

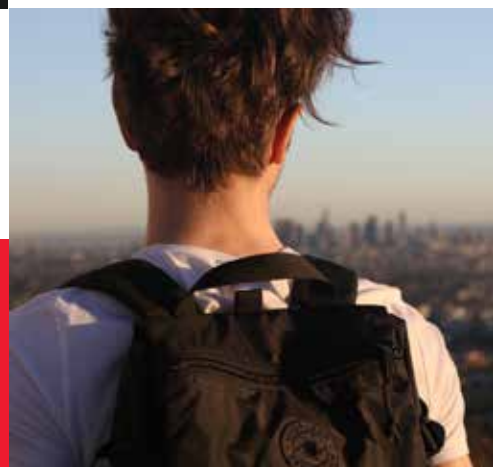


GREETING

TO THE NORDIC POLITICIANS
AND UNACCOMPANIED MINORS



**Nordic Welfare
Centre**



Text and adaption of the report "Society's reception of unaccompanied refugee minors in the Nordic region" by Anna Gärdegård: Caroline Jonsson.
www.nordicwelfare.org



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Greeting to the Nordic politicians and unaccompanied minors

"Canada's Minister of Immigration arrived in Canada as an unaccompanied minor when he was 16 years old. He's done very well. When politicians say that we unaccompanied minors have unrealistic expectations of what we can achieve in the Nordic countries, they send a signal that we differ from other young residents of the Nordic countries. That we have dreams that can never be achieved, just because we are born in a different country and want to become lawyers, doctors and engineers in a new country. People believe that unaccompanied minors don't know and can't do anything. Their ignorance is what drives me. I want to be a good role model for other unaccompanied minors.

When I came to Norway as an unaccompanied minor, I didn't have anything. Today, I have a full life.

Follow your dreams, stand up for your rights and don't give up. Work hard for what you believe in. Today, I am involved in party politics and civil society for children's rights. Through good solutions, we can leverage the Nordic welfare model – solutions that are based on everyone being able to succeed and achieve their dreams.

Let us mark the end of the long-lasting policies of exclusion.

Let us invest in a good integration policy. Time is of the essence."

Ismail A. Hussein from Somalia

Lives: Svolvær, Nordland, Norway

Arrival: five years ago

Residence permit: Yes



"Young people with the future ahead of them"

"We have to begin talking about unaccompanied refugee minors as a resource for society. They are young people with their whole future ahead of them," says Anna Gärdegård, Project Manager at the Nordic Welfare Centre and responsible for the mapping report "Society's reception of unaccompanied refugee minors in the Nordic region".

In cooperation with Nordic researchers and civil servants, Anna Gärdegård was responsible for the mapping report "Society's reception of unaccompanied refugee minors in the Nordic region", which among other things describes the responsibilities of the authorities, leisure time, after-care, social services, housing and health care.

"In Hyllestad and Ibestad, Norway, Ærø, Denmark and Åsele and Sorsele, Sweden, unaccompanied refugee minors account for around 10 per cent of the total number of children. For the entire Nordic region, the average is eight per thousand children, or 0.8 per cent," explains Gärdegård.

Based on the flow of refugees in 2015, the Nordic Welfare Centre saw a need to start a project on unaccompanied refugee children in the Nordic region.

"The Nordic countries have had to face new practical issues. There is an extensive need for knowledge about what the reception and handling of these children and adolescents looks like in each country – and what we can learn from each other," says Project Manager Anna Gärdegård.

Shifting legal system

The asylum process is carried out in similar manners throughout the Nordic region. There are also differences, such as how long the residence permits are valid or how the reception municipalities are organised.

The mapping shows that education is of central importance to the possibilities of integration in the new country. Children seeking asylum are entitled to education in all of the Nordic countries. Anna Gärdegård describes the challenge of staying up-to-date in the changing political climate where frequent new legislative proposals are being presented throughout the Nordic region.

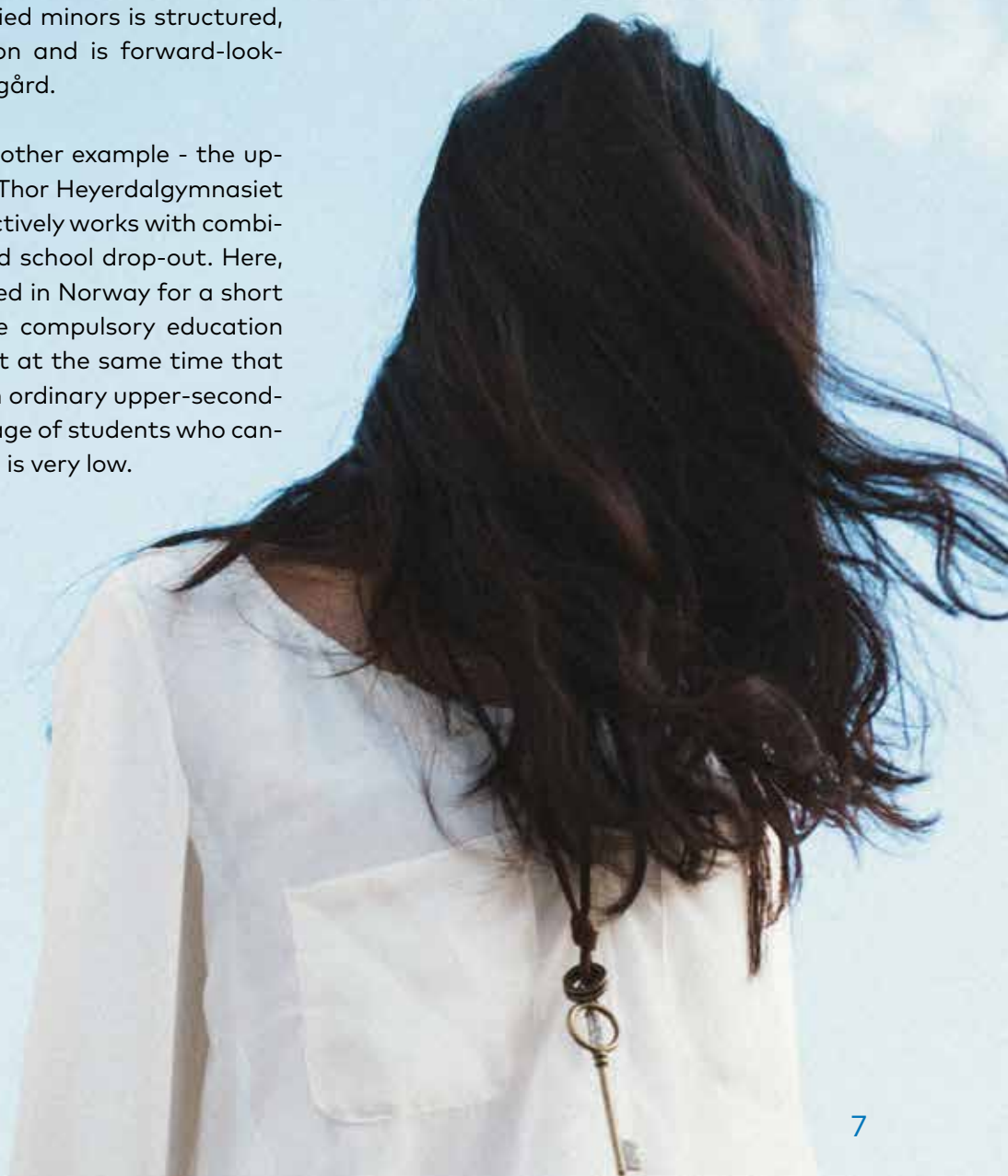
"A shifting legal system affects everyone who has to interpret and apply the intentions of the law makers. Above all, it has consequences for the people it affects – the unaccompanied refugee minors. New legislative proposals are being presented at a rapid pace, creating new conditions for such aspects as housing and school. This unpredictability becomes tangible in terms of planning and moving on in life."

Looking for learning examples

Part of the project is about identify examples to learn from. Trelleborg Municipality in Sweden has welcomed a large number of unaccompanied refugee minors. Here, housing facilities are called "establishment housing". The municipality adapts its interventions to the needs of each individual. All efforts are intended to support the unaccompanied refugee minors into studies and work.

"One week after arrival, a plan for establishment for the future is formulated. The work with the unaccompanied minors is structured, strengthens motivation and is forward-looking," says Anna Gärdegård.

In Norway, there is another example - the upper-secondary school Thor Heyerdalgymnasiet in Larvik. The school actively works with combination classes to avoid school drop-out. Here, students who have lived in Norway for a short period of time receive compulsory education with language support at the same time that they are included in an ordinary upper-secondary class. The percentage of students who cannot handle the studies is very low.





Anna Gärdegård, Project manager and author of the report "Society's reception of unaccompanied refugee minors in the Nordic region"

Great resource – if individual needs are met

Anna Gärdegård believes that we have to talk about the unaccompanied refugee minors as the resource they are, as all children and young people are. She understands the challenge, for example, for media to convey stories about these children and young people and about the reception process where the legal system and its consequences is in focus. Nonetheless, she is surprised that the reporting often builds on anecdotes and that there are surprisingly few positive voices.

"Studies at Stockholm University show that the unaccompanied refugee minor group succeeds better in the Swedish labour market than children and young people who have arrived with their parents. One conclusion is that unaccompanied refugee minors are more quickly integrated into society thanks to the support of the social services."

Around 50,000 unaccompanied refugee minors are in Sweden alone. This is a matter of young people with their whole future ahead of them with the same needs as any teenager. They need to get attention from an adult – somebody who asks them how they are doing and how their day went.

Broader focus on research and integration

In 2017, the Nordic Welfare Centre will continue the work with a focus on research and learning examples of integration of recently arrived children and young people in the Nordic region. Research has shown that the group of recently arrived children who come to the Nordic region with their guardians also need to be highlighted. These children also need to be included in the continued work of the Nordic Welfare Centre.

FACTS

- *Unaccompanied refugee minors comprise the group of children under the age of 18 who apply for asylum without a guardian.*
- *In 2015, 45,765 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in the Nordic countries.*
- *Around 35,000 of them applied for asylum in Sweden.*
- *Most came from Afghanistan, followed by Eritrea, Syria, Iraq and Somalia as the most common countries of origin.*

ESPOO INVESTING IN AFTER-CARE

Minors who arrive without a guardian often need advice, guidance and support even after they have turned 18. The social services in Espoo offer former unaccompanied refugee minors the largest range of services in Finnish after-care.

Aino-Marja Kairamo, Social Worker, and
Henna Leppamaki, Manager in the Social
Services of Espoo Municipality in Finland.



In Espoo, young people between the ages of 18 and 21 with residence permits receive after-care in the form of regular meetings, home visits, study and working life support, free-time activities and financial assistance. Aino-Marja Kairamo, Social Worker, and Henna Leppamaki, Manager in the social services, work among other things with the handling of matters regarding unaccompanied refugee minors in Espoo, Finland:

"We are responsible for giving the unaccompanied minors all the support they need. Housing is a first priority."

Voluntary after-care

Municipalities that offer interventions receive compensation for after-care by the state. Espoo and another municipality were the first up. Since 2015, growing numbers of municipalities are implementing after-care, but far from all. "We have welcomed the largest number of unaccompanied refugee minors and offer the largest range of support. In Espoo, the young people only have to visit one office. That's our foremost strength in the reception," says Leppamaki.

Aino-Marja Kairamo and Henna Leppamaki believe that stable housing, adapted to individual needs, is the foundation for further efforts. The municipality strives for a housing guarantee for unaccompanied refugee minors. This objective has been achieved to-date. In addition, all former unaccompanied refugee minors between the ages of 18 and 21 are studying today.

Unique school cooperation

"The social services have been represented in the school setting for more than ten years – a working model that works excellently. It is an unusual resource. Early interventions to keep

them from dropping out of school," says Leppamaki.

This working model is unique to Espoo. Two social workers are employed full time to work in the school where there are unaccompanied refugee minors. If problems arise, teachers, students and social workers can handle the problem quickly and talk directly with each other, explains Leppamaki.

"Young people who have lived in Finland a short time have many needs. They are in school most of the day. Consequently, interventions have to be moved to the school where general support are combined with individual support."

Unaccompanied minors are usually easy to motivate to study, Aino-Marja Kairamo explains. However, they are often affected by stress. What is happening in the home country? How is the family doing? These thoughts disturb sleep and concentration on their studies.

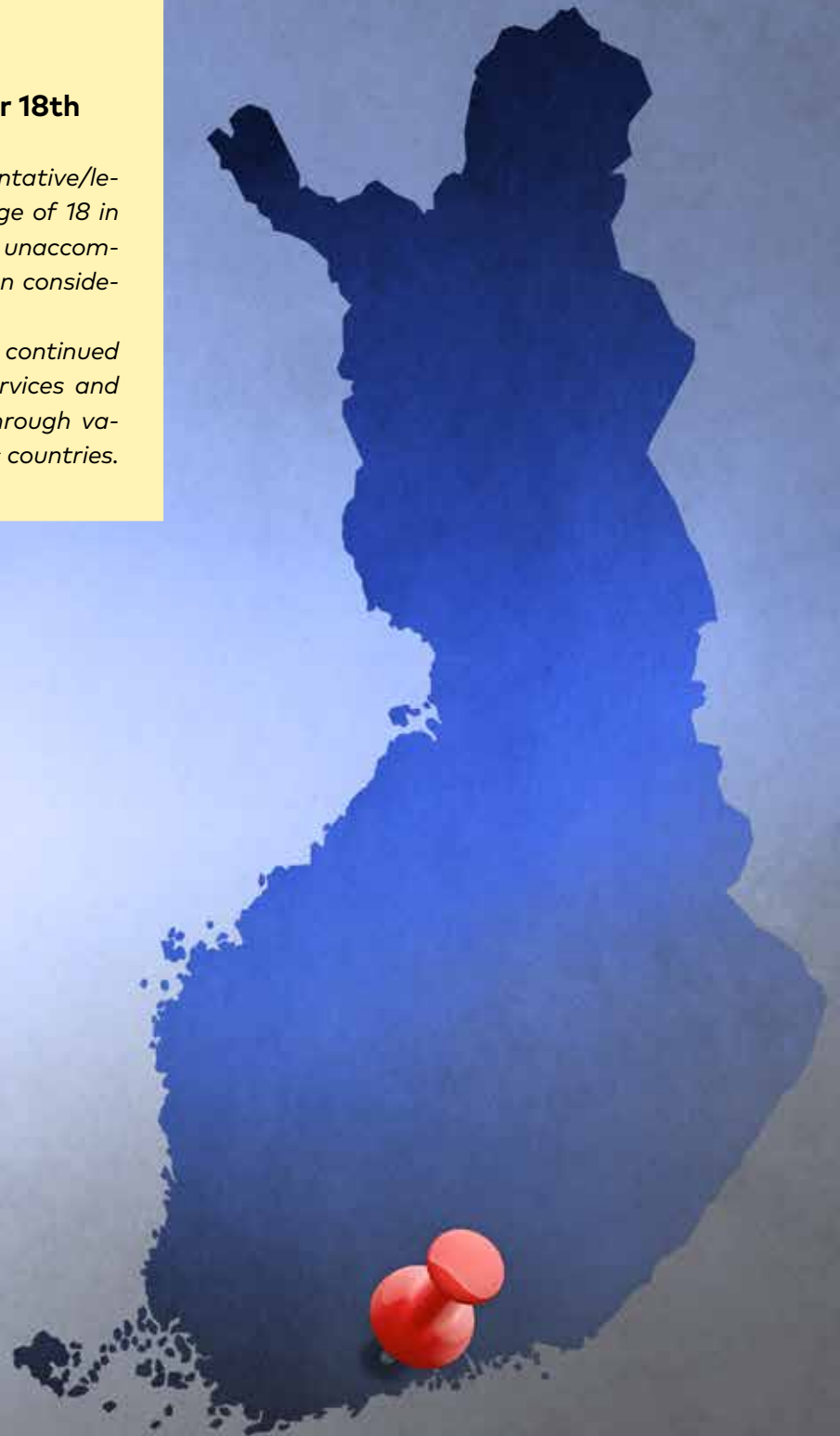
We learn to say hi"

The greatest challenge in the work is the loneliness that many experience, continues Kairamo. Joining forces, the municipality organises free-time activities in cooperation with the school and NGOs. At the same time, everyone in the team of social workers experiences a great deal of meaningfulness, explains Aino-Marja Kairamo and Henna Leppamaki:

"We follow the unaccompanied minors' emotional low periods with periods of strength. They arrive empty handed and often create content in life surprisingly quickly. These children and young people are a huge resource for society. Their way of interacting with others is inspiring. They break through our quiet Finnish way of approaching each other. We learn to say hi."

What happens after their 18th birthday?

- *The right to a legal representative/legal guardian ends at the age of 18 in all the Nordic countries. The unaccompanied refugee minor is then considered an adult.*
- *There are possibilities for continued support from the social services and integration programmes through various actors in all the Nordic countries.*





WITHOUT LEISURE TIME – NO FUTURE

To date, 3,500 refugee children in Denmark, including unaccompanied minors, have received financial assistance for free-time activities through the “Fritidspuljen” (a funding pool for leisure activities) of the Danish Refugee Council. The NGO also provides teaching, housing, advice and a network of volunteers.



In Denmark, refugee children, unaccompanied minors and adults between the ages of 18 and 30 with residence permits can apply for grants for leisure activities from Fritidspuljen, a funding pool for leisure activities in the non-governmental organisation, the Danish Refugee Council. The aim is to strengthen refugees' quality of life and integration and offer an active leisure time:

"Social involvement is a prerequisite for successful integration. Limited financial resources make it difficult to offer a meaningful leisure time to unaccompanied minors, equivalent to the conditions of Danish young people," says Anette Christoffersen - Director of the Integration Division at the Danish Refugee Council.

Hundred applications a week

As a result of continued savings in the refugee area, the daily newspaper Dagbladet Politiken, OAK Foundation Denmark and the Danish Refugee Council took the initiative to the collection "Without leisure time - no future". DKK 10 million was raised for refugees to be able to participate in association life and Fritidspuljen was formed, explains Christoffersen. "The Danish Refugee Council has a huge need for financing. A hundred applications for grants from Fritidspuljen are received every week. Since 2015, funding has been granted for more than 3,500 refugee children."



Anette Christoffersen - Director of the Integration Division of the Danish Refugee Council, a non-governmental organisation.

Learn to debate

In Denmark, asylum seeking children have the right, based on the Aliens Act, to special educational programmes, asylum schools, linked to the housing unit. The education should be equivalent to the compulsory school syllabus. When unaccompanied minors are given refugee status and housing placement in a municipality, they often begin language training at the Lærdansk language centres operated by the Danish Refugee Council. In a survey, 84 per cent of the students say that they are satisfied with the instruction.

"In Lærdansk, instruction is provided to smaller groups based entirely on individual needs," explains Christoffersen. Knowledge of Nordic democracy and freedom of speech is included. Independence, decision making and debate techniques are skills practised throughout the programme.

Education

Children seeking asylum are entitled to education in all the Nordic countries. Most of the children are not placed directly in ordinary school as a rule. They most often receive preparatory education - mainly introduction to language skills. The municipality is responsible for offering a place in school to children seeking asylum.

- In Norway, the child has the right to school if he or she is expected to be in the country longer than three months and in Denmark if the child is expected to be in the country at least six months.
- In Finland, there is no time stipulated. The right to basic education applies to all children.
- In Sweden, asylum seeking children have the right to begin school within one month. Asylum seeking children are not subject to compulsory school attendance, which they are in the rest of the Nordic countries (to the end of upper-secondary school). Students with residence permits valid for at least one year are, however, subject to compulsory school attendance.



Ismael Jafari from Afghanistan

Lives: Malmö, Sweden

Arrival: one year ago

Residence permit: No - awaiting a decision

Ismael Jafari

"There wasn't room for me in school I heard. I waited four months to begin school. Let us begin studying directly. Adapt the education to prior knowledge from the home country. Some have seven years of education - others have never gone to school. It's impossible for students who have never learned mathematics to understand anything. Many need study support. One teacher has always fought for me and arranged the right instruction. She is almost like my mother.

Housing

The migration authorities in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland have overall responsibility for the reception of unaccompanied refugee minors. Temporary housing is arranged during the asylum process. Housing in group homes, at institutional reception facilities or housing with extended family network is most common. Family based care such as foster families are used more seldom.

- All Swedish municipalities has a responsibility for housing and care of unaccompanied minors and the social services are responsible. The other Nordic countries have special reception municipalities.
- Norway has a similar arrangement as Sweden for children up to the age of 15.
- The Danish Immigration Service in Denmark has delegated to Børneindkvarteringscentre (children housing centres), which are operated by the Danish Red Cross or by a municipality in the asylum phase.

As a new arrival, you don't know anyone. It's tough and stressful to wait for a decision. Once I began school, I never wanted to go home. After the last lesson, I stayed at the school's homework help session and then went straight to the Ensamkommandes förbund. I will begin upper-secondary school in the autumn. Then I will become a doctor. I will show everyone who doesn't believe in me that it's possible."

Adib Waes

"The best medicine against loneliness is the language. Letters, or text messages from authorities, are written in Norwegian. If I don't understand what it says, I have to find an interpreter. That takes time. That way was never attractive for me. To be able to contribute to society, work and create a meaningful leisure time, you must communicate.

Put unaccompanied minors in regular classes straight away. I came from Syria alone. After half a year, I could speak Norwegian. If you can't speak for yourself, you always feel alone. Use every minute to learn the language. See the possibilities - there are loads of them!"

"Schools need to mix students with different backgrounds and cultures to learn the language, create discussions and increase an understanding for each other. That will make it easier for unaccompanied minors to be integrated into society." *Mahboba Madadi - Chairperson of Ensamkommandes förbund*



Adib Waes from Syria

Lives: Oslo, Norway

Arrival: four years ago

Residence permit: Yes

"Sometimes when the anxiety strikes I leave school. The teacher asks why, but I don't have the strength to explain. I need to listen to music or go to Ensamkommandes förbund. I feel better there. At the association, there's understanding, help and support. Before I found my way here, I sat in my room and looked at Facebook. My worries made me constantly phone my legal guardian and social worker. The volunteers and other unaccompanied minors makes life better. I make friends and get help with my homework. I learn to play the guitar and swim. I've become good at ping pong." *Ismael Jafari*

Leisure time

The organisations of civil society play an important role in their function to introduce the minor into the local community. The value of leisure activities is often emphasised in various reports. However, there is often a lack of information on which authority or actor that has the responsibility for leisure time activities. The Danish Refugee Council and Ensamkommandes förbund in Sweden are examples of organisations that offer leisure activities.

Ensamkommande förbund

Ensamkommandes förbund, an association for unaccompanied minors, in Sweden, is a party political and religiously independent association that consists of and is operated by self-organised unaccompanied minors and former unaccompanied minors. The association encourages young people's involvement in society, creates meetings and arranges leisure activities, such as outings, summer camps, sports, music and theatre projects, as well as cultural festivals, study circles and lectures.

"Foster homes are good, but there are different kinds of people. Some families view you as their own. Others are driven by money. You feel the difference. If you live with people like that, it's hard to concentrate in school. I've lived in different kinds of homes. Now I live with a good family who helps me with everything. I'm safe here." **Ismael Jafari**



Ismail A. Hussein from Somalia

Lives: Svolvær, Nordland, Norway

Arrival: five years ago

Residence permit: Yes

Ismail A. Hussein

"The municipality should invest in unpaid work placement as an educational intervention. Let those who came as unaccompanied minors gain a local tie to working life that provides knowledge for life. Work is important. Money can wait. Mentorship is needed in school, where peers help unaccompanied minors make their way into local settings.

A large network makes life easier. This summer, I will finish upper-secondary school. After that, I will follow my dream and continue studying. I will motivate other unaccompanied minors to do the same."

"The responsibility for leisure time should be divided between the municipality and civil society. Volunteer organisations can't bear the full responsibility. The municipality doesn't do as much as the local civil society. When I move to Oslo, I'm going to start an Ensamkommandes förbund in Norway. It will be exciting. I'll talk with some people and put together good suggestions. An organisation for unaccompanied minors should be led by other young people who have succeeded in society."

Ismail A. Hussein

Mahboba Madadi - Chairperson of Ensamkommandes förbund

(Association of unaccompanied minors in Sweden).

"To everyone in society - get involved! Visit the children at the housing units. Become a legal guardian or invite them home for dinner. Many are unhappy. Show some humanity. Talk with unaccompanied minors who have fled across large seas with the hope of a good life in Sweden. They miss their families and need somebody who cares. The meeting with another person can create hope. Everyone can help out.

Volunteers in Ensamkommandes förbund meet unaccompanied minors at the housing units. We talk and try to convey hope. Many isolate themselves in their room and need help to escape the loneliness."

"Unaccompanied minors often feel that the time at the arrival housing is time lost in idleness. A fast asylum process would of course be the best. Continuous contact with the staff at the housing unit is also necessary. Unaccompanied minors shouldn't have to always start new relations and contacts with fill-ins." Ismail A. Hussein

"Create opportunities for unaccompanied minors to spend time with Norwegian kids. Hanging out with friends lets you quickly understand the culture. Resistance to speak the new language makes loneliness grow. Integration involves knowledge of the language and culture. Make new friends in the new country. Then you'll achieve great things." Adib Waes



Mahboba Madadi from Afghanistan

Lives: Malmö, Sweden

Arrival: three years ago

Residence permit: No - awaiting a decision

Mahboba Madadi – Chairperson of Ensamkommandes förbund

"Come to Ensamkommandes förbund, the association for unaccompanied minors, and meet others. Here, unaccompanied minors can be happy for a while. Everyone should have a good free time and a home with us. We've experienced the same loneliness. That feeling shouldn't grow. I came alone the first time, began talking with others and registered for a language course. The association has meant a lot to me. Today, I'm its chairperson.

An association of unaccompanied minors would be good to have in all of the Nordic countries. It is important that we organise ourselves and say what we need. I want to inspire other girls and show that we can be leaders. Few unaccompanied girls come to the Nordic countries. Those who have come here, have long fought for their rights in their home countries."

How many and from which countries?

In 2016, every Nordic country except Iceland had a decrease in the number of unaccompanied refugee minors and asylum seekers in total. Iceland has had an increase; 1,132 people applied for asylum in Iceland in 2016 compared with 345 in 2015. The number of unaccompanied refugee minors as a percentage of the total number of asylum seekers decreased in every Nordic country except Denmark. More than ten times as many unaccompanied refugee minors came to the Nordic region in 2015 (45,765) as in 2016 (4,127).

Total number of unaccompanied refugee minors and total number of asylum seekers in the Nordic countries 2016

Country	Unaccompanied minors	Total number of asylum seekers	Unaccompanied minors per total number of asylumseekers
Denmark*	1189	7048	16,9
Finland	401	5651	7,1
Iceland	18	1132	1,6
Norway	320	3460	9,2
Sweden	2199	28939	7,6
Nordic	4127	46230	8,9

Data source: DK: Danish Immigration Service; FI: Finnish Immigration Service; IS: Directorate of Immigration; NO: Norwegian Directorate of Immigration; SE: Swedish Migration Agency. Note: Denmark until 30 November 2016. Note: Nordic countries excluding Faeroe Islands, Greenland and Åland, which did not receive any unaccompanied refugee minors in 2016.



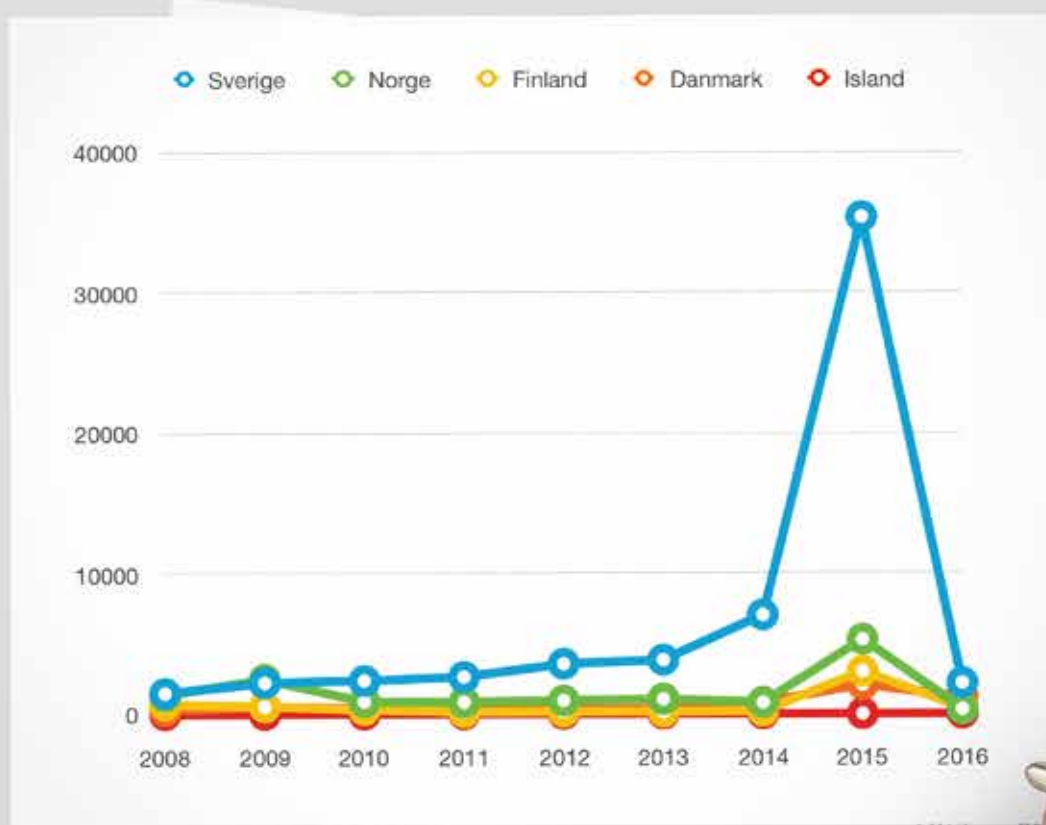


Unaccompanied refugee minors in the Nordic countries 2008-2016

The number of asylum applications from unaccompanied refugee minors has been distinctly higher in Sweden than the other Nordic countries for several years, but this has not always been the case. In 2009, the number was roughly the same in Norway as in Sweden. In 2014, the number of applications was much higher in Sweden than in the other countries. After

Sweden, most of the unaccompanied refugee minors applied for asylum in Norway and Denmark, while fewer applied for asylum in Finland. In 2015, the number of unaccompanied minors in all four countries increased. The diagram below shows the number of unaccompanied refugee minors over time in the Nordic countries.

Unaccompanied refugee minors in the Nordic countries 2008-2016



Data source: Denmark: Danish Immigration Service; Finland: Finnish Immigration Service; Iceland: Eurostat; Norway: Norwegian Directorate of Immigration; Sweden: Swedish Migration Agency; Iceland: Directorate of Immigration. * Data for Denmark 2016 per 30 November 2016.

How is the reception of unaccompanied refugee minors arranged in the Nordic countries?

Since these children do not have a legal guardian, the responsibility for the children rests with public authorities. In all countries, a legal guardian is therefore appointed to the child

to ensure that the children's rights are met. In addition to the areas described regarding housing during and after the asylum process, school, leisure time and what happens when turning 18, the table below gives a general description of other important areas that various authorities have responsibility for.

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Which authority conducts an investigation of grounds for protection?	Danish Immigration Service	Finnish Immigration Service	Norwegian Directorate of Immigration	Swedish Migration Agency
How long did it take to receive a decision in 2016	No information available on average time for decision. The target is max 7 months.	Average processing time 242 days	Up to 12 months before the interview, then 3 months before a decision.	Average processing time for decisions 353 days. No information available on waiting time to start the investigation.
Residence permits granted	500 (2015)	1191 (Jan-Oct 2016)	1167 (Jan-Nov 2016)	6853 (2016)
Residence permits rejected	46 (2015)	100 (Jan-Oct 2016)	118 (Jan-Nov 2016)	1121 (2016) (Plus 117 Dublin cases and 1400 applications written off)
Is there a possibility of family reunification?	Should be possible upon refugee status	Should be possible upon refugee status	Should be possible upon refugee status	Should be possible upon refugee status
Children who go missing	There are no collective statistics or overall procedures.	There are no collective statistics or overall procedures.	There are no collective statistics. National guide with guidelines exists. Proposed measures have been submitted to the government.	There are no collective statistics or overall procedures. Proposed measures have been submitted to the government.

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Does the child have access to help and support from the social services?	The municipality shall provide support based on the Danish Social Services Act in the same way as for other children in Denmark. The Danish Immigration Service have to approve social service interventions per the Aliens Act. Upon the issuance of a residence permit, the municipality determines if the minor shall receive support per the Social Services Act or the Integration Act.	The Child Welfare Act applies to all children in Finland, regardless of legal status, and they have the right to have their needs assessed and services per this law.	The Child Welfare Act applies to all children in Norway, regardless of legal status, and they have the right to have their needs assessed and services per this law.	The Social Services Act applies to all children in Sweden, regardless of legal status, and they have the right to have their needs assessed and receive services per this law.
Does the child have access to health care?	Right to emergency care during the asylum phase. Health care and dental care is provided at the housing unit during the asylum phase through the Danish Red Cross or by a municipality. With a residence permit, unaccompanied refugee minors are covered like other citizens in Denmark by national health insurance. Dental care is free for everyone up to the age of 18.	Entitled to same health care services as municipal residents. Health exams are done both at housing units and through ordinary healthcare.	Entitled to the same care as the general population. The municipality has the responsibility. Health exams are done through ordinary healthcare. Healthcare centres and school healthcare.	Entitled to free health care and dental care on the same terms as other children. Health exams are done through ordinary healthcare and student health services.

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
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Examples of legislative changes enacted or announced in 2016.

The Danish government is planning to change the prerequisites for permanent residence permits in 2017.

Permanent residence permits are not granted for humanitarian reasons as of summer 2016.

A proposal on a new law was presented in autumn 2016 that suggests that the housing and care efforts for unaccompanied refugee minors under the age of 15 shall no longer be regulated under the Child Welfare Act, but rather a new law shall be created.

A temporary three-year law was introduced that limits the possibilities of asylum seekers to receive permanent residence permits and the possibility of family reunification.

- For those who have received a legally enforceable decision of rejection or deportation, the right to assistance, such as housing and a daily allowance, ends at the age of 18.

- The government is drafting a new legislative bill that will give unaccompanied refugee minors who have previously received a notice of deportation when they turn 18 the possibility to stay until they complete upper-secondary school.





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