

In Europe a child disappears every two minutes

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We are talking about children who run away from their home, were kidnapped or were taken away from their parents. Others, instead, run away from wars, poverty and natural catastrophes.

If they are unaccompanied children, they run the risk of disappearing as exploitation or trade victims, the risk of being abused during their journey.

It is the invisible-children army: just think about the fact that in Europe, every two minutes, a child disappears, according to the latest data of Missing Children Europe, a network of 29 non-governmental organizations operating in 24 European countries, which manages as much telephone lines for missing children.

The only one telephone number for the European countries is 116 000 and it is a 24 hours-a-day service. In Italy it is managed by Telefono Azzurro, in agreement with the home office, since May, 25th 2009.

On the occasion of the international day of missing children, that every year is celebrated on May, 25th, Telefono azzurro wants people to pay even more attention to this theme of dramatic modernity.

This year, in Palazzo Ferrajoli (Rome), during the event “Missing, exploited, unaccompanied children: the risks of a no future childhood,” some national and international data aimed at defining the problem were presented in advance.

In Europe, in 2015, the calls received by the European network for missing children were 209,841, of which 54% concerning children who **run away from their home**, while 29% concerning cases of parental abduction. During the same year, in Italy, the cases of missing children, who run away from their home/institute or were kidnapped, were 163 and were managed by Telefono Azzurro, through 116,000, by the Listening Line 19696 and by the 114 Childhood Emergency.

However the most worrying data concerns the unaccompanied foreign children. In an year in which, according to Europol’s data, the unaccompanied migrant children who disappeared after reaching Europe were 10,000, the calls to the 116.000 telephone lines regarding these cases seem misleadingly low: only 2% were the cases in Europe in 2015, showing a great underestimation of the phenomenon.

Even though from 2009 to 2014 the Italian percentages were aligned with the European ones, from 2015 to the first quarter of 2016, the boom of the migration phenomenon in Italy indicates a great increase in the trend: in 2015 the cases of unaccompanied foreign children represented 40% of the cases, and only in the first three months of 2016 amounted to 33 reports received.

Ernesto Caffo, president of Telefono Azzurro, member of the Missing Children Europe board and representative of the MCE on the unaccompanied foreign children subject said: **“Modernity lead us to pay even more attention to the issue of unaccompanied foreign children.** The failure of the integration system for these children affects in a significant way their disappearing. Often foreign children and teenagers, who came to Italy, are alone and run the risk of disappearing, involved in illegal

and deviant trades and trade victims, involved in the criminality, illegal employment and in the sexual exploitation. A greater involvement of institutions is necessary not only to prevent the disappearing of foreign unaccompanied children but also to strengthen the reception, integration and care system that today they enjoy.”

For this reason, thanks to the support of Poste Insieme Onlus foundation, which became official in conjunction with the international day of missing children, the activities of the 116,000 service managed by the Telefono azzurro will be strengthened, in order to give to unaccompanied children more support, from psychological support up to advice for practical, legal and social questions.

2015 was an year particularly arduous for the 116 000 European hotlines. The European Union loans , on which a lot of lines rely on, were interrupted, causing a decrease in the balance (52%) and in the resources used in the operation of the service (31%). This latter decrease made it impossible to answer to 38% of the incoming calls, due to a great increase in cases from 2011 to 2014.

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