

FIGURES AND TRENDS 2016

FROM HOTLINES FOR MISSING CHILDREN AND CROSS-BORDER FAMILY MEDIATORS



**Missing
Children
Europe**

General figures

In the European Union, a child is reported missing every 2 minutes. Who do you call for help? To support children and families at this crucial time, a hotline for missing children was set up in Europe available through the same number in 31 countries: 116 000. The hotline provides emotional, psychological, social, legal and administrative support 24/7. Data and statistics of missing children collected from this network of hotlines annually help us understand the concerns facing children and the support that can better help them and their families. The majority of the data illustrated in this report comes from these hotlines and corresponds to cases from 2016.

In 2016, hotline operators saw a decrease in calls received, combined with an important increase in the number of contacts made via channels other than the telephone number. Children increasingly contact the hotlines via text message and chat. A lot of the work done by hotlines also in-

cludes preventing child disappearances as well as responding to cases.

Among the cases handled by hotlines, the percentage of runaways continues to increase yearly, reaching 57% in 2016. Out of the children running away more than once, we see an increase in the number of times that these children run away. Each consecutive time children run away, they rely on riskier strategies to survive and often become victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Migrant children reported missing increased from 2% in 2015 to 7% in 2016. While more migrant children are being reported to hotlines, unaccompanied migrant children continue to go missing at alarmingly high rates from reception centres and the number of children reported to hotlines or the police fall very short of the actual figures of children leaving centres shared by other sources.



31

countries in Europe run **hotlines for missing children** accessible by calling 116 000

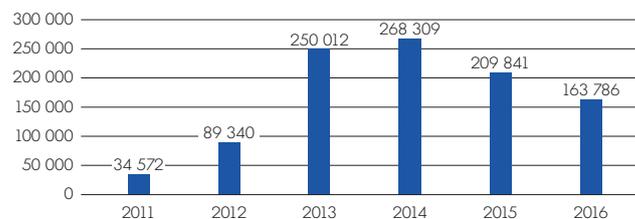
157

trained **Cross-Border Family Mediators** prevent and resolve parental abductions

Calls received by hotlines for missing children

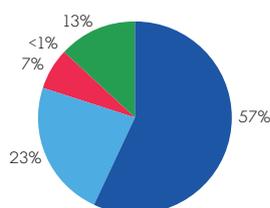
In several Member States, the hotline operation was assigned to new service providers in the course of 2016. As such in 2016, only 23 hotlines reported on the number of calls received, compared to 27 hotlines in 2015, 26 in 2014 and 25 in 2013.

Calls received in 2016 also include at least 50 964 calls which were not specifically about missing children due to a lack of awareness of the role of these hotlines.

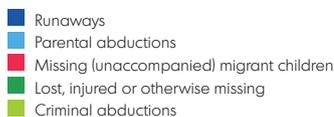


* Data from 23 hotlines

Missing children in all cases opened



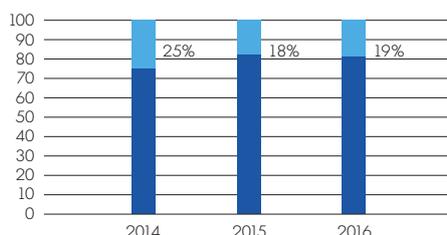
* Data from 23 hotlines



The number of missing children (5 742) in cases handled by the 23 reporting hotlines is greater than in 2015 (5 597 children), where 26 hotlines reported. This indicates an increased caseload handled by hotlines overall. The number of runaways reported to hotlines have increased by 3% since 2015 showing that children who run away or are forced out of home consistently make up the largest category of missing children cases reported.

Corresponding to Europol's report of 10 000 unaccompanied children missing from reception centres in Europe in 2015, cases of missing unaccompanied migrant children reported to hotlines increased from 2 to 7% in 2016. While thousands more have continued to go missing, often they are not reported to hotlines or the police.

Cross-border cases of missing children

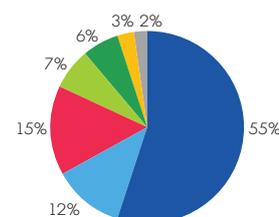


* Data from 14 hotlines for 2016



In 2016, 19% of the cases reported to the 116 000 hotlines were cross-border in nature, up from 18% in 2015. Within the categories of missing children, the percentage of parental abductions of a cross-border nature has increased from 48 to 64% since 2015, while cross-border criminal abductions have decreased from 50% to 10%. Cross-border cases of runaways have remained mostly consistent at 2.5% compared to 2.2% in 2015, while cross-border cases of lost, injured or otherwise missing children have increased from 0.9 to 3.7%. It is important to remember that cases of (unaccompanied) migrant children going missing are often cross-border in nature yet cross-border cooperation for these types of cases remain particularly challenging because of identification, differing legal processes, resource limitations and political will. This in turn leads to lack of follow up on cases and fewer cross-border cases reported in this category than in reality.

Geographical regions involved in cross-border cases of missing children



* Data from 11 hotlines



The vast majority of cross-border cases in 2016 were between two or more EU countries (55%), which is consistent with figures from the last 2 years.

Prevention and publicity appeals

Calls related to preventing child disappearance

Hotlines for missing children received a large amount of calls dealing with preventing a child from going missing. The hotline provides information on risks and alternatives as well as prevention advice to the caller. Often children are safeguarded from going missing as a direct result of the prevention work of the hotline.

Missing children related requests received by hotlines via other channels

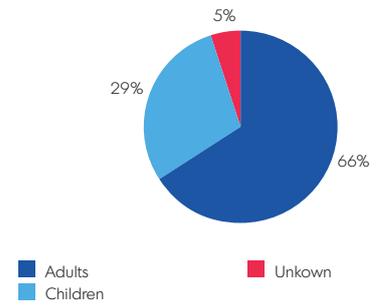
Hotline staff received double the amount of requests via other channels such as email or text message in 2016. 18 915 requests related to missing children were received through channels other than the 116 000 telephone number compared to 9 532 requests in 2015.

Publicity appeals

A commonly used practice in the search for missing children is the use of publicity appeals. A publicity appeal uses communication channels such as posters, social media, websites etc. with information about a missing child aimed at the public in order to get information on the whereabouts or other information that may help in finding the child.

Yet, very little research has gone into understanding the long term impact of these publicity appeals on children and families during a missing incident and after the child is found. Missing Children Europe undertook a [scoping research on the effectiveness and impact of publicity appeals on missing children in 2016](#) to explore these questions.

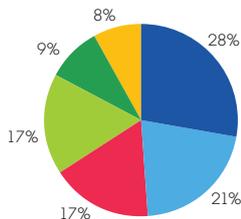
Calls made to hotlines by children versus adults



In 2016, calls made to the hotline by children increased by 12% compared to 2015. Regardless of who calls the hotline, hotline staff make every effort to ensure the support they provide is always in the best interest of the child.

Challenges and funding of hotlines for missing children

Key challenges faced by hotlines



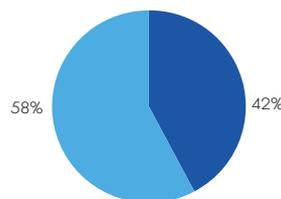
* Data from 21 hotlines

- Lack of financial resources
- The service is not known well enough by the public
- Little help from the government
- Lack of human resources
- Difficult cooperation with the police
- Difficult cooperation with the government agencies

The key challenges faced by hotlines have consistently been the lack of financial and human resources, lack of awareness of the service and lack of support from local and national governments.

Yet, it remains vital for hotlines to be open 24/7 due to the amount of calls received outside of office hours (22%).

Staff and volunteers operating hotlines for missing children



* Data from 25 hotlines

- Remunerated staff
- Volunteers

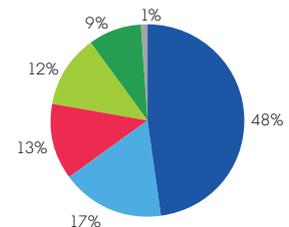
683 full time equivalent staff worked at hotlines for missing children in 2016 of which 58% were volunteers. We see a 22% increase in the number of volunteers working for the hotlines, and a 5% increase in the number of paid staff. All volunteers are trained to respond effectively to the needs of hotline callers.

As in previous years, lack of staff to answer calls is an important reason why all calls could not be answered in 2016.

Budget

The average annual expenditure in 2016 for the running of a 116 000 hotline was 309 367 euro. This is an almost 75% increase in their budget compared with 2015 when hotline funds were cut considerably. While the increase in the hotline's budget is positive, by comparison, it is still lower than the budget of hotlines in 2014.

Sources of funding for hotlines for missing children



* Data from 22 hotlines

- National government
- European Commission
- Private donors
- Corporate/business donors
- Other
- Statutory agencies

National governments provide almost half of the 116 000 hotline budget. The contribution from the European Commission has increased from 12% in 2015 to 17% in 2016 which is due to the fact that 15 hotlines received an action grant from the European Commission which started in mid-2016 and lasts up to 24 months. This might also explain the slight increase in staff answering calls. Private and corporate/business donors collectively contribute a sizeable 25% of budgets to run hotlines, up from 22% in 2015.

Funding provided by national governments however varies greatly across Member States. Despite the obligation of national authorities 'to make every effort to ensure citizens' access to the 116 000 hotline for missing children' based on the [Universal Service Directive](#), many national governments do not provide funding or support to hotlines for missing children.



Definition

Children who run away or are forced out of home, foster care or the institution where they have been placed.

- > 1 in 6 runaways sleeps rough, 1 in 8 begs or steals to survive and 1 in 12 runaways face serious harm including sexual exploitation.¹
- > Runaways are 9 times likelier to contemplate suicide than other children.²
- > 17.24% of children running away spent between a week to a month on the run while 8.74% spent between 1-6+ months away from home.³

“Things I miss while on the run? My mom. If she would say ‘come home, I will not let you down and you can stay with me as long as you want’... I would leave my friends to be with her. But because I know that she will call the police, and I’ve had problems with the police before, I won’t.”

17-year old girl, living in an institution

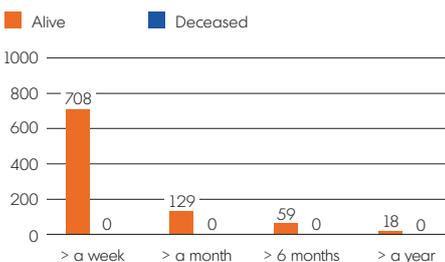
Age range

Children running away or forced out of home or care institutions were between the ages of 6 and 17 years old, with the highest number of children reported running away at the age of 15.

Children found

46% of the runaways reported to hotlines in 2016 were found in the same year, which shows a worrying decrease of 11% since 2015. Investigations to find missing children are conducted by law enforcement authorities.

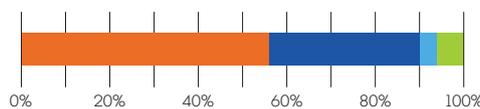
Timelapse of runaway children who were found



* Data from 11 hotlines

Children running away were usually found within a week of their disappearance in 2016.

Children running away more than once



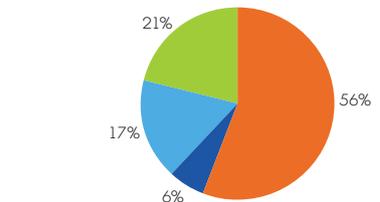
* Data from 12 hotlines

- 56% repeat runaways that ran away twice
- 34% repeat runaways that ran away 3-5 times
- 4% repeat runaways that ran away 6-10 times
- 6% repeat runaways that ran away more than 10 times

The percentage of children running away repeatedly has dropped from 20% in 2015 to 15% in 2016. However, the number of times these children run away has increased: children running away 3 times or more has increased from 34.7% in 2015 to 44% in 2016, and the percent of children running away 10 times or more has increased drastically, from 0.3% in 2015 to 6% in 2016.

This indicates persisting problems at these children’s homes or care institutions. Research shows that the more a child runs away, the more vulnerable they are because they are forced to use riskier strategies to survive.

Runaways generally ran away from



* Data from 16 hotlines

- Home/child's family
- Foster family
- Institution
- Unknown

Fewer children ran away from home in 2016 (56%) compared to 2015 (66%). The number of children running away from institutions dropped by 3% from the year before, while the number children running away from a foster family increased by 1%. However more children contacted the hotlines because they had run away but did not want to share where they had run away from (Unknown is up from 9% in 2015).

1. Children’s society, Make runaways safe, <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do/campaign-join/make-runaways-safe>
 2. Fondation pour l’Enfance, 2009
 3. Child Focus, Runaways profiles and trajectories (to be published in June 2017)

Parental Abductions



Definition

Children taken to or kept in a country other than that of his/her normal residence by one parent against the will of the other.

- > Some 2.1 million marriages take place in the EU each year⁴, of which 1 in 12 are mixed marriages⁵. Of these, 1 million couples file for divorce annually⁴.
- > In many countries, more foreign-born women are in a mixed marriage than foreign-born men. This could explain why mothers abduct their children more often than fathers⁵.

"After 3 months I was finally able to return to my father in the Netherlands, but everything changed drastically from that point on. A child loses both parents when there is a parental abduction. My mother, who abducted me, faded from my life and the relationship with my father was never the same as before."

18 year old boy who was abducted when he was 10 years old

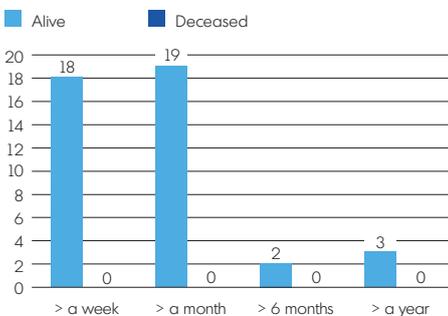
Age range

Children abducted by a parent were between 0 and 17 years old, with a peak at age 6.

Children found

26% of children abducted by a parent in 2016 were found the same year.

Timelapse of children abducted by a parent who were found



* Data from 11 hotlines

Most of the children abducted by a parent were found within a week (18) or a month (19) in 2016.

Data collected from the network of Cross-Border Family Mediators



Cross-Border Family Mediators

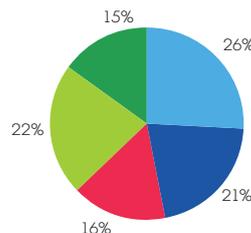
The network of Cross-Border Family Mediators brings together 157 bi-cultural family mediators from 37 countries specifically trained to deal with cross-border family conflicts. A study by the European Parliament found that family mediation brought about significant and measurable time and money savings in resolving cases of parental abductions. The network is coordinated by Missing Children Europe, MiKK and Child Focus.

General figures

In 2016, the network of Cross-Border Family Mediators dealt with an average of 2.5 cross-border family mediation cases per mediator. Of these mediations, almost two-third (62%) resulted in a (partial or full) mediation agreement.

Approximately 62% of the cross-border family mediation cases dealt with by mediators who are members of the network were referred to them by the Cross-border Family Mediators' network (32%) or via another member (30%). This is a much higher number than last year (30%), which shows that knowledge and access to mediation and the network of mediators is growing.

Conflicts addressed by the Cross-Border Family Mediators

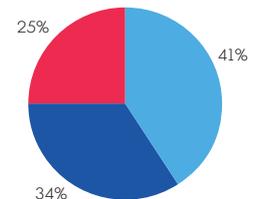


* Data from 40 mediators

- International child abduction
- International relocation
- Prevention of international child abduction
- Cross-border visitation rights
- Other cross-border family conflicts

26% of the cases worked on by mediators involved an international child abduction (20% in 2015) while another 21% involved an international relocation (13% in 2015). 16% of cases were related to the prevention of an international child abduction compared to 7% in 2015 which shows an increase in awareness of mediation as a solution for family conflict and mediation as a tool for prevention rather than solely for resolving cases of parental abduction after they occur. 22% of cases concerned cross-border visitation rights (41% in 2015) and 15% of cases were related to other cross-border family conflicts (19% in 2015).

Countries involved in cases handled by the Cross-Border Family Mediators



* Data from 42 mediators

- 2 EU countries
- 1 EU and 1 non-EU country
- 2 non-EU countries

41% of all mediated cases were undertaken between two EU Member States. Another 34% involved an EU Member State and a non-EU country while 25% of all cases involved 2 non-EU countries. In comparison to last year, we notice a shift in cases from the EU to a more diverse geographical distribution of cases. This is probably due to the fact that the network of Cross-Border Family Mediators welcomed additional members from non-EU countries over the past years.

In total, cases were mediated with cultures from 35 different countries and from every continent. In the EU, cases were mediated in 16 Member States. The most common countries that participated in mediation were USA (15 cases), Germany (14 cases), the UK (14 cases), Spain (9 cases) and France (9 cases).

4. Eurostat, Marriages and divorce statistics (June 2016)
5. Eurostat, Population and social conditions (29/2012)

Missing migrant children



Definition

A child who arrives in a Member State fleeing conflict or persecution, or in search of survival, security, improved standards of living, education, economic opportunities, protection from exploitation and abuse, family reunification or a combination of these or other factors, whose presence became known to authorities and whose whereabouts cannot be established.

- > A large majority of professionals working with unaccompanied children have never received training in preventing or responding to the disappearances of unaccompanied children.⁶
- > In 2015, at least 10 000 unaccompanied migrant children have disappeared within hours of being registered and only a handful have been found since, says Europol.⁷
- > 63 300 unaccompanied children are among the asylum seekers registered in the EU in 2016. Over half of them are Afghans or Syrians.⁸
- > Children are increasingly targeted by traffickers and unaccompanied children are increasingly being coerced into criminal activities and exploitation.⁹

"I arrived in the UK when I was just 13 years old and was completely alone. I spent a year travelling through 10 countries, was sent to jail, had my face burnt with chemicals and almost died in the Mediterranean. Three weeks after all this was finally over, I found myself in front of five strangers who were tasked with assessing my age. They were so careless they didn't bother to spell my name right or get the month and day of my birth correct on their form. They were in charge of my future."

Gulwali Passerlay, Former unaccompanied child and advocate for migrant rights

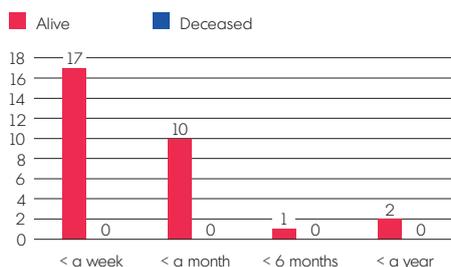
Age range

Children in migration, of which a majority were unaccompanied, have been reported missing from under a year up to 17 years of age. In Italy and Greece, several young girls under the age of 18 have been reported to give birth shortly after arrival in the reception centre, or to arrive with infants, only to disappear from the reception centre with their infants shortly after arrival. The peak age of migrant children going missing has fallen to 13 years of age from 15-16 years in 2015.

Children found

31% of (unaccompanied) migrant children who went missing were found in 2016.

Timelapse of missing (unaccompanied) children who were found



Most of the (unaccompanied) children found were found within a week (17) or a month (10) of their disappearance.

Ali was 15 and the youngest of four. He was taken care of his father in a small city close to Mogadishu, Somalia. His mother and older brother had died when he was too young to remember them. Both his sisters had already married and moved abroad – one was living in the UK and another was in Saudi Arabia. When Ali was 9, his father, a cook for the local police force, was killed by Al Shababb, an Islamist militant group, for refusing to poison the food of the police officers. Ali was then taken in by his uncle who made him work long hours on his farm and beat him regularly. One day, with the support of his uncle, Al Shabaab came knocking to recruit Ali as a fighter. Ali knew he had to escape and fled to Mogadishu where he lived on the streets for three months, cleaning shoes to make a living. He finally made contact with an old friend and colleague of his father who gave Ali somewhere to stay. However, once again aided by his uncle, Al Shabaab tracked him down and accused him of being a spy for the government. As a threat of the consequences he would face if he did not heed their demands, they sent him money and told him to buy his funeral ceremonial kaftan – clothes that are worn by the dead before they are cremated. At this point, Ali knew his life was in immediate danger. With the help of his father's former colleague, he escaped from Somalia and hoped to make his way to his sister. Currently Ali is in Cyprus and is staying at the shelter 'Home for Hope'. He still suffers from hearing loss today as a result of the physical beatings he received from his uncle. He hopes one day that he will get to join his sister in the UK.

Case from Consortium: SPAVO & HFC (Member organisation in Cyprus) based on children living in their refugee homes

6. Fundamental Rights Agency
7. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/30/fears-for-missing-child-refugees> (The Guardian, Jan 2016)
8. <http://www.europeanmigrationlaw.eu/en/articles/news/eurostat-asylum-applications-2016-unaccompanied-minors>
9. Taken from the background note of the 10th European Forum on the Rights of the Child

Criminal abductions



Definition

Abduction of a child by anyone other than the parents or persons with parental authority.

- > Nearly 1 in 100 children reported a stranger tried to get them to go somewhere, like into a car, and they thought they might be hurt.¹⁰
- > Children increasingly struggle to distinguish between a stranger and a non-stranger, especially in an age of social media.¹⁰

“We need to pay attention to attempted abduction attempts and not only abductions that happen. Perhaps if more parents reported abduction attempts, child abduction cases could be better understood and prevented.”

Dr. Karen Shalev Greene, Director of the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons

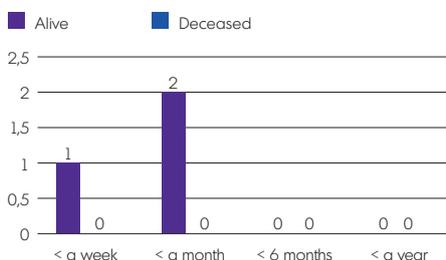
Age range

Children abducted by a third party who were reported to hotlines were as young as 6 and as old as 16 with a peak age of 13. However less than 1% of cases reported to hotlines involved a criminal abduction which is a drop from 1% in 2015.

Children found

33% of children abducted by a third party were found in 2016.

Timelapse of criminally abducted children who were found



* Data from 11 hotlines

Three of the children abducted were found within a week to a month. Research shows that in criminal abduction cases where the children are killed, it happens within the first 48 hours. Luckily, these three children were brought to safety thanks to cooperation between hotlines for missing children and the police.

10. Beyond Stranger Danger (2014): <http://www.actionagainstabduction.org/portfolio/beyond-stranger-danger-published-in-2014/>

Lost, injured or otherwise missing



Definition

Disappearances of children who may have gotten lost or hurt themselves and cannot be found immediately or whose reason for disappearing has not yet been determined.

- > 1 000 children get lost at the Belgian coast every year¹¹.

“At one point it gets dark and that’s when the panic sets in. He still isn’t back. They say that time heals all wounds, but that’s not true. It’s something you can never come to terms with”

Father of 2 year old boy who disappeared from his grandparents’ house 20 years ago

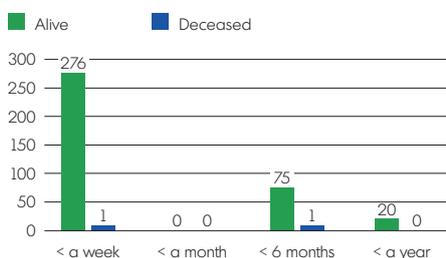
Age range

Lost, injured or otherwise missing children went missing from the age of 1.5 months to 18 years. 14 was the most common age for this category of missing children.

Children found and cases closed

70% of the children reported in this category were found within the same year.

Timelapse of lost, injured or otherwise missing children who were found



Most of the children found in this category are found within a week (276) which also corresponds with children getting lost and then being found shortly after. Of the children not found alive, a child had drowned and another had committed suicide.

11. https://www.rtb.be/info/dossier/bon-a-savoir/detail_une-app-missing-children-europe-pour-faire-retenir-aux-enfants-le-numero-de-leurs-parents?id=9346323

Hotlines for missing children



116 000 

■ Countries operating the 116 000 hotline

📍 Countries where hotlines are run by members of Missing Children Europe

Get involved and keep in touch

Make a donation

Help us continue protecting missing children:
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Donations over 40 euros made by residents in Belgium, France and Luxembourg are eligible to receive a tax exemption certificate.

Join the Notfound campaign

Download the free [notfound app](#), on your website and give missing children another chance to be found. Go to [notfound.org](#) to learn more.

Participate in a fundraising event

Run, cycle, golf or play bridge at one of our fundraising events this year. Register now to make a difference in children's lives.

Partner with us

Sponsor a project to create a safer Europe for children or become a partner at one of our fundraising events. Find out how on our [website](#).

Volunteer to do good

Have time and passion to dedicate to the cause? Get in touch at supporting.committee@missingchildreneurope.eu

Fundraise in fun ways

Do something fun, get your friends involved and fundraise for us via [missingchildreneurope.givengain.org](#)

Download the ReMUMber app

Make it easy for your children to learn your phone number. ReMUMber is a fun app that will help children memorise your phone number in no time.

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