**EMN: The number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors has doubled in the EU**

*A recent comparative study reports that last year more than 24,000 unaccompanied minors sought asylum in the EU. In Finland, the number of these asylum seekers is increasing slightly.*

The number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors coming from third countries to the EU Member States has nearly doubled in five years, reveals a comparative study published by the European Migration Network (EMN). In the EU area, the countries receiving the highest number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors are Sweden (29%), Germany (18%) and Italy (10%).

In Finland, too, the number of these asylum seekers has increased somewhat recently. In 2014, their number was 196, whereas in 2013, it was 161. This year, 141 applications were received by the end of May.

However, in Finland the number of applications has decreased by several hundred from the peak years of 2008–2009 as a result of changes in the legislation and practices related to family reunification, among other factors.

Only a few countries can provide comparative data on minors who are not seeking asylum. Their number in the EU Member States was certainly more than 8,500 in 2013. The majority of them arrive in Italy. In Finland, practically all minors who arrive in the country unaccompanied seek international protection.

**Most applications are filed by teenage boys**

The majority of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors that arrive in EU Member States come from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Syria. In Finland, approximately half come from Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. In most cases, the asylum seeker is a boy close to the age of majority. The age of the asylum seeker is assessed on the basis of documents and registers and by hearing the asylum seeker and, if necessary, through a medical age assessment.

The reasons why minors leave their home country are usually prolonged conflicts or a general feeling of insecurity. Better education and employment opportunities are also appealing. However, often the decision about a minor’s departure is made by someone else than the minor him-/herself. Background factors include a desired family reunification or economic reasons, for instance.

**Detention of minors to be limited with the law**

In Finland, the authorities always process applications filed by minors with urgency. The authorities appoint a representative for a minor who arrives in Finland unaccompanied and the minor is accommodated in a reception centre intended for minors.

The detention of minors is an exceptional practice in the EU Member States. In some countries, the detention of unaccompanied minors is prohibited altogether. In Finland, the intention of the legislative amendment approved by the Parliament in March 2015 is to prohibit the detention of unaccompanied minors under 15 years of age and to limit the detention of those older than that.

A relatively small number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors have gone missing in Finland (only 10 minors in 2013). There are various reasons behind disappearances, and missing children have been at the upper end of the age range. A couple of disappearance cases have raised suspicion of trafficking in human beings. At the EU level, reliable comparative data on disappearances is not available for all Member States, but, for instance, Sweden reported that in 2013 there were nearly 400 disappearances.

**Links to studies:**

[Policies, practices and data on unaccompanied minors in the EU Member States and Norway](http://www.emn.fi/files/1232/emn_study_policies_practices_and_data_on_unaccompanied_minors_in_the_eu_member_states_and_norway_synthesis_report_final_eu_2015.pdf)

[Policies, practices and data on unaccompanied minors in 2014–Finland’s National Contribution](http://www.emn.fi/files/1056/EMN_Minors_ENG_ja_FIN_FINAL.pdf)

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| **About the EMN**  The Finnish National Contact Point for the European Migration Network (EMN) operates in connection with the Finnish Immigration Service. National contact points have been set up in each EU Member State, as well as in Norway, which also participates in the network. The network is chaired by the EU Commission.  The task of the EMN is to support policy-making in the European Union by providing up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum. In addition to politicians and government officials, information is also disseminated to the general public.  Among the most important outputs of the EMN are annual reports on the development of the immigration policies of EU Member States and institutions, as well as various thematic studies on topical migration issues.  Finland’s national EMN website is at [www.emn.fi](http://www.emn.fi/). |