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Education and language skills pose a challenge to the integration of unaccompanied minors

Approximately 2,000 asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors were granted a residence permit for Finland in 2014–2017. According to the recent national report by the European Migration Network (EMN), in Finland this group is given special attention despite its small size. The integration and inclusion of unaccompanied minors were discussed at a seminar organised by EMN on 11 October 2018.

“Nearly all unaccompanied minors who come to Finland are asylum seekers. The majority of them are 14–17-year-old boys. The top three countries of origin among asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors arriving in Finland are Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. In addition, arrivals in Finland include a few unaccompanied minors who apply for a residence permit instead of seeking asylum, on the basis of a family tie, for instance,” summarises **Johanna Väänänen**, Senior Adviser at EMN.

Although nearly all asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors are granted a right of residence, their family members rarely get a residence permit for Finland. This poses challenges to the minors’ well-being and integration.

“Nevertheless, our study indicated that the care and accommodation of unaccompanied minors is well-organised. Although their numbers are small, special attention is paid to their integration,” notes Väänänen.

Studies promote integration

In Finland, measures related to the care, accommodation and education of unaccompanied minors are regulated by law and, as a rule, their rights are implemented well. Minors can attend school during the asylum process and the law guarantees them the same healthcare services as other residents of the municipality.

“Education and language studies of unaccompanied minors are invested in. The minors are provided with the same educational opportunities as other young people of their age living in Finland. However, most of them are near the end of their compulsory school age and thus they are late for properly participating in basic schooling. Particular attention should be paid to their integration and they should be encouraged to study. After the end of their compulsory school age, these youngsters are offered the chance to complete their basic education in adult education services,” emphasises Väänänen.

In addition to basic education, resources should be allocated to improving these youngsters’ language skills, as basic education certificate and sufficient language skills are usually prerequisites for further studies and finding employment.

“One option would be to organise dedicated, concise basic education for immigrants reaching adulthood, also taking into account the improvement of language skills. Language skills and education promote integration and facilitate inclusion in Finnish society.”

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Background: The number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors returned to its earlier level

Approximately 2,000 unaccompanied minors were granted a residence permit for Finland in 2014–2017. In 2011–2014, roughly 150–200 asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors arrived in Finland per year. In 2015, the number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors reached a record-breaking level, exceeding 3,000. Later, the number has returned to its earlier level: 142 in 2017 and 70 by the end of this September. Fluctuation in the number of asylum seekers has posed challenges to the minors' accommodation arrangements, among other things.

According to the EMN synthesis report describing the situation in the member states, in 2014–2017, the number of asylum-seeking unaccompanied minors arriving in the EU and Norway was 220,000. More than 80% of unaccompanied minors were granted a right of residence. The countries receiving the highest number of asylum applications were Germany (71,675), Sweden (45,065) and Italy (22,540). The asylum seekers came mainly from Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea, Iraq and Somalia.

National report of Finland: http://www.emn.fi/files/1855/EMN_UAM_EN_FI_NETTI3.pdf

EMN synthesis report:

http://www.emn.fi/files/1856/00_eu_synthesis_report_unaccompanied_minors_2017_en.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 European Migration Network celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2018.

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.

The international website of the European Migration Network: <https://ec.europa.eu/emn>

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