	Not formalised	Mreža "Snažniji glas za djecu" ("A Stronger Voice for Children" network)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MPI / ICMP (Victims of war) Gorska Služba Spašavanja (Mountain Rescue Service) 	No specific country app
Bulgaria	Ministry of the Interior (MVR)	AMBER Alert	"Nadja Centre" Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safer Internet Centre: coordination Animus Association: 116111 line 	No specific country app
Croatia	MUP / CNDES (Ministry of Interior and Police)	Sustav za uzbunjivanje o nestaloj djeci (Missing Child Alert System)	Centar za nestalu i zlostavljano djecu (Centre for Missing Children and Victims of Abuse)	Hrvatska gorska služba spašavanja – HGSS (Croatian Mountain Rescue Service: searching)	No specific country app. The nestali.gov.hr portal is the main resource
Czech Republic	Policie ČR (Police)	Dítě v ohrožení (Child in Danger)	Ztracené dítě (Missing Child)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ztracené dítě (Lost Child): support Linka bezpečí (Safety Line): prevention 	No specific country app

Country	Main Public Authority	Early Warning System (Minors)	116 000 Helpline Manager	Main Associations (Support & Research)	App for Citizens
Denmark	Rigspolitiet (National Police)	National alert	Børns Vilkår (Children's Conditions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forsvundne Personer (Missing Persons) (social) Børns Vilkår (Support and prevention) 	No specific country app
Estonia	PPA (Police)	National alert	MTÜ Eesti Abikeskused (Estonian Help Centres NGO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OPEROG - Operatiivne Otsingugrupp (Operational Search Group): operational search in the field. SA Kadunud: family support 	No specific country app
Finland	Poliisi (Police)	Not formalized (Only Urgent Alert)	Mannerheimin Lastensuojeluliitto (Mannerheim League for Child Welfare)	Vapepa (network coordinated by the Red Cross): operational partner in large-scale searches	No specific country app
France	Police / Gendarmerie (Law Enforcement)	Alerte-Enlèvement (Child Abduction Alert)	Droit d'Enfance (Children's Rights)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ARPD: voluntary searching Pégase: family support 	No specific country app. The alert is spread on all media channels
Germany	BKA / Länder police (Law Enforcement)	AMBER Alert (managed by NGOs)	Initiative Vermisste Kinder (Missing Children Initiative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiative Vermisste Kinder: family support THW, Volunteer Fire Brigade: searching 	NINA / Katwarn (general alert apps that may include AMBER alerts)
Greece	Ελληνική Αστυνομία (Police)	AMBER Alert Hellas	Το Χαμόγελο του Παιδιού (The Smile of the Child)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Smile of the Child": support and operational search with specialised units Γραμμή Ζωής ("Lifeline"): alert for seniors 	Missing Alert App (to receive AMBER and Silver alerts)
Hungary	Rendőrség (Police)	AMBER Alert Hungary	Kék Vonal (Blue Line)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kék Vonal: support Együtt az Eltűnt Gyermekéért (Foundation "Together for Missing Children"): awareness & support 	No specific country app
Ireland	An Garda Síochána (Police)	Child Rescue Ireland (CRI)	Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing Persons Helpline Ireland: support Community Rescue Service: searching 	No specific country app
Italy	Extraordinary Commissioner / Prefectures	Child Alert / SA.RI.	"Telefono Azzurro"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Penelope": family support Protezione Civile, Soccorso Alpino: searching 	YouPol (for reports to the Police, not for active searching)
Latvia	Valsts policija (Police)	National alert	Biedrība "Bērnu un pusaudžu uzticības tālrunis" ("Line of Trust for Children and Adolescents" Association)	Bezvests.lv: operational search in the field	Bezvests.lv has its own app to coordinate volunteers
Lithuania	Lietuvos policija (Police)	National alert	Dingusių žmonių šeimų paramos centras (Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dingusių žmonių šeimų paramos centras: support 	No specific country app

Country	Main Public Authority	Early Warning System (Minors)	116 000 Helpline Manager	Main Associations (Support & Research)	App for Citizens
			Centre for Families of Missing Persons)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vaikų linija (Children's Line): prevention 	
Montenegro	Uprava policije (Police)	AMBER Alert	Centar za ženska prava (Women's Rights Centre)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centar za ženska prava: helpline and support Gorska služba spašavanja (Mountain Rescue): search and rescue manpower 	No specific country app
North Macedonia	Ministry of the Interior (MVR)	AMBER Alert (in implementation)	Прва детска амбасада во светот Меѓаши (The First Children's Embassy in the World)	Прва детска амбасада во светот Меѓаши: support and advocacy	No specific country app
Norway	Politiet / Kripas (Police)	Barnebortførings alarm (Child Kidnapping Alarm)	Alarmtelefonen for Barn og Unge (Alarm Phone for Children and Young People)	FORF (network that includes Red Cross, Norsk Folkehjelp, Rescue Dogs): operational partner in field searches.	No specific country app
Poland	Policja / CPOZ KGP (Police)	Child Alert	Fundacja ITAKA - Centrum Poszukiwań Ludzi Zaginionych (ITAKA Foundation - Centre for the Search for Missing People)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundacja ITAKA: full support Local volunteer searching groups 	No specific country app
Portugal	Polícia Judiciária, Guarda Nacional Republicana, Polícia de Segurança Pública (Law Enforcement)	"Alerta Rapto de Menores" ("Child Abduction Alert")	Instituto de Apoio à Criança – IAC (Institute of Child Support)	IAC: full support	No specific country app
Romania	Poliția Română (Police)	"Alertă răpire copil" (Child Abduction Alert)	Asociația "Telefonul Copilului" ("The Child's Phone" Association)	"Telefonul Copilului": support	No specific country app
Russia	Ministry of the Interior (MVD) / Investigative Committee	No EU system	LizaAlert (proprietary helpline)	LizaAlert: support and operational search in the field.	LizaAlert's internal app for the coordination of its volunteers
Serbia	MUP / Policija (Ministry of the Interior, Police)	"Pronadi me" (Find me)	Centar za nestalu i zlostavljanu decu – CNZD (Centre for Missing Children and Victims of Abuse)	CNZD (Support and advocacy)	No specific country app; the alert is sent via SMS
Slovakia	Policajný zbor (Police)	AMBER Alert	Linka detskej istoty (Child Safety Line)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linka detskej istoty: support Pátranie po osobách - Slovensko (People Search - Slovakia): social media dissemination) 	No specific country app
Slovenia	Policija (Police)	"Klic v sili" (Emergency Call)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TOM Telefon (TOM Helpline) Zveza prijateljev mladine Ljubljana 	Društvo Iskanje pogrešanih oseb Slovenije (Association for the Search for Missing)	No specific country app

Country	Main Public Authority	Early Warning System (Minors)	116 000 Helpline Manager	Main Associations (Support & Research)	App for Citizens
			Moste-Polje (Association of Friends of Youth Ljubljana Moste-Polje)	Persons of Slovenia: support	
Spain	CNDES / Policía Nacional / Guardia Civil (Police)	Alerta Menor Desaparecido (Missing Minor Alert)	Fundación ANAR - Ayuda a Niños y Adolescentes en Riesgo (ANAR Foundation - Help for Children and Adolescents at Risk)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundación QSDglobal - Periodistas por la gente desaparecida (QSDglobal Foundation - Journalists for missing people): media and advocacy SOSdesaparecidos: social 	No specific country app. The cndes.ses.mir.es portal is the primary resource
Sweden	Polismyndigheten (Swedish Police Authority)	Barnarovslarm (Child Abduction Alarm)	(Barnens Rätt I Samhället - BRIS (Children's Rights in Society)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing People Sweden: Operational partner of the police for field searches BRIS: support & prevention 	No specific country app.
Switzerland	Kantonspolizei / Police cantonale / Polizia cantonale (Cantonal police) FedPol (Federal Office of Police)	Child abduction alert	Missing Children Switzerland	Missing Children Switzerland: support	Swiss-Alert (General alert app that includes kidnapping alerts).
The Netherlands	Politie (Police) Vermiste Personen – LBVP (Missing Persons)	AMBER Alert	Ministry of Justice and Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Red Cross: searching Slachtofferhulp Nederland (Victim Support Netherlands): support 	AMBER Alert App (to receive push notifications).
Ukraine	National Police / War Commissar	Child kidnapping alarm	ГО «Магнолія» ("Magnolia" NGO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Magnolia: support and searching International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): neutral tracing 	No specific country app.
United Kingdom	UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU)/ Police	Child Rescue Alert	Missing People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing People: support Lucie Blackman Trust: support Purple Alert (Scotland): elderly support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Rescue Alert (notifications) Purple Alert (Scotland, for people with dementia).

6. THE TECHNOLOGICAL FRONTIER IN SEARCH AND RESCUE

In this chapter, we explore how emerging technologies are transforming Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. Far from replacing the human element, technology acts as a 'force multiplier', enhancing the effectiveness of both law enforcement agencies and citizen collaboration—a cornerstone of the thesis promoted by EUNWA.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an Analytical Partner

AI is no longer merely a tool for data analysis during the research phase, as mentioned in our methodology; its operational applications are expanding rapidly:

- **Predictive Modelling:** By analysing thousands of past cases, AI can develop predictive models. Given the data of a missing person (age, health condition, habits, last known location), the algorithm can suggest geographical areas with the highest probability of discovery, thereby optimising the deployment of search teams during the critical early hours.
- **Automated Image and Video Analysis:** Searches generate vast amounts of visual data from drones, CCTV, and volunteers' photographs. AI systems can analyse thousands of hours of video footage or imagery in minutes to identify a person matching the description—a task that would take a human team days to complete.
- **Digital Footprint Analysis:** AI can analyse a missing person's online activity (social media, forums) to identify behavioural patterns, recent contacts, or intentions that could provide crucial clues as to their destination or state of mind, subject to legal authorisation.

Advanced Aerial Reconnaissance: Drones and UAVs

Drones are already used by some volunteer groups, but the technology is evolving:

- **Multispectral Sensors:** Beyond standard cameras, next-generation drones are equipped with **thermal sensors** (to detect body heat at night or in dense vegetation) and **LiDAR** (which can 'see' through foliage to map the terrain), dramatically increasing the chances of a successful recovery in challenging environments.
- **Drone Swarms:** Instead of a single drone, coordinated swarms of UAVs, managed by a single AI, can be deployed to cover vast areas exponentially faster and more systematically.

The Power of Geolocation and Personal Devices

Our reliance on mobile devices offers new opportunities for searches, always respecting privacy regulations and with the necessary legal warrants.

- **High-Precision Location Data:** Beyond GPS, the triangulation of **mobile phone masts** and **Wi-Fi signals** can be used to determine a device's last known location with greater accuracy, especially in dense urban areas.

- **Data from Wearable Devices:** Smartwatches, fitness trackers, and medical alert devices can provide vital data, including GPS location, heart rate (indicating if the person is moving or stationary), and even altitude data. This is particularly relevant for lost hikers or elderly people with medical conditions.

Integrating Technology with Citizen Collaboration (The EUNWA Focus)

This is the crucial section that connects innovation to the report's central thesis.

- **'Smart Alerts' for Neighbourhood Watch:** Instead of a blanket alert, a 'smart' system could use predictive AI to send the missing person notification **only to the most geographically relevant Neighbourhood Watch groups**. This would reduce 'alert fatigue' and increase the message's relevance and impact.
- **Organised Crowdsourcing Platforms:** Moving beyond simple social media posts, new applications can 'gamify' the search. A platform could **assign each registered volunteer a specific search grid on a map**, allowing them to upload photos and mark the area as 'cleared'. This transforms a disorganised group into a digitally coordinated field search team.

Technology is not a silver bullet but a powerful tool. Its true potential is realised when integrated into a search ecosystem that centres on **structured collaboration between institutions, professionals, and a connected community of active citizens**. The future goal is to combine the human eye and neighbourhood awareness with the analytical power and reach of technology.

PART III

NATIONAL STRUCTURES

This final section represents the empirical core of our report.

Chapter 7 presents a detailed analysis for each individual country, describing the ecosystem of actors, alert tools, and the role of each organisation. It serves as a practical and in-depth guide to the diverse European responses to the phenomenon of missing persons.

7. DETAILED ANALYSIS BY COUNTRY

Albania

Albania, as a candidate country for accession to the European Union, has made considerable progress in adopting European standards and mechanisms, especially in the field of child protection. Its system is based on centralised state policing and collaboration with key non-profit organisations:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The responsibility for investigations and public safety is entirely in the hands of the State Police.

Policia e Shtetit (Albanian State Police)

It is the country's only police force and has full responsibility for handling missing persons cases (*persona të zhdukur*).

- **Role:** The State Police receive reports of disappearances, initiates investigations and coordinates search operations at national level. The risk assessment and the decision on which resources to deploy are the responsibility of the Authority.
- **Publication of notices:** Search notices and information on missing persons cases are disseminated through the official channels of the State Police, including press releases and, very effectively, their official Facebook page, which has become an important communication tool with the public.

Alert i Zhdukjes së Fëmijës (Early Warning System)

Albania has implemented an early warning system for minors, often called "AMBER Alert Albania" in documents and awareness campaigns, in line with international standards.

- **Operation:** The system is activated by the State Police in collaboration with the Public Prosecutor's Office, in exceptional cases where it is believed that a missing minor is the victim of kidnapping and in serious and imminent danger.
- **Dissemination:** The alarm is propagated through a network of partners that includes the main national media, mobile operators for sending mass SMS and other digital channels, with the aim of reaching as many citizens as possible in the shortest possible time.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The non-profit sector plays a crucial role, especially in the management of European emergency telephone lines and in supporting children.

ALO 116-111 and Qendra për të Drejtat e Fëmijëve – CRCA / ECPAT Shqipëri (Centre for Children's Rights – CRCA / ECPAT Albania)

The management of the emergency lines for children is entrusted to a collaboration between an entity specialised in call centre services and a leading NGO for children's rights.

- **Management of 116 000 and 116 111:** The European lines (116 000 for missing children and 116 111 for childcare) are operated by **ALO 116-111**, which provides the technical infrastructure. The service is promoted and supported by **CRCA/ECPAT Albania (Child Rights Centre Albania)**, the country's leading children's rights organisation.
- **Role:** This collaboration guarantees a professional service active a 24-hour service. CRCA/ECPAT Albania provides expertise in the field, offers counselling, psychosocial support to families and collaborates closely with the State Police and the State Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights.
- **Reference website:** www.crca.al

The Albanian system is a well-defined model and in line with the path of European integration. Policia **and Shtetit** has total control over the investigation and activation of the early warning system. The fundamental support to families and the professional management of the European emergency lines **116 000** and **116 111** are ensured by the partnership between **ALOCENTRE** and the children's rights organisation **CRCA/ECPAT Albania**, which represents the pillar of civil society in this area.

Austria

The Austrian system is characterized by a centralised federal police structure and a strong commitment to international cooperation, with the support of non-profit organisations for direct assistance:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

In Austria, the management of missing persons is a federal competence, coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior.

Bundesministerium für Inneres – BMI (Federal Ministry of the Interior)

It is the central authority that defines the strategies and procedures for searching for missing persons. The Federal Criminal Police Office (*Bundeskriminalamt* or *.BK*), which plays a key role.

- **Role of the .BK:** It serves as a national centre for collecting data on disappearances. It manages cooperation with Interpol and Europol, coordinates investigations that go beyond the borders of a single federal state (Land) and provides analytical and forensic support to local units.
- **Public database:** The Ministry of the Interior maintains an official web page where search notices are published for the most urgent or long-term cases.
- **Website:** www.bmi.gv.at/fahndung ("Personenfahndung" section).

Bundespolizei (Federal Police)

As a single police force at federal level, the Bundespolizei manages all stages of the process: from receiving the complaint at any police station, to initiating investigations and field searching operations.

"Journal-Dienst-Verlautbarung" (Journal Service Announcement)

Austria does not have an "AMBER Alert" system with a specific brand like other countries, but it does have an equivalent rapid alert procedure.

- **Operation:** In exceptional cases of abduction of minors or persons in serious and imminent danger of life, the Ministry of the Interior may issue an urgent alert.
- **Dissemination:** The alert is immediately sent to the **Austria Presse Agentur – APA (Austrian Press Agency)**, the national news agency, which distributes it to all the country's media (TV, radio, online newspapers). This guarantees immediate and widespread media coverage throughout the country.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

In Austria, too, support for families and the management of specialised services are entrusted to civil society organisations.

"Die Möwe" and "Rat auf Draht" - 116 000 operators

The single European number for missing children, **116 000**, in Austria is jointly operated by two leading child protection organisations:

- **Die Möwe – Kinderschutzzentren (The Seagull):** It is a network of child protection centres that offers psychological, therapeutic and legal support to children and adolescents who are victims of violence.
- **Rat auf Draht (Advice on the Wire):** Operates the historic **147 emergency telephone line** for children and young people, providing listening and counselling for any type of problem.

Together, they ensure the operation of the 116 000 line, offering a complete service that combines expertise in child protection with emergency helpline management.

- **Reference websites:** www.rataufdraht.at e www.die-moewe.at

Österreich findet uns (Austria is looking for us)

It is a private initiative, like those present in other countries, which mainly uses social media (Facebook) to spread viral appeals for missing persons.

- **Role:** Acts as a community platform to increase the visibility of cases, reaching a wide audience and supporting the efforts of families and police. It is not an organisation structured as a volunteer organisation, but a very popular and effective community page.

The Austrian system is very centralised from an investigative point of view, with the **Ministry of the Interior** and the **Federal Police** managing the entire process. The media alert for the most serious cases is quick and efficient thanks to the direct channel with the national news agency. Specialised support for missing children and their families is delegated to organisations responsible for child protection, which operate the **116 000 line**.

Belarus

It is crucial to realise that the context here is radically different from that of EU or candidate countries. Belarus has a highly centralised state system, where Law Enforcement is the almost exclusive actor and civil society operates under heavy restrictions:

1. State Initiatives (Dominant Role)

All official search and investigation procedures are handled exclusively by the Ministry of the Interior and its police.

Министерство внутренних дел – МВД (Ministry of the Interior)

The MVD, through its police force (Милиция, Militsiya), has a total monopoly on handling cases of missing persons (пропавшие без вести).

- **Role:** The Militsiya receives the report, opens the case (called a 'delo rozyska' - search case) and conducts all investigations. It is the only authority that can decide to initiate a search, mobilise resources and issue an official notice. The information is strictly controlled.
- **Publication of notices:** Official search notices are published on the MVD website and on its social channels. Any other form of public dissemination requires, in fact, their approval.
- **Website:** www.mvd.gov.by/ru/wanted ("People Search" section).

Absence of European Systems (116 000 and AMBER Alert)

Due to its political isolation, Belarus **is not part of the European network** of helpline.

- **The number 116 000 is not active** in the country. There are no NGOs accredited to operate this service according to EU standards.
- **There is no "AMBER Alert" system** formalized on the European or American model. Although the police can issue an urgent alert through the state media in an exceptional case, it is not a standardised and automated multi-channel system like those seen elsewhere.

2. Volunteering Initiatives (Single Relevant Actor)

Despite strict state control, there is a major volunteer organisation that has managed to carve out a crucial role for itself, acting as a bridge between families and the police.

Поисково-спасательный отряд «Ангел» (Search and Rescue Team "Angel")

"PSO Angel" is the largest and best-known volunteer organisation in Belarus that deals with the search for missing persons.

- **Role:** PSO Angel is not an advocacy or psychological support NGO in the Western sense, but an **operational research team**. Its main role is:

- **Dissemination of information:** It uses social media (especially the Russian platform VKontakte) to massively disseminate search alerts, reaching a much larger audience and quickly than official police channels do.
- **Field research organisation:** Organize and coordinate research trips with hundreds of volunteers to scour specific areas (forests, parks, urban areas).
- **Relationship with the State:** It is essential to emphasize that PSO Angel always operates **in close coordination and with the authorization of the Militsiya**. You cannot start a search on your own. It acts as a civilian operational arm that the police can decide to activate when they see fit. It fills a practical void but does not act independently of state authorities.
- **Website:** psoangel.by

The Belarusian system is **dominated by the state**. The **Militsiya (MVD)** has absolute control over investigations and information. There are no European alert and support mechanisms such as 116 000. The only relevant non-state actor is the **PSO Angel** volunteer team, which carries out irreplaceable practical work in citizen mobilisation and field research, but always within the framework and under the supervision of the authorities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

It is crucial to understand that the concept of "missing person" here has a completely different historical connotation and scope than in any other European country, due to the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

The country's system is therefore divided into two main and distinct strands: the search for and identification of victims of the conflict and the management of "ordinary" (contemporary) cases of disappearance.

1. People Disappeared Due to War (1992-1995)

This is the predominant and most complex aspect. Tens of thousands of people disappeared during the conflict. Their search led to the creation of unique institutions.

Institut za nestale osobe Bosne i Hercegovine – MPI (Institute for Missing Persons of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

It is the central state institution, created by law, which has the mandate to search for and identify the approximately 30,000 people who disappeared during the war.

- **Role:** The MPI coordinates the entire process: it collects complaints from families, manages information on mass grave sites, supervises exhumations and works on the identification of the remains. It is an institution created to deal with the consequences of genocide and war crimes.
- **Website:** www.ino.ba/

International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP)

The ICMP is an international organisation based in The Hague but born and raised in Sarajevo precisely to deal with the crisis in Bosnia. It has developed a revolutionary large-scale DNA identification system.

- **Role:** Provides technical and scientific assistance to the MPI. He created the largest database of genetic profiles in the world, comparing DNA taken from exhumed human remains with blood samples provided by family members of missing persons. Thanks to this work, more than 75% of the people who disappeared during the conflict were identified, an unprecedented achievement in history.
- **Website:** www.icmp.int

2. Contemporary ("Ordinary") Disappearance Cases

The management of non-war-related disappearances follows a structure that reflects the complex administrative division of the country.

Law Enforcement

There is no single national police force. The investigations are the responsibility of the different political entities in the country:

- **Policija Federacije BiH (Police of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina)**
- **Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova Republike Srpske - MUP RS (Ministry of the Interior of Republika Srpska)**
- **Policija Brčko distrikta (Brčko District Police)**

Each of these Law Enforcement manages complaints and searches in its own territory. Cooperation exists, but the system is inherently fragmented. There is no public database that is as centralised and easily accessible as the Croatian NENO.

Non-Profit Initiatives and Emergency Lines

The non-profit sector is also active, especially in the protection of minors.

- **116 000 management:** The single European number for missing children, **116 000**, is also active in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is run by an association called "**Mreža 'Snažniji glas za djecu'**" ('**A Stronger Voice for Children' Network**). This network brings together several local NGOs to guarantee the service. It provides psychosocial support and acts as a bridge with the different Law Enforcement.
- There are also other local associations that support families and carry out awareness campaigns, but the context is more fragmented than in countries with a strong single national organisation.

To understand the system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is crucial to distinguish between two parallel efforts. On the one hand, there is the massive, historic, and world-leading effort to identify war casualties, led by the MPI and the ICMP. On the other hand, there is the management of contemporary disappearance cases, which is the responsibility of the various cantonal and institutional Law Enforcement, with the support of the 116 000 line for minors. This second system is understandably less centralised and resourceful than those of neighbouring countries, given the country's historical priority and political complexity.

Bulgaria

As a member of the European Union, Bulgaria has implemented a missing persons search system that aligns with EU standards, based on cooperation between the national police and the non-profit sector for support services:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The responsibility for investigations and national coordination is entirely in the hands of the Ministry of the Interior.

Министерство на вътрешните работи – МВР (Ministry of the Interior)

The Ministry of the Interior (MVR), through its General Directorate of the National Police, is the authority responsible for handling missing persons cases (*издирвани лица*).

- **Role:** The Bulgarian police receive missing person reports, initiate investigations and coordinate search operations nationwide. Risk assessment and mobilisation of specialised units, such as dog units, are his responsibility.
- **Public Database:** The Ministry of the Interior operates a public website where it publishes search notices for missing persons, allowing citizens to access information and provide any reports.
- **Website:** www.mvr.bg/izdirvani-litsa ("Wanted Persons" section).

AMBER Alert

Bulgaria is one of the member countries of the AMBER Alert Europe network and has implemented its own early warning system for minors.

- **Operation:** The system is activated by the National Police in exceptional cases of child abduction in which it is believed that the life or safety of the child is in serious and imminent danger.
- **Dissemination:** The alert is quickly disseminated through a network of partners that includes national media, social networks and other mass communication channels. The collaboration with Facebook and Google makes it possible to show the alarm to millions of users in the search area.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Specialised support for minors and families, as well as the management of emergency telephone lines, is entrusted to a key association.

Национален център за безопасен интернет (Safer Internet Centre and "Nadja" Association)

The management of European emergency lines in Bulgaria is entrusted to a collaboration between different entities coordinated by the National Centre for a Safe Internet.

- **Management of 116 000:** The European Missing Children Helpline is run by the **Nadja Centre Association**. This service provides immediate counselling and support to families and anyone with information about a missing child.
- **Management of 116 111:** The helpline for children and adolescents is instead managed by the "**Animus Association**" **Foundation**.
- **Coordination:** This is coordinated by the **Safer Internet Centre**, which also plays a key role in preventing online risks, such as grooming and cyberbullying, which can be linked to the disappearances of children.
- **Website:** www.safenet.bg

The Bulgarian system is well structured according to the European model. The **Ministry of the Interior (MVR)** leads all investigative activities and has the authority to activate the **AMBER Alert** system. Crucial support for families and the professional management of European emergency lines are ensured by a consortium of specialised NGOs, coordinated by the **Safer Internet Centre**, which guarantee a competent response in both emergency and prevention.

Croatia

The Croatian model is modern and well aligned with European directives, characterized by an excellent online platform for the management of missing persons and close collaboration between the police and the non-profit sector:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The handling of disappearance cases is a central responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior and its police.

Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova - MUP and Policija (Ministry of Interior and Police)

The Ministry of the Interior (MUP), through the Croatian Police Corps (*Policija*), has full responsibility for the investigation and coordination of searches for missing persons (*nestale osobe*).

- **Role:** The police receive the report, which can be filed at any station, and immediately start the investigation. It is responsible for risk assessment, information gathering and coordination of field operations, which may involve other units such as the Croatian Mountain Rescue (*Hrvatska gorska služba spašavanja - HGSS*) - the Croatian Mountain Rescue Service - which is particularly active given the conformation of the territory.

NENO - Nacionalna evidencija nestalih osoba (National Registry of Missing Persons)

Croatia has one of the most advanced and comprehensive public information systems in Europe.

- **How it works:** NENO is not just a database, but a real interactive platform. The public website is very detailed and allows you to view profiles of missing persons with photos, descriptions, and circumstances of the disappearance. It offers the possibility for citizens to provide information anonymously directly from the missing person's file.
- **Website:** nestali.gov.hr/ (The site is a central point of reference for the public and the media).

Sustav za uzbunjivanje o nestaloj djeci (Missing Child Alert System)

Croatia has an early warning system equivalent to the AMBER Alert.

- **Operation:** It is activated by the police in the most serious cases of missing minors, when it is believed that there is a danger to their life or health.
- **Dissemination:** The system is based on a public-private partnership. The alarm is spread quickly through national media, social networks (on the pages of the police and NENO), and other information channels to reach as many people as possible in the shortest possible time.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Specialised support for minors and families is entrusted to a national centre that manages the European emergency line.

Centar za nestalu i zlostavljaju djecu - CNZD (Centre for Missing Children and Victims of Abuse)

It is the key non-profit organisation in Croatia and the main partner of the institutions for all matters related to children.

- **Services offered:**
 - **116 000 Administration:** This is the body that manages the European telephone line for missing children. The centre offers psychological, emotional and practical support to families a 24-hour service.
 - **Collaboration:** It works in very close synergy with the Ministry of the Interior and the police, facilitating communication with families and providing specialised advice.
 - **Prevention:** He is very active in prevention and education, carrying out awareness campaigns on online risks, bullying and other problems that can lead to the disappearance of a minor.
- **Website:** www.cnzd.org

The Croatian system stands out for its excellent **NENO** digital platform, which ensures transparency and active citizen participation. The **Policija** leads all investigative operations, working closely with other relief agencies such as the **HGSS**. The fundamental support for children and their families is instead ensured by **the Centre for Missing Children and Victims of Abuse**, which manages the **116 000 line** and represents the heart of psychosocial support in the country.

Czech Republic

The Czech model is very well structured and aligns with European standards, with state police leading operations and a highly developed early warning system for minors, supported by a key non-profit organisation:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The responsibility for investigation and coordination lies entirely in the hands of the national police.

Policie České republiky (Police of the Czech Republic)

It is the only police agency in the country and handles all aspects of missing persons (*pohřešované osoby*).

- **Role:** When a disappearance is reported, the police immediately start the investigation. It is responsible for assessing the risk, gathering information and coordinating all search operations. For more complex cases, specialised units of the criminal police intervene.
- **Public Database:** The Czech Police maintain an online, publicly searchable database of all wanted persons, including missing children, fugitives and unidentified bodies. It is a very transparent and constantly updated tool.
- **Website:** aplikace.policie.cz/patrani-osoby (People Search Database).

Národní koordinační mechanismus pátrání po pohřešovaných dětech (National Coordination Mechanism for the Search of Missing Children)

This is the official name of the Czech early warning system, often also called '**Dítě v ohrožení**' (Child in Danger). It is the equivalent of the AMBER Alert.

- **Operation:** It is a very efficient system activated by the police when there is a fear for the life or health of a missing child. It is not only limited to abductions but can also be used for children who are lost and in a situation of serious vulnerability (e.g. due to age, health conditions or adverse weather conditions).
- **Dissemination:** The system is based on a broad public-private partnership. Once activated, the alert is disseminated through:
 - National media (TV, radio, online news portals).
 - Information panels in railway and metro stations.
 - Information screens on public transport.
 - Post offices and ATMs.
 - Social media and push notifications.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Family support and emergency line management are entrusted to a specialised association, which works in close cooperation with institutions.

Ztracené dítě (Missing Child)

It is the national centre and non-profit organisation for the management of the European emergency line.

- **Services offered:**
 - **Management of 116 000:** This is the organisation that manages the single European number for missing children in the Czech Republic. It offers immediate support, psychological and legal advice to families and anyone with information.
 - **Collaboration with the Police:** Acts as an intermediary between families and the police, helping parents to understand procedures and providing emotional support during all stages of the search.
 - **Prevention:** Carries out awareness-raising campaigns and educational programmes in schools to prevent runaways and other risks for minors.

Linka bezpečí (Safety Line)

Although it does not deal directly with disappearances, this is another key organisation for prevention.

- **Role:** It runs the national helpline **116 111** for children and young people. It is the largest and oldest helpline in the country and offers young people an anonymous and safe channel to talk about anything from bullying to family conflicts, thus intercepting many of the causes that can lead to running away from home.
- **Website:** www.linkabezpeci.cz

The Czech model is based on a strong and centralised **State Police** that has full control over investigations and a very effective and wide-ranging **early warning system**. The crucial support to families, the management of the **116 000** line and the important prevention work are instead entrusted to highly specialised NGOs, in particular **Ztracenédítě** and **Linka bezpečí**.

Denmark

Denmark, being a country with a strong welfare state tradition and a centralised administrative structure, entrusts the management of missing persons almost entirely to public institutions, with the targeted support of non-profit child welfare organisations:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The Danish system is characterised by a single national police force that ensures a uniform approach throughout the country.

Rigspolitiet (Police)

The Danish police (Politi) is a unified national force, under the direction of the National Police Commissioner (Rigspolitichef). It is divided into 12 police districts, but procedures and systems are shared nationwide.

- **Role:** Local police stations receive the complaint and immediately start investigations. Case management, data collection and publication of search notices (*efterlysninger*) are standardised tasks. For more complex cases, local units can make use of the support of the **National Cyber Crime Centre (NCCC)** if there is a digital dimension, or other specialised units at national level.
- **Public database:** The Danish police publish active search notices on their official web portal.
- **Website:** politi.dk/efterlyste-og-savnede-personer

National Alert System

Denmark has an early warning system in place for cases of child abduction in danger of life.

- **How it works:** When the police believe that a child has been kidnapped and is in danger, they may decide to issue a nationwide alert.
- **Broadcasting:** The alert is spread quickly through major Danish media, such as public broadcaster **DR (Danmarks Radio)** and **TV 2**, as well as via social media and other partners. This ensures that the news reaches the population in the shortest possible time.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The role of the non-profit sector is very targeted and focuses mainly on telephone support and counselling for children and families.

Børns Vilkår (Children's Conditions)

It is Denmark's largest and most important private organisation for the protection of children's rights and child welfare.

- **Services offered:**

- **Management of 116 000:** This is the organisation that, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs, manages the European emergency number for missing children. She offers psychological support and counselling to families affected by the disappearance of a child.
- **BørneTelefonen (Children's Phone):** Operates the historic and very popular **116 111** helpline, which children and young people can contact anonymously for any problem. This service is a fundamental prevention tool, as it intercepts uncomfortable situations that could lead to an escape from home.
- **Website:** bornsvilkar.dk

Forsvundne Personer - Danmark (Missing Persons - Denmark)

Similar to other European initiatives, it is a group of volunteers who are very active on social media (in particular [Facebook](#)).

- **Role:** This community page supports families by sharing police search alerts, reaching a very large audience, and keeping the focus on cases. Although it is not a registered organisation with support services like Børns Vilkår, its role in disseminating information is recognised and appreciated.

The Danish model is highly **institutionalized**. The **Danish National Police** have full control of investigative operations and the dissemination of alarms throughout the territory. Specialised support is mainly entrusted to **Børns Vilkår**, a very authoritative organisation that manages the emergency lines and plays a crucial role in the prevention of youth distress.

Estonia

The Estonian system, in line with the country's reputation for digital efficiency, is based on a technologically advanced national police force and a well-specialised non-profit sector, with a clear division of roles between telephone support and operational field research:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The management of all cases of disappearance is a centralised responsibility of the Police and Border Guard.

Politsei- ja Piirivalveamet – PPA (Estonian Police and Border Guard)

It is the unified agency responsible for security and border control, which also handles all missing persons cases (*teadmata kadunud isikud*).

- **Role:** The PPA receives the complaint, initiates investigations and coordinates all search operations. It uses advanced technological tools and, given the vast presence of wooded and rural areas, collaborates closely with voluntary organisations for field research.
- **Publication of alerts:** Hunting notices (*otsimisteade*) are published on the official police website and quickly disseminated through social media, which is a primary tool for communicating with the public.
- **Website:** www.politsei.ee (active searches are published in the News Feed).

Early Warning System

Estonia has an alert system for the most serious cases of missing children.

- **How it works:** When a child's life or health is deemed to be in grave and imminent danger, PPA can trigger a nationwide alert.
- **Dissemination:** The system relies on the rapid dissemination of information through national media, online news portals, and a strong push on social networks to ensure that the appeal reaches as many people as possible.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The Estonian non-profit sector is very well organized, with several associations covering specific and complementary roles.

Lasteabi (Help for Children)

Fundamental to prevention, this service manages the European childcare helpline.

- **Role:** Manages the number **116 111**, offering children and young people a 24-hour service listening channel for any type of problem. It is a crucial tool to prevent running away from home related to uncomfortable situations.
- **Website:** www.lasteabi.ee

MTÜ Eesti Abikeskused (Estonian Help Centres NGO)

This organisation is specifically responsible for managing the European emergency helpline **116 000** for **missing children** in Estonia.

- **Role:** It ensures a professional, 24-hour support and counselling service for families of missing minors and acts as the primary contact point for reports related to these cases. This service runs complementary to the 116 111 assistance line (managed by Lasteabi), guaranteeing comprehensive coverage for both harmonised EU helplines.

SA Kadunud (The 'Missing' Foundation)

Founded by the family of a missing person, this foundation focuses on supporting families and raising awareness.

- **Role:** Offers emotional support and practical counselling to families during the difficult period of the search. It carries out intense advocacy activities to improve procedures and legislation and collaborates with the media to keep the attention on unresolved cases.
- **Website:** www.facebook.com/SAKadunud

OPEROG - Operatiivne Otsingugrupp (Operational Search Group)

Like the Latvian Bezvests.lv, OPEROG is a team of volunteers specialised in operational research.

- **Role:** It is a volunteer rescue organisation that works directly with the police for physical field searches. Its members are trained to operate in difficult terrain and use their own equipment to support official operations, always acting under the coordination of the PPA.

ESTSAR (Search and Rescue Estonia)

- **Role:** It is a non-profit organisation that operates in the public interest within the fields of rescue and first aid. The organisation works both independently and in cooperation with other similar associations to enhance the population's rescue capabilities and awareness. ESTSAR is a member of the Rescue Association (*Päästeliit*) and provides an operational search and rescue service. All members and volunteers contribute their time and resources to ensure a safer community.
- **Website:** www.estsar.ee

ESTSAR is composed of specialists from diverse backgrounds who ensure a swift and professional response in emergency situations. Key activities include:

- **24/7 personal search and rescue operations** – The team is ready to respond 24/7 to assist people who are lost or in distress.
- **Preventative activities** – The organisation works to reduce the number of accidents and to improve general safety.
- **Awareness raising** – ESTSAR organises and participates in events that help the public acquire rescue skills and increase their awareness.

- **Cooperation with the police and rescue services** – The team supports the official emergency services during special operations and aids where required.

The team is deployed only upon receiving a notification from the police command centre. Searches and operations are not initiated in response to calls or reports from the public.

The Estonian system is a model of efficiency and specialisation. The **Police (PPA)** lead the investigation with a modern approach. Support is guaranteed by a network of NGOs with well-defined roles: the **Support Centres** for the 116 111 line, **Lasteabi** for prevention, the **Kadunud Foundation** for family support and **OPEROG** for concrete help in field research.

Finland

The Finnish system has many similarities with the Norwegian and Swedish ones, based on strong leadership of the national police and, above all, on an extraordinary and well-established network of volunteer organisations for field research:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

Responsibility for all investigations and search operations is firmly in the hands of the police.

Poliisi (Police)

The Finnish Police is a national agency that operates through local police departments. It is the sole authority responsible for handling missing persons cases (*kadonneet henkilöt*).

- **Role:** When a missing person report is filed, the police initiate a risk assessment to determine the urgency and resources to be deployed. It is the police who direct all operations, decide the search area and the strategies to be adopted. One of its most important functions is to activate and coordinate teams of volunteers.
- **Publication of notices:** The police disseminate search notices (*katoamisilmoitus*) through their website and social channels, asking for the public's help only when they consider it tactically useful.
- **Website:** poliisi.fi/katoamisilmoitukset

Early Warning System

Unlike most other European countries, Finland **does not have a formalized "AMBER Alert" system** with a specific name for child abduction cases.

- **How it works:** If an exceptionally serious kidnapping case occurs, the police use the standard communication channels for emergencies. It issues an urgent police bulletin (*poliisitiedote*) which is immediately picked up by the main national media, such as the public broadcaster **YLE** and other private channels, while ensuring a rapid and effective dissemination of information.

2. Private Initiatives and Organized Volunteering

This is the pillar of the Finnish research system. Field operations are almost entirely entrusted to a network of professional volunteers.

Vapepa (Voluntary Rescue Service)

Vapepa is the beating heart of field research in Finland. It is not a single organisation, but a **network coordinated by the Finnish Red Cross** that brings together about 50 non-governmental organisations.

- **Role:** When the police decide to launch a full-scale search, they contact Vapepa. The network immediately activates its volunteers, who are trained and specialised in different disciplines: ground search, first aid, radio communications, psychological support and

operations management. Vapepa teams always act under the command of the police but independently manage the logistical organisation of the volunteers. This collaboration is so well-established that the police consider it a standard resource to be used in almost any search.

- **Member Organisations:** The network includes the Finnish Red Cross, the Federation of Volunteer Fire Brigades, amateur radio associations, rescue dog associations and many others.
- **Website:** vapepa.fi

Children's and young people's telephone - Operator of the 116 000

Telephone support for minors is managed by a specialised association.

- **Role:** The European number **116 000** for missing children and the national helpline **116 111** for children and young people are run by the **Mannerheim League for the Welfare of Children**. This organisation, one of the oldest and most respected in Finland, offers a confidential and professional listening service, playing a key role in preventing escapes and supporting families.
- **Website:** www.mll.fi

The Finnish model is a prime example of **efficiency based on trust and cooperation**. The **Police** maintain absolute strategic and investigative control, but almost completely entrusts the complex and expensive search operations on the ground to the **Vapepa** network, an organized, widespread and highly competent volunteer machine, considered an integral and indispensable part of the national emergency system.

France

France, like other European countries, has a dual approach that is based on close collaboration between Law Enforcement agencies and non-profit sector associations. The system is particularly known for its early warning mechanism for abductions:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

Investigative responsibility is firmly in the hands of the state, through the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior, with its Law Enforcement.

Kidnapping Alert

It is the French national alert system, one of the first and most effective in Europe, activated for the first time in 2006. It is the equivalent of the AMBER Alert.

- **Operation:** The "Alerte-Enlèvement" plan is activated under the authority of the competent public prosecutor, in close cooperation with the police. It is only used in exceptional circumstances that must meet four strict criteria:
 - It must be an ascertained kidnapping and not a simple disappearance.
 - The victim must be a minor.
 - The life or physical integrity of the child must be in grave and imminent danger.
 - The prosecutor must have information useful for locating the child or suspect.
- **Broadcasting:** When triggered, a massive alert message is broadcast for three hours on about 60 different channels: news agencies, TV channels, radio stations, variable message signs on highways, screens in stations and airports, websites and social media.
- **Reference website:** www.alerte-enlevement.gouv.fr

Police Nationale and Gendarmerie Nationale (Law Enforcement)

They are the two main Law Enforcement agencies that handle complaints and conduct investigations on the ground. Their competence is divided on a territorial basis (the Police in the cities, the Gendarmerie in rural and peri-urban areas). They create and disseminate "avis de recherche" (search notices) for all cases of disappearance that they consider worrying (disparition inquiétante).

Fichier des personnes recherchées – FPR (Wanted Persons File)

It is the central database managed by the Ministry of the Interior in which all wanted persons in France, including missing persons, are registered.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Associations play a crucial role in long-term support for families and raising public awareness.

Children's Rights

It is the foundation that manages the single European number **116 000** in France, through its service called "**Allo 116 000 Enfants Disparus**".

- **Services offered:**
 - **Helpline 116 000:** Free 24-hour service listening and support line for families of missing children. It offers psychological, social and legal support.
 - **Collaboration with the authorities:** Works in close collaboration with the police and gendarmerie, providing a bridge between families and institutions.
- **Website:** www.116000enfantsdisparus.fr

Assistance et Recherche de Personnes Disparues - ARPD (Assistance and Search for Missing Persons)

It is one of the most active and widespread associations on French territory. It focuses on concrete support during searches.

- **Role:** It is made up almost entirely of volunteers, many of whom have had personal experiences of missing persons in the family. They provide practical support by organizing field research trips (battues citoyennes), putting up posters, and using social media to spread notices. They also offer great moral support to families.
- **Website:** www.arpd.fr

Manu Association

Founded by the family of a missing young man, this association has specialised in the dissemination of search alerts through social media, reaching a wide audience and raising awareness especially among the youngest.

The French model is characterized by a state alert system, the **Alerte-Enlèvement**, extremely powerful but used very sparingly only in the most critical cases. For all other cases of disappearance, investigations are handled by Law Enforcement, while day-to-day, psychological and practical support for families is entrusted to key organisations such as the **116 000 Droit d'Enfance** and the **ARPD volunteer network**.

Germany

In Germany, the system for finding missing persons is characterised by a well-defined structure, with a clear distinction between the tasks of public institutions, mainly the police, and the fundamental support role played by private initiatives and associations.

Unlike other countries, Germany does not use an "AMBER Alert" style mass public alert system. The choice is based on privacy considerations and the desire to avoid panic and false sightings, reserving the public dissemination of photos and personal data only for cases of serious and concrete danger.

Here is an overview of the main public and private initiatives:

1. Public Initiatives and the Role of the Police

The official responsibility for the search for missing persons lies entirely in the hands of the German police.

Bundeskriminalamt - BKA (Federal Police) / Länderpolizei (State Police)

They are the only authorities that can initiate an official public search (*Öffentlichkeitsfahndung*).

- **How it works:** When a person goes missing, the family must file a report with the local police. The police start the investigation discreetly. Only if investigators believe that the person's life is in grave danger or if all other leads have been exhausted, a judge authorizes the public dissemination of the case.
- **Public Search Tools:** Authorized searches are published on the official portal of the BKA, on the websites of the Law Enforcement of the individual federal states (Länder) and disseminated through traditional media (newspapers, television news).
- **Official website of the BKA for missing persons:**
[bka.de/DE/IhreSicherheit/Fahndungen/Personen/Vermisste/vermisste_node.html](https://www.bka.de/DE/IhreSicherheit/Fahndungen/Personen/Vermisste/vermisste_node.html) (On this portal it is possible to consult the cases of disappearance for which public disclosure has been authorised).

2. Private Initiatives and Non-Profit Organisations

The private and voluntary sector plays a crucial role in providing support to families, prevention and awareness, always working in close collaboration with the police.

Initiative Vermisste Kinder (Missing Children Initiative)

It is the largest and most important German non-profit organisation dedicated to missing children. It is part of the Missing Children Europe network.

- **Services offered:**
 - **116 000 helpline:** Operates the single European number for missing children, offering a free, 24-hour service helpline for families and anyone with information.

- **Awareness campaigns:** She is famous for her long-term campaign "**Deutschland findet Euch**" ("Germany seeks you"), which uses social media and celebrity endorsement to keep the focus on unsolved cases.
- **Family support:** Provides counselling and psychological support to parents and family members.
- **Website:** www.vermisste-kinder.de
- **Social media:** Their Facebook and Instagram pages are a fundamental tool for the viral dissemination of appeals.

Germany Finds You

Started as a Facebook initiative, it has established itself as one of the largest private online communities for searching for missing persons in Germany.

- **How it works:** It takes advantage of the capillarity of social media to spread research appeals. Again, cooperation with the police and the consent of the family are crucial for the publication of a case. Their speed and far-reaching can be of great help in critical early hours.
- **Website:** It operates primarily through its Facebook page, which has hundreds of thousands of members.

AMBER Alert Deutschland

It is important to clarify one specific point: unlike other countries, Germany **does not have a state-run national alert system** that disrupts television broadcasts or sends mass alerts on mobile phones.

- **Operation:** The "AMBER Alert" system in Germany is operated by the **Initiative Vermisste Kinder**. When the police confirm a high-risk kidnapping case, the initiative activates its private network. The alert is spread on thousands of digital screens in public places (stations, shopping malls, airports) thanks to partnerships with digital advertising companies such as Ströer. It is a powerful system but based on public-private collaboration and not on a state infrastructure of mass alert.
- **Website:** www.amber-alert-deutschland.de

While the AMBER Alert system relies heavily on private digital screens, official public warnings issued by the authorities—for which judicial authorisation is granted—may also be disseminated via general state alert applications, such as **NINA** and **Katwarn**.

DRK-Suchdienst (German Red Cross Research Service)

This historical service has a specific mandate, different from that of the police.

- **Role:** Its main objective is to reunite families separated by armed conflict, natural disasters and migration. It is a key point of reference for refugees and migrants who have lost contact with their loved ones on their way to Germany. He manages the international project "**Trace the Face**".
- **Website:** www.drk-suchdienst.de

3. Specific Systems and Apps

Unlike the UK (with Purple Alert for dementia), Germany does not have a specific national alert app for certain categories of vulnerable people. The searches rely on the centralised structure of the police and the viral support of private initiatives.

In summary, the German approach is more cautious and controlled than in other countries. Privacy is prioritized and alarmism is avoided, entrusting the public dissemination of cases to a judicial evaluation. Private organisations such as "**Initiative Vermisste Kinder**" act as a fundamental support for families, offering emotional support and additional communication channels, always in compliance with the directives of Law Enforcement. Of course, Germany also has a well-organized system, with a clear division of roles between state agencies and a very active non-profit sector, particularly for the protection of minors.

Greece

The Greek model is one of the strongest and most recognised in Europe, characterized by an exceptional symbiosis between Law Enforcement and an incredibly active and well-equipped non-profit organisation, which has become a national institution:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The responsibility for the investigation and general coordination are the responsibility of the Hellenic Police.

Ελληνική Αστυνομία (Ellinikí Astynomía) (Hellenic Police)

It is the national police force of Greece, responsible for handling all missing persons cases (*εξαφανισμένοι άνθρωποι*).

- **Role:** The Hellenic Police receive the report of disappearance, initiates the investigation and directs all operations. Its collaboration with the non-profit sector is daily and deeply integrated, especially in cases involving minors.
- **Publication of alerts:** Official search alerts are disseminated through police channels, but very often they are amplified and managed in parallel by their non-profit partner.

AMBER Alert Hellas

Greece has a very effective early warning system, officially established in 2007.

- **Operation:** The system is activated by the Hellenic Police in cases of abduction or disappearance of minors in which it is believed that their life or physical integrity is in serious and imminent danger. The decision is made in consultation with the competent prosecutor.
- **Spread:** The alarm is massively disseminated through dozens of public and private partners: TV and radio channels, news sites, social media, screens in airports, metro stations and on public transport, motorway signs and even ATMs.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

In Greece, the non-profit sector for missing children is dominated by one of the most comprehensive and operational organisations in Europe.

Το Χαμόγελο του Παιδιού (To Xamogelo tou Paidiou) (The Smile of the Child)

This organisation is the beating heart of the child protection system in Greece. It is not only a support body, but a real **operational partner** of the police.

- **Services offered:**
 - **116 000 Administration:** This is the body that manages the European emergency line for missing children. The line is active 24-hour service and offers immediate support and advice.

- **Coordinator of AMBER Alert Hellas:** "The Smile of the Child" is the body in charge of coordinating the entire network of partners for the dissemination of the alarm, acting on police activation.
- **Search and Rescue Unit ("Thanasis Makris"):** This is the most remarkable feature. The organisation has its own highly specialised search and rescue unit equipped with professional means, including:
 - Off-road vehicles for searches.
 - Trained dog units.
 - Drones and thermal night vision equipment.
 - A mobile operational coordination unit. These teams of specialised volunteers are activated by the police and are integrated into field search operations.
- **Comprehensive support:** It offers psychological, social and legal support to families, manages family homes and day centres for minors in difficulty and carries out intense prevention activities.
- **Website:** www.hamogelo.gr

Γραμμή Ζωής (Grammi Zoís) (Lifeline)

While "The Child's Smile" is focused on minors, this organisation focuses on missing adults, especially seniors suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's.

- **Role:** Operates a support line and activates its own alert system, called "**Silver Alert**", to search for missing elderly people, disseminating alerts through the media and social media.
- **Website:** www.lifelinehellas.gr

The Greek system is an excellent example of a public-private partnership. The **Hellenic Police** retain investigative leadership and decision-making authority. However, "**The Child's Smile**" acts as a real operational extension, providing not only the management of the 116 000 line and the AMBER Alert system, but also advanced human and technological resources for field research, making the Greek system one of the most responsive and effective in Europe.

Hungary

Hungary also follows the European model of close cooperation between the national police, which is responsible for investigations, and the non-profit organisations that provide specialised support and manage emergency lines:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The investigative structure is centralised and reports to the national police.

Rendőrség (Police)

The Hungarian National Police Corps is the only police agency in the country and has full responsibility for handling missing persons cases (*eltűnt személyek*).

- **Role:** The police receive the report at any station, initiate investigations and coordinate all search operations. It is responsible for assessing the risk and mobilizing the necessary resources, which may include special units and search dogs.
- **Public Database:** The Hungarian police maintain an online database of wanted persons (*körözés*), which includes a specific section for missing persons, including minors. This portal is accessible to the public for consultation.
- **Website:** www.police.hu/hu/koral

"Amber Alert Hungary"

Hungary has implemented an early warning system for minors in danger, equivalent to the AMBER Alert, of the same name.

- **Operation:** The system is activated by the National Police only in exceptional circumstances, when there is a well-founded fear that a child has been kidnapped and his life is in imminent danger.
- **Dissemination:** The alert is spread quickly thanks to a public-private partnership. Partners include national media (TV, radio, web), mobile operators (who can send SMS), and information screens in public places. Dissemination via social media, especially on the police's Facebook page, is a very effective tool.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The support to families and the management of emergency lines are entrusted to civil society organisations with long experience.

Kék Vonal Gyermekkrízis Alapítvány (Blue Line Foundation for Childhood Crises)

"Kék Vonal" is Hungary's leading non-profit organisation for the protection of minors and the main partner of the institutions for cases of disappearance.

- **Services offered:**

- **116 000 Administration:** This is the body that manages the European telephone line for missing children. It offers counselling and emotional and practical support to families, 24 hours a day.
- **116 111 Management:** It also manages the children's and young people's listening line, providing a safe and anonymous channel to discuss any issues and prevent crisis situations that could result in a runaway.
- **Collaboration:** Works closely with the police, child protection services, and other authorities, facilitating communication and support for families.

- **Website:** www.kek-vonal.hu

Együtt az Eltűnt Gyermekéért Alapítvány (Foundation "Together for Missing Children")

This foundation is another important player, focused on raising awareness and direct support.

- **Role:** Collaborates with families to increase the visibility of missing persons through the media and social media. It also plays an active role in education and prevention, organising information campaigns on the dangers that young people may encounter.

The Hungarian system is well aligned with European standards. The **Rendőrség** has full control of the investigations and the "Amber Alert Hungary" alert system. Specialised support, the management of European emergency lines (**116 000** and **116 111**) and support for families are the responsibility of experienced organisations such as **Kék Vonal**, which is a key pillar of the country's child protection system.

Ireland

Ireland's missing persons search system is based on a long-standing partnership between the National Police, **An Garda Síochána**, and a well-structured non-profit sector, where several organisations provide specialised services ranging from telephone support and family assistance to operational field research.

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

Responsibility for the investigation and coordination of search operations lies entirely with the Irish National Police.

- **An Garda Síochána (Irish Police)** The national police authority, An Garda Síochána, has primary responsibility for investigating all missing persons cases in the country. It receives complaints, carries out risk assessment and directs all research activities, coordinating its internal resources and activating, when necessary, partners from the non-profit sector and voluntary relief.
 - **Website:** www.garda.ie/
- **Child Rescue Ireland (CRI)** Ireland has a national early warning system for children in danger called Child Rescue Ireland (CRI). Working like the AMBER Alert, the CRI system is activated by An Garda Síochána only in exceptional circumstances, when there is a well-founded fear that a child has been kidnapped and his or her life is at imminent risk. The alert is disseminated widely through the media, social networks and other partner channels.
 - **Website (official information page):** www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/office-of-corporate-communications/press-releases/2013/november/garda-child-rescue-ireland-alert.html

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Ireland's voluntary sector offers crucial and specialised support, with a clear division of roles between different organisations.

- **Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)** The management of the European **116 000 helpline** for missing children is entrusted to the ISPCC. This historic children's rights organisation offers, through its Childline service, a 24-hour service listening and support point for families facing the disappearance of a child and for anyone with information to report.
 - **Website:** www.ispcc.ie/
- **Missing Persons Helpline Ireland** This association provides targeted support to families and friends of missing persons of all ages. It offers a listening service, emotional support and practical advice throughout the difficult path of research, representing a fundamental point of reference for those who experience the anguish of not having news of a loved one.
 - **Website:** www.missingpersons.ie
- **Community Rescue Service (CRS)** The CRS is a volunteer organisation that specializes in field operations research. Acting as a partner to Law Enforcement, its teams of trained

rescuers assist An Garda Síochána in patrolling inaccessible areas, waterways and rural areas, providing an essential contribution to physical searches.

- **Website:** www.communityrescue.org

The Irish model is distinguished by clear police investigative leadership, supported by an ecosystem of highly specialised NGOs that ensure comprehensive coverage of needs: Child Emergency (ISPCC), long-term emotional support for all families (Missing Persons Helpline) and Operational Field Relief (CRS).

Italy

Italy has a very precise and well-defined regulatory and organisational structure, which reports to a central government figure and is articulated at the provincial level, with a close synergy between institutions and a very active voluntary sector:

1. Public and Institutional Initiatives

The Italian system is unique for the presence of a coordinating figure at government level and for the pivotal role of the Prefectures.

Commissario Straordinario del Governo per le persone scomparse (Special Government Commissioner for Missing Persons)

Established in 2007 at the Ministry of the Interior, it is the central figure of the Italian system. It does not conduct investigations directly, but has a role of impulse, monitoring and coordination at the national level.

- **Role:** Collects and analyses data from all over Italy, promotes memoranda of understanding and common strategies, manages the National Register of Unidentified Bodies and maintains contacts with family associations. It is the engine that ensures that the system works homogeneously throughout the territory.
- **Website:** commissari.gov.it/persona-scomparse

Prefetture (Prefectures - Territorial Government Offices)

At the local level, the pivot of every search operation is the Prefecture.

- **Role:** Immediately after the report of disappearance to the police, the Prefect of the competent province activates the "**Provincial Plan for the Search for Missing Persons**". It immediately convenes a coordination table that brings together all the actors involved: Law Enforcement (Police, Carabinieri, Guardia di Finanza), Fire Brigade, Civil Protection, Mountain Rescue (if necessary), health authorities and voluntary associations. The Prefect directs and coordinates all search operations in the area.

Polizia di Stato, Carabinieri (Law Enforcement)

They are the first point of contact for citizens. They receive the report of disappearance, which by law must be accepted **immediately**, without waiting 24 or 48 hours. They enter the data into the inter-force database and start the first investigative activities.

SA.RI. (Interforce Early Warning System)

It is the information system that feeds the national database. It allows all Law Enforcement to share information about the missing person in real time. There is also a public version, **SA. RI. Pubblico**, where search notices can be consulted.

Child Alert - "Find the Children"

Italy also has its own early warning system for cases of child abduction, managed by the Ministry of the Interior through the Postal and Communications Police Service.

- **Operation:** It is activated at the request of the Public Prosecutor's Office and the investigative forces only in the most serious cases. Its dissemination takes place through press agencies (ANSA), TV, radio, institutional websites and partners such as “Ferrovie dello Stato” and motorway concessionaires.

2. Private and Third Sector Initiatives

Italian volunteering is a fundamental and irreplaceable partner for institutions.

Telefono Azzurro (Helpline for Children)

It is the reference organisation in Italy for the protection of minors and manages the emergency telephone lines.

- **Services offered:**
 - **116 000 management:** This is the body that manages the single European number for missing children. It offers listening, counselling and psychological and legal support to families 24 hours a day.
 - **Line 1.96.96:** The historic listening line for children and adolescents in difficulty, essential for prevention.
- **Website:** azzurro.it

Penelope (National Association of Families and Friends of Missing Persons)

Founded in 2002, Penelope is the association that gives a voice to the families of missing persons (both adults and minors) and fights for their rights.

- **Role:** It is made up of families who have experienced or are experiencing the drama of disappearance. It offers psychological and legal support, helps to keep media attention on cases high and carries out intense institutional lobbying to improve the laws on the subject. He is a permanent member of the coordination table at the office of the Extraordinary Commissioner. It has regional offices in almost all of Italy, ensuring a widespread presence.
- **Website:** www.penelopeitalia.org

The Italian model is distinguished by a strong institutional direction, with the **Special Commissioner** at the national level and the **Prefects** at the provincial level, who direct a broad coalition of rescuers. This public apparatus is flanked and supported by two pillars of the Third Sector: **Telefono Azzurro**, specialised in the childhood emergency, and **Penelope**, which represents the voice and strength of families.

Latvia

The Latvian model is very interesting because, in addition to following the standard European structure with the national police and emergency lines, it relies heavily on a powerful organisation of volunteers for field research, like the Swedish model:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The responsibility for investigations and the coordination of operations are the responsibility of the State Police.

Valsts policija (State Police)

It is the country's only national police force, responsible for handling all missing persons (*bezvēsts pazudušie*) cases.

- **Role:** The State Police receive the report of disappearance, initiates investigations and directs all search operations. It is the authority that decides whether and when to involve volunteer teams and whether to disseminate a public appeal.
- **Public Database:** The police maintain an online database where profiles of wanted persons can be consulted, including cases of disappearance.

Early Warning System

Latvia has an alert mechanism in place for the most serious cases of missing children.

- **How it works:** Although it is not formally labelled as "AMBER Alert" in all communications, the system works in a similar way. It is activated by the State Police in exceptional circumstances of danger to a minor.
- **Dissemination:** The alarm is spread quickly through national media, social networks and other partners, to ensure that the information reaches the public in the shortest possible time.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The non-profit sector in Latvia is characterized by a clear division of roles: one for telephone support and one, very important, for field operations.

Biedrība "Bērnu un pusaudžu uzticības tālrunis" ("Line of Trust for Children and Adolescents" Association)

This organisation manages the European emergency lines.

- **Role:** This is the body that manages both **116 000** (missing children) and **116 111** (childcare helpline). It provides psychological support, counselling, and a safe and anonymous point of contact. It plays a crucial role in prevention and support for families during the emergency.
- **Website:** www.uzticibastalrunis.lv

Bezvests.lv (Missing.lv)

This is the largest and best-known volunteer organisation for the search for missing persons in Latvia and the Baltic countries. His role is **operational**.

- **Role:** "Bezvests.lv" is a search and rescue team. As soon as the police give the go-ahead, the organisation mobilizes its vast network of trained volunteers to conduct physical field research. They are equipped with professional equipment such as drones, diving equipment, and all-terrain vehicles.
- **Collaboration:** They act as a strategic partner and operational arm of the police. Their ability to mobilize large numbers of people quickly and to use advanced technologies has become an indispensable component of the national research system.
- **Website:** www.bezvests.lv

The Latvian system is an excellent example of a three-pillar model. The **Valsts policija** maintains investigative and strategic leadership. Psychosocial support and the management of emergency lines are entrusted to a specialised association **Bērnu uzticības tālrunis (Children Helpline)**. Finally, the complex and expensive field research operations are massively supported by the efficiency and professionalism of the organisation of Bezvests.lv volunteers.

Lithuania

As a member of the European Union, Lithuania has a system that is well aligned with EU standards, which is based on national police responsible for investigations and collaboration with the non-profit sector for victim support and emergency line management:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The management of disappearance cases is a centralised responsibility of the Lithuanian Police.

Lietuvos policija (Lithuanian Police)

It is the only national police force in the country, subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior. He has full responsibility for handling missing persons cases (*dingę asmenys*).

- **Role:** The Lithuanian Police receive complaints, immediately initiates investigations and coordinates all search operations. It is responsible for risk assessment and mobilization of resources, which may include canine units, helicopters, and cooperation with other emergency services.
- **Public Database:** The police operate an online portal where you can look up profiles of wanted persons, including missing persons.
- **Website:** www.policija.lrv.lt ("Wanted Persons" section).

Missing Child Rapid Alert System

Lithuania has implemented an early warning mechanism for the most serious cases of missing children, which works similarly to the AMBER Alert system.

- **Operation:** The system is activated by the Police in exceptional circumstances, when a kidnapping is suspected and there is a serious and imminent danger to the life or health of the child.
- **Dissemination:** Once activated, the alert is quickly disseminated through a network of partners that includes national media, social networks and other communication channels, to ensure that the information reaches the public in the shortest possible time.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Specialised support for families and the management of European emergency lines are entrusted to specialised assistance centres.

Dingusių žmonių šeimų paramos centras (Support Centre for Families of Missing Persons)

This is the main non-governmental organisation in Lithuania that deals specifically with the phenomenon of missing persons.

- **Role:** Provides comprehensive psychological, legal, and social support to families facing the drama of a disappearance. It works closely with the police and institutions to ensure

that families receive the help they need. It also plays an important role in prevention, organizing awareness campaigns.

- **Website:** missing.lt/

Management of 116 000

The single European number for missing children, **116 000**, is managed by the "Support Centre for Families of Missing Persons" mentioned above. This ensures that calls are answered by highly specialised personnel on the specific topic.

Vaikų linija (Children's Line)

Although it does not deal directly with disappearances, this organisation is crucial for prevention.

- **Role:** Runs the European helpline **116 111**, giving children and adolescents a safe and anonymous space to talk about any issues (bullying, family problems, loneliness). This service helps to intercept and resolve uncomfortable situations that could otherwise lead to an escape from home.
- **Website:** www.vaikulinija.lt

The Lithuanian system is well structured and in line with the European model. The **Lietuvos policija** leads all investigative and research activities. Essential support for families, both for adults and missing children, and the management of the **116 000-emergency** line are provided by **the Support Centre for Families of Missing Persons**, which is at the heart of civil society's response to this phenomenon.

Montenegro

As a small state with a centralised administrative structure, the Montenegrin system relies mainly on the work of the national police, with the support of non-profit initiatives that are aligning with European standards:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The handling of all disappearance cases is a direct and centralised responsibility of the state police.

Uprava policije Crne Gore (Police Administration of Montenegro)

It is the only police force in the country and has full authority over the investigation of missing persons (*nestale osobe*).

- **Role:** The police receive the complaint, carries out the risk assessment and initiates the investigation. It coordinates all search operations in the area, cooperating, if necessary, with other emergency units such as the Protection and Rescue Service (*Služba zaštite i spašavanja*).
- **Publication of notices:** Unlike other countries with dedicated portals, the Montenegrin police disseminate search notices (*potrage*) mainly through official press releases and, very effectively, through their Facebook page and other social channels. These channels have become the primary point of reference for the public to get information on active cases.

Early Warning System

Montenegro is aligning itself with European standards for child protection.

- **Operation:** The country has introduced an early warning system for missing children, often referred to as 'AMBER Alert' in official documents and communications. It is activated by the police in the most serious cases, when the life or safety of a child is feared.
- **Dissemination:** The alert is propagated through the national media, social networks and via text messages (SMS), in cooperation with mobile phone operators, to ensure rapid and widespread dissemination of information.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The non-profit sector in Montenegro is at a developmental stage, but there are already key actors providing essential services, especially in the field of child protection.

Centar za ženska prava (Women's Rights Centre)

In Montenegro, the management of the European helpline **116 000** for missing children was entrusted to the 'Centre for Women's Rights'.

- **Role:** Although the name may sound specific, this NGO has a broader mandate that includes the protection of vulnerable victims, including children. It operates the 116 000-line providing initial support, counselling and a contact point for families, working in cooperation with the police and social work centres.

Gorska služba spašavanja (GSS) – Mountain Rescue Service

In a country with significant mountainous and inaccessible terrain, the Mountain Rescue Service acts as a fundamental operational partner for the police.

- **Role:** The GSS is the primary volunteer organization responsible for **conducting physical searches** and rescue operations in complex geographical areas, such as mountains, canyons, and difficult terrain. Their teams are formally coordinated and deployed by the **Uprava policije** (Police Administration) whenever a field search requires specialized training beyond standard police resources.

Other initiatives

There are other organisations and citizens' groups, as in other Balkan countries, that use the power of social media to share and amplify police search appeals, thereby increasing public awareness and participation.

Montenegro's model is practical and centralised. The **Uprava policije** is the main actor leading all investigations and alerts. Specialised support, particularly the management of the **116 000**line, is entrusted to an established non-profit organisation, the **Centre for Women's Rights**, which acts as a key partner of the institutions. The system reflects the country's path towards full integration into the European safety and security networks.

North Macedonia

As an EU candidate country, North Macedonia has been actively working to align its procedures with European ones, especially in the field of child protection, by establishing clear cooperation between state institutions and the non-profit sector:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

Responsibility for investigations is managed centrally by the Ministry of the Interior and its police.

Министерство за внатрешни работи – MBP (Ministerstvo za vnatrešni raboti)
(Ministry of the Interior)

The Ministry of the Interior (MVR), through its police force, is the only authority responsible for handling cases of missing persons (*исчезнати лица*).

- **Role:** The police receive complaints, initiate investigations and coordinate search operations. The Ministry's website is the official channel for publishing search notices, allowing citizens to consult active cases and provide information.
- **Public Database:** There is a missing persons section on the Ministry of the Interior's portal, which serves as a public database for search appeals.

Early Warning System ("AMBER Alert")

North Macedonia has formally joined the AMBER Alert Europe network and is implementing the system in the country.

- **How it works:** In early 2024, the Ministry of Interior signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the AMBER Alert Europe Foundation to introduce an early warning system for missing children in danger. This system, once fully operational, will allow for the rapid dissemination of alerts through various channels.
- **Dissemination:** The dissemination network will be based on partnerships with the media, mobile phone operators, social networks and other partners, following the standard European model to maximise the reach of the message.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Specialised support for children and the management of helpline are entrusted to one of the oldest and most respected children's rights organisations in the country.

Прва детска амбасада во светот Меѓашу (Prva detska ambasada vo svetot Megjashi)
(The First Children's Embassy in the World)

Founded in 1992, 'Megjashi' is the pioneer and leading organisation in the protection of children's rights in North Macedonia.

- **Services offered:**

- **Management of 116 000 line:** This is the body that manages the European helpline for missing children. It offers support and advice to families and anyone with information about a missing child.
- **Management of 'Alo Bushavko':** Before the introduction of the European numbers, Megjashi already ran its own child helpline, demonstrating a long experience in the field.
- **Advocacy and Support:** The organisation plays a crucial role in promoting more effective child protection laws and providing psychological and legal support to vulnerable families.
- **Website:** www.childrensembassy.org.mk

North Macedonia's system is clearly defined. The **Ministry of the Interior (MVR)** leads all investigative activities and is implementing a modern system of **AMBER Alert** in cooperation with European partners. The specialised support and management of the emergency line **116 000** is entrusted to the historical and authoritative organisation '**Megjashi**', which is the backbone of child protection in the country.

Norway

Norway has a system that, like its neighbours, is based on a national police force, but is distinguished by its exceptional and formalised reliance on a **network of different voluntary organisations specialising in rescue**, which act as integrated partners in search operations:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The system is led and coordinated by the national police, which has ultimate responsibility for all operations.

Politiet (Police)

The Norwegian police is a unified national agency, divided into police districts. It is the authority that receives the complaint, opens the case and directs all stages of the investigation and search.

- **Role:** When a person is reported missing (*savnet*), the police assess the level of risk. If a large-scale physical search is necessary, the police assume the role of command and control (*innsatsleder*) and immediately activate the necessary resources, which primarily include voluntary organisations.
- **Kripas (National Criminal Investigation Service):** For more complex cases, which require specialist expertise or have an international dimension, Kripas steps in, providing investigative and forensic support and liaising with Interpol.
- **Publication of notices:** Search notices (*etterlysninger*) are published on the police website and social media (especially Twitter/X) for cases where help from the public is deemed necessary.

Barnebortføringsalarm (Child Kidnapping Alarm)

Norway also has an early warning system for child abduction cases.

- **Operation:** It is only activated by the police in the most serious circumstances, when there is a well-founded fear that a child's life is in danger.
- **Dissemination:** The alert is broadcast through the main national media (such as the public broadcaster **NRK**), the news agency NTB and other partner channels, to ensure immediate coverage throughout the country.

2. Private Initiatives and Organised Volunteering

This is the real peculiarity of the Norwegian system. Field research is entrusted to a network of highly professionalised and specialised volunteers, often united under one federation.

Frivillige Organisasjoners Redningsfaglige Forum – FORF (The Forum for Voluntary Rescue Organisations)

It is the federation that brings together the main voluntary rescue organisations in Norway. FORF acts as a coordination body and point of contact for the authorities. When the police need support in the field, they often turn to these organisations:

- **Røde Kors Hjelpkorps (Red Cross Relief Corps):** It is one of the largest resources, with thousands of volunteers trained in first aid, search and coordination of operations in difficult terrain.
- **Norsk Folkehjelp (Norwegian People's Relief):** Another large organisation with teams specialised in rescue, mine clearance (in international contexts) and first aid.
- **Norske Redningshunder (Norwegian Rescue Dogs):** An organisation that specialises in training and deploying dog units to search for missing persons under avalanches, in rubble or in vast areas.

These are not just 'citizen volunteers', but **highly qualified volunteer rescuers** with professional equipment and standardised procedures, who fit seamlessly into the police chain of command.

Alarmtelefonen for Barn og Unge (Alarm Phone for Children and Young People)

This is the organisation that operates the emergency lines for minors.

- **Operation of 116 111 and 116 000:** In Norway, both European lines are operated by this service. **116 111** is the helpline for children and young people who need to talk to an adult, while **116 000** is specifically for reports of missing children. This integration makes it possible to have a single point of contact experienced in both prevention and emergency.
- **Website:** www.116111.no

The Norwegian model is an **integrated rescue** system. The **police** hold the strategic and investigative leadership. However, the operational phase of the field search is largely delegated to a **network of voluntary relief organisations** that represent a structured, professional and crucial national resource, especially considering the complex topography of the country.

Poland

Poland has a well-defined system that combines the action of Law Enforcement with the fundamental role of a non-governmental organisation that has become a national reference point:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The backbone of the search system is managed by the State Police (Policja), under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration.

Komenda Główna Policji (Police Headquarters)

It is the central body that defines procedures and coordinates operations at national level. A highly specialised unit operates within it:

- **Centrum Poszukiwań Osób Zaginionych (CPOZ KGP) - Centre for the Search of Missing Persons:** This is the elite unit of the Polish police, responsible for coordinating the most complex searches, cases with media resonance and international cooperation through Interpol and Europol. It intervenes in cases of kidnapping or when a missing person is suspected of being the victim of a serious crime.
- **Police Public Database:** The police operate an official online portal where search notices are published. It is the main tool for public dissemination of information by the authorities.
 - **Website:** poszukiwani.policja.pl

Child Alert

Poland has also implemented the Early Warning System for cases of missing children in serious and imminent danger.

- **How it works:** When the CPOZ decides to activate it, the alert is disseminated instantly through a wide partnership that includes national media (TV, radio, web), variable message boards on motorways, screens at railway stations and on public transport, and notifications on social media.
- **Website:** www.childalert.pl

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

In Poland, the non-profit sector is dominated by a large and historic foundation that works closely with the police and families.

Fundacja ITAKA - Centrum Poszukiwań Ludzi Zaginionych (ITAKA Foundation - Centre for the Search for Missing People)

The ITAKA Foundation is Poland's most important and recognised non-governmental organisation dealing with missing persons. Founded in 1999, it has become an institution in the country www.itaka.org.pl/.

- **Services offered:**

- **Support helpline:** Operates several helpline, including the single European number **116 000** for missing children and a specific line for missing adults and their families (116 111).
 - **Psychological, legal and social support:** Offers free comprehensive help to the families of missing persons, supporting them throughout the difficult search process and even after they are found.
 - **Database and dissemination of appeals:** maintains its own, extensive database of missing persons and disseminates appeals through its website, social media and a network of press contacts. Polish media often turn directly to ITAKA for information on cases.
 - **Prevention campaigns:** organises awareness-raising campaigns on topics such as depression, running away from home and the risks of dementia.
- **Website:** www.zaginieni.pl (meaning 'disappeared.pl')

The Polish model is very clear: **Policja** and its specialised centre **CPOZ** hold full investigative responsibility and manage state alert tools such as Child Alert. In parallel, the **ITAKA Foundation** acts as the main partner of civil society, providing the direct, continuous and multifaceted support to families that institutions alone could not guarantee.

Portugal

Portugal has a structured system for dealing with missing persons, which follows the European model of close cooperation between Law Enforcement agencies and specialised organisations, particularly for the protection of minors:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

Investigations and coordination are mainly entrusted to the Judicial Police, acting under the authority of the judiciary.

Polícia Judiciária – PJ (Judicial Police)

The Judicial Police is the main criminal investigation body in Portugal and has primary responsibility for the most serious cases of missing persons, particularly when a crime such as kidnapping or murder is suspected.

- **Role:** It coordinates investigations, manages international cooperation through Interpol and Europol and assesses whether to activate the national alert system.

Sistema de Alerta Rápido - "Alerta Rapto de Menores" (Early Warning System - "Child Abduction Alert")

It is the Portuguese early warning system, equivalent to the AMBER Alert.

- **Operation:** Activation is the sole responsibility of the Polícia Judiciária, in agreement with the Public Prosecutor's Office. As in other countries, it is only used in exceptional circumstances and for a limited time when there is a well-founded fear that an abducted child is in serious and imminent danger.
- **Dissemination:** Once activated, the alert is disseminated through a wide network of public and private partners: television channels, radio stations, variable message signs on motorways (operated by Brisa, the main motorway concessionaire), airports (operated by ANA Aeroportos), railway and metro stations, and through social media.

Guarda Nacional Republicana – GNR and Polícia de Segurança Pública – PSP (National Republican Guard and Public Security Police)

These are the Law Enforcement with territorial jurisdiction (the GNR in rural areas, the PSP in urban areas). They are generally the first point of contact for a family reporting a disappearance and initiate the first search and then transfer more complex cases to the Polícia Judiciária.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

In Portugal, the role of the non-profit sector is fundamental and is concentrated in one large, specialised institution.

Instituto de Apoio à Criança – IAC (Institute of Child Support)

The IAC is Portugal's leading and most important organisation for the defence of children's rights.

- **Services offered:**
 - **Management of 116 000:** The IAC is the body that manages the single European number for missing children **SOS Criança Desaparecida (SOS Missing Children)** in Portugal. This free 24-hour service helpline is the reference point for anyone who wants to report a missing child or for families in need of help.
 - **Comprehensive family support:** Provides integrated support including psychological, social and legal assistance to the families of missing children.
 - **Prevention and awareness-raising:** Plays an active role in the prevention of runaways and youth distress through educational and awareness-raising campaigns.
 - **Database and dissemination:** Manages its own database and cooperates closely with the media and Law Enforcement agencies to disseminate research alerts.
- **Website:** iacrianca.pt

Unlike other countries where multiple associations exist, in Portugal the support system for missing children is strongly centralised around the **IAC**. This guarantees a unique and highly specialised point of contact for families and for the institutions themselves.

The Portuguese model is based on the clear investigative leadership of **Polícia Judiciária**, which also holds the power to activate the national 'Alerta Rapto de Menores' system. All direct family support, 116 000-line management and prevention are instead entrusted to the authoritative **Instituto de Apoio à Criança (IAC)**, which acts as a pillar of civil society in this field.

Romania

As a member of the European Union, Romania has developed a well-defined system for the management of missing persons, which is based on the leadership of the national police, an early warning system for minors and the work of specialised non-profit organisations:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The investigative structure is centralised and reports to the Romanian Police.

Poliția Română (Romanian Police)

It is the national police agency, subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and has full responsibility for handling missing persons cases (*persoane dispărute*).

- **Role:** The Romanian Police receive the complaints, which by law are taken care of immediately, and starts the investigation. It is responsible for risk assessment, coordination of research operations and cooperation with other agencies, such as the Gendarmerie (*Jandarmeria*) for research in difficult areas.
- **Public Database:** The Police operate an official online portal where it publishes search notices for missing persons, divided by minors and adults. This site is the reference point for the public.
 - **Website:** www.politiaromana.ro/ro/persoane-disparute

"Alertă răpire copil" (Child Abduction Alert)

Romania has an early warning system for minors, fully integrated into the European AMBER Alert framework.

- **Operation:** The system is activated by the Police in exceptional cases of abduction of a minor or when there is a well-founded suspicion that his life or health is in serious and imminent danger. The decision is made in agreement with the prosecutor.
- **Dissemination:** The alert is spread instantly through a large network of partners. The main mechanism is the interruption of television and radio broadcasters' programmes to transmit the alarm message. Added to this are notifications on social media, information screens and other digital channels.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The support to families and the management of emergency telephone lines are entrusted to non-governmental organisations that have specialised in the protection of minors and support for victims.

FOCUS – Centrul Român pentru Copii Dispăruți și Exploațați Sexual (Romanian Centre for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children)

This centre was a point of reference for years, but the management of line 116 000 was then taken over by another important organisation.

Asociația "Telefonul Copilului" (Association "The Child's Phone")

Currently, this is the key association that manages Europe's emergency lines.

- **Services offered:**
 - **Management of 116 000:** This is the body that manages the European helpline for missing children. It offers immediate support, psychological and legal advice to families and anyone who calls to report a case.
 - **116 111 Management:** It also runs the Children and Adolescents Helpline, a vital prevention service that gives young people a safe space to talk about their problems.
 - **Collaboration:** He works closely with the Romanian Police and the General Directorate for the Protection of Minors, acting as a link between families and institutions.
- **Website:** telefonulcopilului.ro

The Romanian system is well aligned with EU standards. Poliția **Română** leads all investigative operations and has the authority to activate the "**Alertă Răpire Copil**" system. Crucial support for families and the professional management of European emergency lines is ensured by the **Asociația "Telefonul Copilului"**, which represents the main civil society actor in the field of the protection of missing children.

Russia

The Russian system is unique and is based on two distinct but interconnected pillars: the powerful state agencies, which hold a monopoly on investigations, and a mass volunteer movement, which has become an irreplaceable operational force:

1. State initiatives (exclusive investigative role)

The state has total control over all official investigations and procedures. Unlike many other countries, responsibility is often split between two federal agencies.

Министерство внутренних дел - МВД (Ministry of the Interior)

The Ministry of the Interior and its police force (Полиция, Politsiya) are the first point of contact.

- **Role:** They receive the missing person report and start the initial search (*розыск*). They manage their databases and public information channels.

Следственный комитет Российской Федерации - СКР (Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation)

It is a separate and very powerful federal investigation agency, which reports directly to the President.

- **Role:** When a disappearance presents suspicious circumstances, especially if it involves a minor, the Investigative Committee opens a criminal file and takes over the investigation. This means that the search is no longer just a police operation, but a full-fledged criminal investigation.

Absence of European Systems

Russia does not participate in European cooperation networks like EU member or candidate countries.

- **The number 116 000 is not active.**
- **There is no "AMBER Alert" system** formalized on the Western model. The authorities can issue urgent alerts through state media, but it is not an automatic and multi-platform system like the European ones.

2. The Volunteer Pillar (Crucial Operational Role)

The vacuum left by a state system that is often bureaucratic and slow to mobilize research in the field has been filled in an extraordinary way by an organisation of volunteers that has become a national phenomenon.

Поисково-спасательный отряд «ЛизаАлерт» (Search and Rescue Team "LizaAlert")

"LizaAlert" is, without exaggeration, the beating heart of search operations in Russia. Founded in 2010 after the tragic death of Liza Fomkina, a 5-year-old girl lost in a forest near Moscow, it has grown into an organisation with tens of thousands of volunteers across the country.

- **Operational role:**
 - **Own National Helpline:** Operates its own 24-hour service toll-free helpline (8-800-700-54-52), which has become the de facto reference number for anyone who wants to report a disappearance and get immediate help.
 - **Instant Mobilisation:** Through its regional coordinators and heavy use of social media and chats, LizaAlert can mobilize hundreds of volunteers for a field search in a matter of hours, both day and night.
 - **Technology and Specialization:** It uses advanced technologies, including drones with thermal cameras, GIS mapping, and has specialised teams (divers, drone pilots, dog units, etc.).
- **Relationship with the State:** It is a **partnership of necessity**. LizaAlert could not operate without the green light from the authorities (MVD or SKR), who remain in command of the investigation. However, the authorities themselves consistently rely on LizaAlert for its incredible ability to provide the manpower, agility, and technology needed for large-scale physical searches. LizaAlert provides the "fieldwork" that state agencies alone would not be able to cover so efficiently.
- **Website:** lizaalert.org

The Russian system is a unique dual model. On the one hand, the powerful **state agencies (MVD and Investigative Committee)** maintain iron control over all legal and investigative procedures. On the other hand, almost all the physical research on the ground is made possible by the impressive efficiency and dedication of the volunteer organisation **LizaAlert**, which acts as an indispensable operational arm of civil society, in a relationship of functional symbiosis with the State.

Serbia

As a candidate country for EU membership, Serbia has made great strides in recent years to modernise its missing persons search system, culminating in the launch of a new and long-awaited early warning system on the AMBER Alert model:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

Case management is centralised and led by the Ministry of the Interior, which has recently enhanced its public communication tools.

Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova - MUP (Ministry of the Interior)

The MUP, through the Serbian Police (*Policija*), has full responsibility for the investigation and coordination of searches for missing persons (*nestale osobe* or *nestala lica*).

- **Role:** The police receive complaints, which by law must be dealt with immediately without waiting periods, and initiate investigations. Coordinates field operations and manages all case-related information.
- **National Registry of Missing Persons:** The MUP operates a public online registry of missing persons, which allows citizens to view active cases and provide information.

"Pronađi me" (Find me) - Serbian Early Warning System

This is the most significant and recent development. Officially launched at the end of 2023, "**Pronađi me**" is Serbia's early warning system for missing children, equivalent to AMBER Alert.

- **Operation:** The system is activated by the police in situations of exceptional gravity, such as a kidnapping or disappearance in which there are fears for the life of the minor. Activation interrupts television and radio programmes to spread the alarm.
- **Spread:** It is a very powerful cross-platform system. Dissemination occurs through:
 - Interruption of programmes on national broadcasters.
 - SMS sent by mobile operators.
 - Messages on variable message signs on motorways.
 - Information screens at airports, train and bus stations.
 - Notifications on social media and news portals.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The non-profit sector plays a fundamental role in supporting families and managing emergency lines, with a strong push from specialised organisations.

Centar za nestalu i zlostavljaju decu – CNZD (Centre for Missing Children and Victims of Abuse)

This organisation, founded by the father of a missing girl, was the main promoter of the introduction of the AMBER Alert system in Serbia and today is a key partner of the institutions.

- **Role:**
 - **116 000 management:** This is the body that manages the single European number for missing children. It offers psychosocial support and legal advice to families, acting as a bridge with the police and other institutions.
 - **Advocacy and Prevention:** It carries out intense lobbying to improve legislation and carries out awareness campaigns to educate the public, parents and children on the risks related to disappearances.
- **Website:** www.cnzd.rs

The Serbian system has recently made a significant leap in quality. The **Police (MUP)** lead the investigation and now has the powerful "**Pronađi me**" alert system. The essential support for families and the management of the **116 000** line are provided by the **CNZD**, an organisation born from direct experience that has become the engine of change and the main point of reference for civil society in the country.

Slovakia

The Slovak model is very similar to that of the neighbouring Czech Republic, with a strong centralization of investigative responsibilities in the hands of the national police and with the support of non-profit organisations for assistance services and emergency lines:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The entire investigative and research structure is headed by the National Police Corps.

Policajný zbor Slovenskej republiky (Police Corps of the Slovak Republic)

It is the only police agency in the state, responsible for all security and investigation activities, including the handling of missing persons (*nezvestné osoby*).

- **Role:** The police receive the report, assess the level of risk and start the investigation. It coordinates all search operations, which may include the use of dog units, helicopters and cooperation with the fire brigade (*Hasičský a záchranný zbor*) or other rescue forces.
- **Public Database:** The Slovak Ministry of the Interior, through the police, maintains an online database where search notices are published. This portal allows the public to consult the profiles of missing persons and provide useful information.
- **Website:** www.minv.sk/?patranie-po-osobach (section "Pátranie po osobách").

AMBER Alert Slovensko (Early Warning System)

Slovakia has also implemented an early warning system for children in danger, equivalent to the AMBER Alert.

- **Operation:** The system is activated by the police when the life or health of a missing child is at imminent risk. The goal is to disseminate information as quickly and widely as possible to maximize the chances of a timely find.
- **Dissemination:** The alarm is propagated through a public-private partnership that includes:
 - National media (TV, radio, web portals).
 - The Slovak News Agency (TASR).
 - Social media notification systems.
 - Information screens in public places.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Direct support to families and the management of emergency helpline are entrusted to civil society organisations with long experience in the field of child protection.

Linka detskej istoty (Child Safety Line)

It is the key non-profit organisation in Slovakia for child protection and the main partner of the institutions regarding missing children.

- **Services offered:**
 - **116 000 Administration:** This is the body that manages the European emergency line for missing children. It provides immediate counselling and psychological support to families and anyone who calls to report a case or provide information.
 - **Management of 116 111:** It also manages the listening line for children and young people, a fundamental prevention service for intercepting youth distress that can lead to escapes or other risk situations.
 - **Collaboration:** Works closely with the police and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, serving as an essential bridge between families and the state.
- **Website:** www.ldi.sk

Pátranie po osobách - Slovensko (People Search - Slovakia)

Like other countries, it is a community page (mainly on Facebook) run by volunteers.

- **Role:** This initiative supports the dissemination of official police search alerts, amplifying their reach through viral sharing on social media. While it is not an operational rescue organisation, it helps to increase public awareness and attention.

The Slovak system is well defined: the **State Police** have full control of investigations and alerts, while the **Linka detskej istoty** acts as a pillar of psychosocial support, managing the **116 000** and **116 111** emergency lines and providing crucial help in both emergency and prevention.

Slovenia

The Slovenian system is well integrated into the European framework and is based on close cooperation between the national police, which is responsible for investigations, and third sector organisations that provide specialised support:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The structure is centralised and reports to the State Police.

Policija (Police)

The Slovenian National Police (*Policija*) is the only police agency in the country and handles all matters related to public safety, including missing persons (*pogrešane osebe*).

- **Role:** The police receive the missing person report, carry out a risk assessment to determine urgency, and initiate investigations. It is responsible for coordinating all field search operations, which may involve other rescue units such as firefighters (*gasilci*) and civil protection units.
- **Public Database:** The Slovenian Police operate a public web portal where it publishes search notices for cases where citizens' input is deemed useful.
- **Website:** www.policija.si/pogresane-osebe

Early Warning System

Slovenia has an early warning system for missing children, commonly known as "**Klic v sili**" (Emergency Call), which works in a similar way to AMBER Alert.

- **Operation:** The system is activated by the Police in exceptional cases where a kidnapping is suspected and there are fears for the life or safety of the minor.
- **Dissemination:** Once triggered, the alert is quickly disseminated through a network of partners, which includes national media (such as the public broadcaster RTV Slovenija), news agencies and other information channels, to ensure widespread coverage throughout the country.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Support for families and the management of emergency telephone lines are entrusted to non-governmental organisations that work in close synergy with the institutions.

Management of 116 000

The single European number for missing children, **116 000**, in Slovenia is managed by a consortium of two organisations, to ensure full coverage of services:

- **TOM Telefon (TOM Helpline):** It is the main listening line for children and adolescents in Slovenia, very similar to Telefono Azzurro in Italy. It offers advice and support to young people on any problem.

- **Zveza prijateljev mladine Ljubljana Moste-Polje (Association of Friends of Youth Ljubljana Moste-Polje):** It is an important NGO that works in the field of the well-being of young people and families.

Together, these two entities provide a comprehensive service that includes immediate counselling, long-term psychological support for families, and collaboration with the authorities.

Društvo Iskanje pogrešanih oseb Slovenije (Association for the Search for Missing Persons of Slovenia)

There are also volunteer associations that provide support to families.

- **Role:** These associations, often made up of family members of missing persons and volunteers, offer emotional support, help spread search calls via social media, and keep public attention on unsolved cases. They collaborate with the police and act as a point of reference for families facing the drama of a disappearance.

The Slovenian model is well structured and aligned with European standards. The **Policija** has complete control of the investigation and the alert system. Specialised support for families and the management of the **116 000-emergency** line are entrusted to a consortium of experienced NGOs, thus ensuring a professional and humane response both in emergencies and in prevention and long-term support.

Spain

Spain has also developed a model of cooperation between public institutions and non-governmental organisations, with a national centre playing a key role in coordinating all cases of disappearance:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

Coordination at the state level is entrusted to a specialised centre, while operational investigations are managed by the various Law Enforcement present in the country.

Centro Nacional de Desaparecidos – CNDES (National Centre for the Disappeared)

Established in 2018, the CNDES is the central body of the Spanish Ministry of the Interior for the management of the phenomenon of missing persons. It is the real fulcrum of the national system.

- **Role:** Coordinates all information on missing persons cases from the different Law Enforcement (Policía Nacional, Guardia Civil, and autonomous Law Enforcement such as Mossos d'Esquadra in Catalonia and Ertzaintza in the Basque Country). It analyses data, issues reports, and ensures coordinated action across bodies. It also manages the central public database.
- **Website:** cndes-web.ses.mir.es (The public portal contains search alerts, statistics and useful information).

Alerta Menor Desaparecido (Missing Minor Alert)

It is the Spanish rapid alert system, the equivalent of the AMBER Alert.

- **Operation:** It is activated by Law Enforcement in cases of high-risk child abduction, when the child's life or physical integrity is believed to be in immediate danger. Its activation, as in France, is subject to very strict criteria to avoid its abuse and ensure its effectiveness.
- **Dissemination:** Once activated, the alarm is massively disseminated through the media, social networks and the network of partners (airports, stations, road signs) who collaborate with the Ministry of the Interior.

Law Enforcement

- **Policía Nacional and Guardia Civil:** They are the main Law Enforcement at the state level and handle most investigations.
- **Autonomous Police (Mossos d'Esquadra, Ertzaintza, Policía Foral de Navarra):** They have full investigative competence in their respective territories.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

In Spain, several foundations and associations play a crucial role, often founded by families who have directly experienced the drama of a disappearance.

Fundación ANAR -Ayuda a Niños y Adolescentes en Riesgo (ANAR Foundation - Help for Children and Adolescents at Risk)

The ANAR Foundation is a fundamental organisation for the protection of minors in Spain.

- **Services offered:**
 - **116 000 Administration:** This is the body that manages the European helpline for missing children. It offers psychological, legal and social support to both minors and their families.
 - **ANAR Telephone for Minors:** It also operates a helpline for children and adolescents who are in difficulty, which serves as an important prevention tool for running away from home.
- **Website:** www.anar.org

Fundación QSDglobal - Periodistas por la gente desaparecida (QSDglobal Foundation - Journalists for missing people)

Founded by the well-known journalist Paco Lobatón, this foundation has a unique approach, focused on communication and media awareness.

- **Role:** "QSD" stands for "Quién Sabe Dónde" ("Who knows where"), the name of a famous Spanish television program dedicated to missing persons hosted by Lobatón. The foundation acts as a bridge between families, the media and institutions, helping to keep public attention high on cases, even the oldest ones (cold cases). It promotes the Charter of the Rights of Missing Persons and their Families.
- **Website:** www.qsdglobal.com

SOSdesaparecidos

It is a very active and responsive non-profit association, specializing in the rapid dissemination of search alerts through social media and a large network of digital contacts.

- **Role:** Collaborates closely with Law Enforcement agencies and other associations. Its strength lies in its great agility and ability to create and distribute digital posters virally, reaching millions of people in a very short time.
- **Website:** sosdesaparecidos.es

The Spanish system is characterized by the strong centralization of information through the **CNDES**, which ensures effective coordination at the national level. This is accompanied by an ecosystem of very specialised associations: **ANAR** for direct support to minors (116,000), **QSDglobal** for media and institutional leverage, and **SOSdesaparecidos** for the viral spread of appeals in the digital world.

Sweden

The Swedish model is particularly interesting because, while relying on a solid national police structure, it relies heavily and operationally on a large organisation of volunteers for field research, a feature that distinguishes it from many other countries:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The ultimate responsibility for the investigation is, as in the rest of Scandinavia, the responsibility of a single national police agency.

Polismyndigheten (Swedish Police Authority)

The Swedish Police is a unified state agency that handles all aspects of police work in the country.

- **Role:** When a missing person (*försvinnande*) is reported, the police launch a preliminary investigation. If the person is in danger (due to age, illness or suspicious circumstances), they are classified as a "missing person search" (*eftersök av försvunnen person*) and the necessary resources are mobilized. The police are always responsible for commanding and directing operations.
- **Publication of notices:** Notices of search (*efterslysningar*) are published on the official website of the police for cases where it is believed that the public's help may be decisive.
- **Website:** polisen.se/om-polisen/polisens-arbete/forsvunna-personer/

Barnarovslarm (Child Abduction Alarm)

Sweden also has an early warning system for child abduction cases.

- **How it works:** The system is activated by the police in very specific circumstances, when there is certainty or strong suspicion of a kidnapping and fears for the life of the child.
- **Dissemination:** The alert is disseminated through national media, with the support of partners who can show the message on public screens, and via the social channels of the police and other organisations.

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The non-profit sector in Sweden plays a key operational role, becoming the police's right-hand man in field research.

Missing People Sweden

It is Sweden's largest volunteer organisation and the police's main partner in search operations. Its role is much more active than that of similar associations in other countries.

- **Role:** As soon as the police approve a search, **Missing People Sweden** activates its extensive network of registered volunteers (*jourhavande sökare* - researchers on duty). He organises and coordinates massive field research trips, patrolling forests, urban areas and waterways, always under the strategic direction of the police. Their ability to mobilize hundreds of people in a few hours is a fundamental tool.

- **Reach:** They run a Facebook page and other social channels with millions of followers, ensuring viral and near-instant spread of search alerts across the country.
- **Website:** www.missingpeople.se

Jourhavande Medmänniska / BRIS - Support Line Managers

Unlike other countries where a single organisation runs 116 000, in Sweden telephone support is divided.

- **116 000 (Missing Children Helpline):** This line is operated directly by the Swedish emergency call centre (SOS Alarm) and forwards relevant calls to the police.
- **BRIS (Barnens Rätt i Samhället - Children's Rights in Society):** It is the reference organisation for the protection of minors. She runs the child support number **116 111**, offering listening and counselling. It plays a crucial role in prevention, helping young people deal with problems that might otherwise lead to a runaway.
 - **Website:** www.bris.se
- **Jourhavande Medmänniska (Next on duty):** It is one of the main listening lines for adults who find themselves in crisis or loneliness, helping to prevent disappearances related to psychological distress.

The Swedish model is an excellent example of **an operational public-private partnership**. While the **Polismyndigheten** maintains strategic and investigative command, it delegates and structurally relies on the incredible mobilisation capacity of **Missing People Sweden** for physical searches on the ground, creating a rapid and efficient response system.

Switzerland

The Swiss system reflects its federal structure: the main responsibilities lie with the **cantons**, but there are national coordination platforms and non-profit organisations operating throughout the country:

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The fundamental feature of the Swiss system is that police sovereignty belongs to the 26 cantons.

Kantonspolizei / Police cantonale / Polizia cantonale (Cantonal police)

They are the heart of the system. Each cantonal police are responsible for managing missing person reports, investigating and coordinating search operations within its territory.

- **Role:** They receive the complaint, start the first research and decide what means to use. They publish the search alerts on their websites and communication channels. Cooperation between the various cantonal bodies is common and well-established practice.

FedPol (Federal Office of Police)

Fedpol does not directly conduct field investigations (which remain the responsibility of the cantons) but acts as a centre of competence and coordination at federal and international level.

- **Role:** Manages the national database of wanted persons, **RIPOL (Recherches informatisées de police** or Computerised Police Searches), in which cases of disappearance are also entered. It is the Swiss contact point for cooperation with Interpol and the Law Enforcement of other countries through the SIRENE system.

Child Abduction Alert System

Switzerland also has a national early warning system for high-risk child abduction cases.

- **Operation:** Activation is required by the competent cantonal police and must be approved by the public prosecutor. The decision to activate the alert is very restrictive and is based on precise criteria, like those of other European countries (proven kidnapping, imminent danger to life, information useful for research).
- **Dissemination:** When triggered, the alarm is disseminated nationwide through the Keystone-ATS news agency, the Swiss Radio and Television Corporation (SRG SSR), and a network of partners including airports, railway stations Schweizerische Bundesbahnen (SBB), public transport companies and road information boards.
- **Reference website:** www.alerte-enlevement.ch

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

The non-profit sector is mainly represented by a foundation that acts as a national reference point.

Missing Children Switzerland

It is the most important Swiss foundation in the field of missing children. It is a public benefit organisation that works closely with the authorities.

- **Services offered:**
 - **Management of 116 000:** This is the body that operates the free 24-hour service helpline for missing children in Switzerland. It offers psychological and legal advice and support to affected families.
 - **Prevention:** It carries out important prevention and awareness-raising work in schools and among the public on issues such as running away from home, online grooming and child safety.
 - **Investigation support:** Provides its expertise and network to support searches, always in coordination with the responsible cantonal police.
- **Website:** www.missingchildren.ch (available in German, French, Italian and English).

FRED & FARID "Look for Lex" (Specific Campaign)

It is worth mentioning an innovative campaign launched a few years ago in Switzerland, which shows openness to new technologies:

- **"Look for Lex":** Developed for Missing Children Switzerland, this initiative used facial recognition software integrated into online advertisements. Users could activate their webcam, and if their face matched that of a missing child (in this case, the fictitious child "Lex" for the launch campaign), the ad would turn into an informational message. This type of initiative, although not permanently active, demonstrates the willingness to explore new research channels.

The Swiss model is highly **decentralised**, with the **Cantonal Police** as the main actors on the ground. At the national level, **fedpol** ensures international coordination and connection, while the kidnapping alert system offers a tool for the most serious cases. The essential support for families and the management of the **116 000**-emergency line are instead entrusted to the professionalism of the **Missing Children Switzerland foundation**.

The Netherlands

The Dutch system is internationally recognised as one of the most advanced and effective, for its powerful and pervasive early warning system. The model is based on a clear state-led structure for investigations and alerts, supported by large professional organisations that provide support to victims and families.

1. Public Initiatives and Law Enforcement

The handling of missing person cases is a centralised responsibility of the national police, which is equipped with state-of-the-art technological tools.

- **Politie (Dutch Police)** The national police (*Politie*) have primary responsibility for all investigations related to missing persons. Within it operates the **Landelijk Bureau Vermiste Personen (LBVP)**, the National Office for Missing Persons, which acts as a competence and coordination centre for more complex cases. The police operate a public portal with search notices.
 - **Website (missing persons section):** www.politie.nl/gezocht
- **AMBER Alert:** The Netherlands was the pioneer in Europe in adopting the AMBER Alert system, making it one of the most powerful and widespread in the world.
 - **Function:** It is only activated by the police in cases of 'imminent danger to life' or the abduction of a child. The aim is to alert as many people as possible in the shortest possible time.
 - **Dissemination:** The system is pervasive and multi-channel. The alert is disseminated on screens in railway stations, airports and public transport, on variable message signs on motorways, at ATMs, on social media and, above all, via the dedicated app.
 - **Website:** www.burgernet.nl/amberalert

2. Private and Non-Profit Initiatives

Family support and helpline management are integrated in a professional structure that directly involves the state and large support organisations.

- **Management of the 116 000:** Unlike in many other countries, the **116 000** helpline in the Netherlands is coordinated directly by the **Ministry of Justice and Security**. The operational service is managed by a specialised centre that works closely with the police.
- **Slachtofferhulp Nederland (Victim Support Netherlands):** Is the leading national organisation offering support to all victims of crime and accidents, including the families of missing persons. It provides emotional support, practical advice and legal assistance.
 - **Website:** www.slachtofferhulp.nl/
- **Het Rode Kruis (The Red Cross):** The Dutch Red Cross plays a supportive role, particularly in the search for family members who have lost their way due to conflicts or international disasters and can be activated in the event of major national emergencies.

- Website: www.rodekruis.nl/

3. App per i Cittadini

- **AMBER Alert App:** The Netherlands has an official **AMBER Alert** app that citizens can download. This app sends an instant, geolocated push notification as soon as an alert is triggered, turning every smartphone into a potential search tool.

The Dutch model excels in its technological efficiency and clear structure, where the state (police and Ministry of Justice) directly handles the investigation and alerting aspects, while the extended support to victims and families is entrusted to large professional organisations.

Ukraine

Analysing the Ukrainian system requires a fundamental and necessary premise: the context is dominated by Russia's large-scale war of aggression, which began in 2022. This has created a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions, with tens of thousands of people missing, including soldiers, civilians who are victims of war crimes and, tragically, thousands of children forcibly deported.

Therefore, the Ukrainian system must be understood on two parallel and overlapping levels: the institutions created to manage war-related disappearances and the "ordinary" mechanisms for other cases.

1. People Missing Due to War (The Main Crisis)

This is the top priority for the Ukrainian state. Specific institutions have been created to deal with this emergency.

Commissioner for Missing Persons in Special Circumstances

He is the central government figure, appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers, who has the mandate to coordinate all efforts to search for people missing because of the conflict. It works in synergy with the Ministry for the Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories.

- **Role:** Coordinates work between various ministries, armed forces, police and humanitarian organisations. It manages the process of collecting information and negotiates, through intermediaries, for the exchange of information and the repatriation of bodies.

Unified Register of Missing Persons in Special Circumstances

The Ukrainian state has created a central register where all information relating to civilians and servicemen who disappeared during hostilities is entered. This database is a critical tool for centralizing data and coordinating searches.

Missing Persons Search Coordination Centre

This operations centre, which works under the auspices of the Commissioner, operates the national emergency telephone lines where family members can report a person's disappearance and receive information on the status of the search.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

As in any armed conflict, the ICRC plays a neutral and crucial role. It helps to try to locate prisoners of war, facilitate communication with families and manage the delicate process of exchanging and identifying the fallen.

2. Systems for "Ordinary" Disappearance Cases

Despite the war, daily life continues and with it the cases of disappearances not directly related to the conflict (escapes, people with dementia, etc.). For these, there are standard mechanisms.

Національна поліція України (Natsionalna politsiia Ukrainy) (National Police of Ukraine)

It is the national police force that manages the investigation of "civilian" cases of disappearance.

- **Role:** Receives complaints, initiates investigations, and publishes search notices (*розшук*) on their channels. Due to the war, its resources are put to the test, but the service continues to operate.

"Child kidnapping alarm"

Ukraine has an early warning system for missing children, equivalent to the AMBER Alert.

- **Operation:** It is activated by the National Police in cases of kidnapping or disappearance of minors in danger. The war has made the use of this tool more complex, but it remains an important mechanism.
- **Dissemination:** The alarm is spread through the media, social networks and via SMS, thanks to the collaboration with mobile phone operators.

ГО «Магнолія» ("Magnolia" NGO)

It is the most important and specialised non-governmental organisation in Ukraine in the field of missing children.

- **Role:**
 - **116 000 Administration:** This is the body that manages the European telephone line for missing children. Their work has become exponentially more difficult and crucial since the 2022 invasion. They handle not only "ordinary" cases but also reports of missing children in conflict zones or deported.
 - **Support and Research:** Their teams offer psychological support to families and actively collaborate with police and journalists to maximize the visibility of cases.
- **Website:** magnolia.org.ua

The Ukrainian system is a **system in a state of permanent crisis**. On the one hand, it had to create **emergency state structures** to manage the catastrophe of war disappearances. On the other hand, it seeks to keep the **standard investigation** and support mechanisms in place, where the **National Police** and the heroic work of NGOs such as "**Magnolia**" represent the backbone of the response to "civilian" cases of disappearance.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has a very structured, multi-agency system for dealing with missing persons, with close collaboration between government agencies, Law Enforcement and a highly developed voluntary sector.

Here are the main actors, systems and projects specific to the UK:

1. Government Bodies and Law Enforcement

UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU)

It is the central unit and nerve centre of case management in the UK. It is part of the **National Crime Agency (NCA)**, the UK equivalent of the FBI.

- **Role:** Acts as a national centre of expertise. It provides tactical and strategic support to local Law Enforcement, manages a central database that cross-references national and international data on missing persons and unidentified bodies, and coordinates forensic analysis (DNA, fingerprints).
- **Website:** www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk (Public site offers database of missing persons, information and links to useful resources).

Child Rescue Alert

It is the British equivalent of the AMBER Alert system. It is only activated by the police in the most serious cases, when a child is believed to have been abducted and their life is in imminent danger.

- **Operation:** When activated, the alert is quickly disseminated to the public via media, social networks, variable message boards and push notifications to those who have downloaded the app.
- **Website:** www.facebook.com/CRAAlerts/
- **App:** There is an official app called '**Child Rescue Alert**' available for iOS and Android, which allows you to receive notifications in real time.

2. Voluntary Organisations (Charities)

The voluntary sector plays a key role in the UK, providing direct support that government agencies are not always able to cover.

Missing People

It is the UK's leading and best-known voluntary organisation dedicated to the phenomenon. It offers all-round support to both missing persons and their families.

- **Services offered:**

- **Free Helpline (116 000):** The same European helpline, active 24-hour service, for anyone who wants to report a disappearance, for those who are missing and want to get in touch, or for families seeking support.
- **Case publicity:** They disseminate search appeals through posters, social media and media partnerships.
- **Psychological support:** They offer counselling and emotional support to families.
- **TextSafe® service:** A proactive system that sends a confidential SMS to a person reported missing, offering them a safe way to get in touch.
- **Website:** missingpeople.org.uk
- **App:** They do not have a public search app but encourage people to become 'Digital Search Heroes' by registering on their site to share online appeals.

LBT Global (formally Lucie Blackman Trust)

This organisation specialises in assisting British citizens who go missing abroad, providing unique support.

- **Role:** Offers practical advice and support to families dealing with the complexities of a disappearance in a foreign country, managing communication with local authorities, international media and the UK Foreign Office.
- **Website:** www.lbt.global/

3. Specific Projects and Apps

In addition to national systems, there are more local or targeted initiatives.

Purple Alert (Scotland)

This is a Scotland-specific initiative run by Alzheimer Scotland.

- **Purpose:** To help find people with dementia who are lost.
- **How it works:** It is a free community app. When a person with dementia is reported missing, an alert is sent to all app users in the area, creating a network of 'eyes' that can help in the search.
- **App:** 'Purple Alert' available for download on mobile devices.

The UK model is characterised by a clear division and collaboration of roles: the **NCA/UKMPU** for investigative and national coordination, the **Child Rescue Alert** for absolute emergencies, and organisations such as **Missing People** that provide indispensable human and practical support around the clock.

European Union

At the European Union level, there is no "European police" that directly deals with searches, as investigations remain a sovereign competence of each member state. However, the EU has created a sophisticated ecosystem of cooperation, tools and networks to ensure that a disappearance does not stop at a border.

The European system works as an "engine" that connects and strengthens the national systems we have analysed. Here are its key pillars:

1. Police Cooperation and Shared Tools

Europol and the European Network of Missing Persons Experts

Europol, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, does not conduct direct investigations but acts as an intelligence and support hub. Its role is crucial:

- **Facilitates the exchange of information:** When a case of disappearance has a cross-border dimension, Europol helps national Law Enforcement to quickly exchange sensitive information and data.
- **Provides analytical support:** Provides its expertise to analyse cases, identify links between different disappearances or with other criminal activities.
- **Coordinates the European Network of Missing Persons Experts (PEN-MP):** This network, created in collaboration with AMBER Alert Europe, brings together the best investigators from each Member State to share best practices, new technologies and to collaborate on the most complex cases.

Schengen Information System (SIS)

It is the pillar of cooperation. The SIS is a huge database shared between the countries of the Schengen area (which includes most EU countries and some associated ones).

- **How it works:** When the police of a country, such as Italy, enter a missing person report into their national system, this report is uploaded to SIS. Within minutes, the alert is visible to every border patrol, police officer or immigration officer in all other member countries.
- **Types of alerts:** For missing persons, especially minors or vulnerable adults, a "tracing for protection purposes" is created. If an officer in Sweden stops a person and checks their documents in the system, they will receive an immediate alert with instructions on how to act to protect the person and contact the authorities who reported them.
- **Biometric data:** The SIS may contain biometric data (photos, fingerprints) and, only in cases of missing persons, also DNA profiles to facilitate their certain identification.

SIRENE Offices (Supplementary Information Request at the National Entries)

Each Member State has a SIRENE Office, which is active 24-hour service. These offices are the "human engine" of the SIS. When an officer finds an alerted person (a 'match' or 'hit' in the system), it is the SIRENE Bureau in their country that contacts the SIRENE Bureau in the country that issued the alert to exchange any additional information needed to handle the case.

2. Cross-border Rapid Alert Systems

AMBER Alert Europe

It is not an EU agency, but a foundation that acts as a "glue" between national alert systems (such as the French Alerte-Enlèvement, the British Child Rescue Alert, the Serbian "Pronađi me", etc.).

- **How it works:** When a child goes missing in a country and there are fears that they may be transported abroad, AMBER Alert Europe, at the request of the national police, can amplify the alarm. Activate your network to spread the alert in neighbouring countries or other relevant countries, using social media, digital screens and your network of partners. This turns a national alarm into a European research operation.
- **Website:** www.amberalert.eu

3. Victim Support and Unique Emergency Lines

116 000 - Single European Number for Missing Children

This is one of the most important and concrete initiatives of the EU. The European Commission has reserved the number **116 000** as a helpline, free of charge and active 24-hour service throughout Europe, to report the disappearance of a child and receive support.

- **How it works:** 116 000 is a freephone number, active 24-hour service in all 27 Member States (and some neighbouring countries). Anyone can call this number to report the disappearance of a minor or to provide information about a sighting.
- **National management:** Although the number is European, the service is managed at national level by specialised organisations. This ensures a response in the local language and a thorough understanding of national procedures. The organisations running the 116 000 are brought together in the **Missing Children Europe** (missingchildreneurope.eu) **network**, which promotes cooperation and the exchange of good practices.

Funding and Programmes

The European Commission actively funds projects that improve cooperation, develop new research technologies and support NGOs that operate 116 000 lines, through programmes such as the Internal Security Fund (ISF).

Ultimately, the role of the European Union is not to replace national police forces, but to act as an engine of connection. Through shared technological tools such as the SIS, the investigative support of Europol, and the provision of a single emergency access point like the 116 000 helpline, the EU has created an ecosystem that enhances and integrates national systems, ensuring that the search for a missing person does not stop at national borders.

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the different national systems for the search for missing persons reveals a rich and varied European landscape, united by common objectives but distinct from operational approaches that reflect the history, culture and social structure of each country. Some key points emerge:

- **The Irreplaceable Role of Public-Private Cooperation:** No model proves to be effective without a close synergy between public institutions and the non-profit sector. While Law Enforcement agencies maintain investigative leadership, NGOs and voluntary associations make an irreplaceable contribution in terms of psychological and legal support to families, management of emergency lines such as 116 000, and, in some cases, become real operational partners in field research. Models such as the Swedish one with Missing People Sweden, the Latvian one with **Bezvests.lv** or the Greek one with "The Smile of the Child" show how organized and professional volunteering can be a decisive "force multiplier".
- **Technology as an Enabler:** From early warning systems such as **AMBER Alert** to dedicated apps such as **the Child Rescue Alert** in the UK or the **Purple Alert** for dementia patients in Scotland, technology remains a crucial tool for accelerating the dissemination of information. However, the presence of dedicated apps is still not uniform, and many countries still rely mainly on the viral power of social media, managed by initiatives such as **Deutschland findet euch** in Germany or **SOSdesaparecidos** in Spain.
- **The Importance of a Specialised Approach:** The creation of dedicated police units, such as the **UKMPU** in the UK or the **CPOZ KGP** in Poland, and national coordination centres such as the **CNDES** in Spain, proves to be a winning strategy for centralising information and ensuring coordinated and effective action. Similarly, the presence of associations focused on specific needs, such as **Penelope** in Italy for the support of adult and child families or **LBT Global** in the United Kingdom for citizens who have disappeared abroad, guarantees a more targeted and competent response.

Although the European regulatory and technological framework offers increasingly powerful cooperation tools, the real challenge for the future remains to harmonise best practices and further strengthen the weakest link in the chain: the link with the community. The evidence gathered in this report strongly supports our initial working hypothesis. Therefore, the formal integration of neighbourhood networks, as explored by EUNWA, emerges not as a definitive solution, but as a promising and flexible framework for future development. We conclude by **inviting national authorities and stakeholders to consider this framework as a basis for pilot projects**, tailored to local realities. Experimenting with this approach is the logical next step to collectively build safer and more resilient communities, where the search for a missing person is truly a shared responsibility.

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