

Comparative EU Study on Unaccompanied Minors

To complement the Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors, the European Commission presents an EU Comparative Study on Unaccompanied Minors which has been produced by the European Migration Network (EMN)¹.

The purpose of the study is to fill a gap in information on policies concerning unaccompanied minors in the EU. These range from an assessment of identified reason(s) and circumstance(s) for entering the EU, to entry procedures, reception arrangements, including integration measures, detention, return and identified best practices. In addition, statistics on unaccompanied minors have also been compiled.

Main findings of the study

Several, varied and interconnected reasons and circumstances for entering the EU have been identified. These range from fleeing persecution and seeking protection, family reunification, economic reasons, hope for a better life, to join the migrant/diaspora community, to transit to another (predominantly EU-15) Member State, as victims of trafficking or of smuggling, for medical reasons or abandonment, or as runaways or drifters.

It was also found that whilst entry procedures, including border controls for unaccompanied minors who lodge an application for asylum are well-established and more-or-less harmonised across the Member States, this is not to the same extent in other cases. A key component of the reception arrangements for unaccompanied minors who apply for asylum is **the appointment of a guardian**, or equivalent. Unaccompanied minors who are **victims of trafficking in human beings, most often are granted a specific residence permit** offering (short-term) protection.

Naturally, all Member States provide accommodation and other care facilities for unaccompanied minors. Often the Member States will also provide access to healthcare, education and, subject to national conditions being met, to employment. However, **a disturbing number of disappearances from some care facilities occurred in a number of Member States**. In the best-case scenario, this is because the unaccompanied minor left an open accommodation facility to join family already living in the Member State, whilst the worst case scenario is that these minors are then victims of trafficking and subjected to exploitation.

Accurate and consistent **methods for the determination of the age** of an unaccompanied minor in cases of doubt were found to be a challenge common to all Member States. The general practice, however, is for Member States to give the benefit of the doubt and to use the lower age determined.

¹ The [European Migration Network \(EMN\)](#) was established through [Council Decision 2008/381/EC](#) and serves to provide up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum, with a view to supporting policymaking in the EU. It provides this information also to the wider public.

The **detention of an unaccompanied minor in general occurs only as a last resort**, with some Member States not detaining an unaccompanied minor under any circumstances. Most often, an unaccompanied minor is detained with a view to his/her eventual removal or if they have committed a criminal offence. With regard to the provisions in the Return Directive concerning the detention of minors, almost all Member States report that these are already met in their current national legislation.

The return and reintegration of unaccompanied minors to their country of origin is first and foremost only undertaken if considered in the minor's best interest. In practice, as for detention, **the numbers of those returned are generally low**, with only assisted returns, often with a degree of reintegration and undertaken via programmes such as those conducted by the IOM.

Figures and statistics

Statistics on unaccompanied minors are not widespread or consistent, with the most comprehensive and comparable data on those unaccompanied minors who lodge an application for asylum. According to the data presented in the report, **in 2008 there were a total of 11 292 applications for asylum lodged by unaccompanied minors in the 22 Member States** (exceptions are Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Luxembourg, Romania) participating in this study.

The distribution of applications across Member States varied widely, from less than 10 to up to 4 285, as did the country of nationality of the unaccompanied minors, although **overall nationals of Afghanistan, Iraq and some African states** were prominent. In terms of the sex and age of the unaccompanied minors, generally the **most significant group were males aged 16 years or above**. An overall comparison with 2007 is possible for 21 of the participating Member States (the exception is Italy for which no data are available in 2007), when there were a total of 8 050 such applications, representing an increase of 33 percent in 2008 compared to 2007 for these 21 Member States.

For 2009, Eurostat data gives a total of 10 960 unaccompanied minors who lodged applications in 22 Member States (this time excluding Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Poland, Romania). This still represented **an increase of 13 percent from 2008** when a like-for-like comparison is made with the same 22 Member States, with 9 695 asylum applications lodged by unaccompanied minors in these 22 Member States during 2008.

Additional data, as far as possible, is also presented in the EMN Synthesis Report on those in the care of public authorities, in detention, assisted returns, refusals of entry, apprehensions, victims of trafficking, family reunification and Eurodac checks. However, these data are more limited, partly because the recorded numbers are low and not available in all Member States.

The EMN Synthesis Report, as well as the 22 National Reports upon which the synthesis is based, are available at:

<http://emn.sarenet.es/Downloads/prepareShowFiles.do?directoryID=115>

For more information

[MEMO/10/168](#)