



STUDY
„POLICIES ON RECEPTION, RETURN AND
INTEGRATION ARRANGEMENTS FOR, AND
NUMBERS OF, UNACCOMPANIED MINORS
IN LATVIA”

Riga, April, 2009

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ANOTATION

In accordance with the work programme 2008 of the European Migration Network second study in the year 2008 is „**Policies on reception, return, integration arrangements for, and numbers of, unaccompanied minors in Latvia**”. The Latvian contactpoint of the European Migration Network started to develop the study in December 2008.

The **aim** of the study is to provide information about the reception measures of unaccompanied minors and experience in Latvia, as well as to reflect the statistical data about unaccompanied minors received in Latvia.

Unaccompanied minors are third-country nationals or stateless persons below the age of eighteen, who arrive on the territory of the Member State unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them whether by law or custom, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person, or minors who are left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the Member State.

The study has been developed on the basis of the specification initially prepared by the European Commission and the United Kingdom contactpoint of the European Migration Network and further modified in cooperation with the experts of other national contactpoints of the European Migration Network (hereinafter – the Network).

Main conclusions about the effectiveness of the reception, return and integration policy of unaccompanied minors will be summarized in the synthesis report prepared by the European Commission on the basis of studies submitted by the 26 national contactpoints of the Network.

In the **first part** of this study reasons why unaccompanied minors seek

entry into Latvia are examined. It must be pointed out that the authors of the study had to face the fact that at this point Latvia is not a destination country for unaccompanied minors this is confirmed by the gathered statistical data and the opinion of experts involved in the development of the study.

In the **second part** of the study entry procedures of unaccompanied minors into Latvia including border control has been examined. More detailed information has been provided about the legal regulations, structure of the institutions involved and their tasks in work with unaccompanied minors.

In the **third part** of the study legal stay including possible integration measures of unaccompanied minors in Latvia have been examined.

In the **fourth part** of the study return procedure of unaccompanied minors has been examined. Up to now no unaccompanied minors have been expelled from Latvia.

In the end **concluding remarks** on the efficiency of the policies on reception, return, and integration arrangements for unaccompanied minors in Latvia have been provided.

Laws and regulations as well as the information from the internet about unaccompanied minors and information provided by the institutions involved in the development of the study – the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the State Border Guard and the State Police – has been used in the study.

All together work consists of 18 pages and it has 1 table.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study „Policies on reception, return, integration arrangements for, and numbers of, unaccompanied minors in Latvia” is to provide information about reception measures of unaccompanied minors and experience in Latvia, as well as to reflect the statistical data about unaccompanied minors received in Latvia.

In order to ensure comparability of the study with works prepared by other national contactpoints of the European Migration Network (hereinafter – the Network) and to facilitate the development of the synthesis report, this study is developed on the basis of the specification initially prepared by the European Commission and the United Kingdom contactpoint and further modified in cooperation with other experts from the national contactpoints of the Network.

The **subject** of this study is a third country unaccompanied minor who enters into the Republic of Latvia. Unaccompanied minors are third-country nationals or stateless persons below the age of eighteen, who arrive on the territory of the Member State unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them whether by law or custom, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person, or minors who are left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the Member State¹.

The **object** of this study is the efficiency of the reception, return and integration policy of unaccompanied minors in Latvia.

To reach the aim of the study following **tasks** have been placed: examine why unaccompanied minors search for a possibility to enter into Latvia, examine entry procedure, reception conditions, including integration measures, return practice, including reintegration measures for third country unaccompanied minors.

This study is mainly meant for institutions and their officials who are dealing with the policy of unaccompanied minors, namely, officials of ministries (for example, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Welfare), nongovernmental organisations (for example, Riga Office of the International Organization for Migration) and officials of the European Union institutions.

In the development of the study those state institutions and their experts were involved who possess the necessary information about reception, return and integration policy for

¹ Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof, the Official Journal L 212, 07.08.2001.; COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, the Official Journal L 031, 06.02.2003.

unaccompanied minors in Latvia: the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the State Border Guard and the State Police.

Internet was used in order to increase the amount of information used for analyses and to browse articles, opinions on the mentioned topic. Articles, researches and opinions used in the study can be found in the section of this study on literature and sources.

In the preparation of the study Latvian legal base, literature found in newspapers on the chosen topic as well as the statistical data and information gathered and provided by the institutions involved in the study was used.

During the work process it was very hard to describe the part on the reasons why unaccompanied minors enter into Latvia as the number of unaccompanied minors in Latvia in comparison with the general statistics of the world is just a small part from the number of unaccompanied minors in Europe and in the world. Therefore it is not possible to make conclusions about concrete trends of flows of unaccompanied minors through or to Latvia.

In the same way nongovernmental organizations, that would be active in this field, have not been mentioned in this study.

1. REASONS OF ENTRY OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS INTO LATVIA

Seven unaccompanied minors entered into Latvia in the time period from 2002 till 2008, in 2005 – 3 and in 2008 – 4. The reason why these seven unaccompanied minors entered into Latvia was with an aim to emigrate to another Member State of the European Union (Germany, Denmark). Experts who interviewed these seven unaccompanied minors did not state similar reasons for entry into Latvia.

As the number of unaccompanied minors in Latvia at this point is relatively small in comparison to the general statistics of the world it is not possible to make conclusions about concrete trends of flows of unaccompanied minors through or to Latvia.

2. ENTRY PROCEDURE, INCLUDING BORDER CONTROL

The procedure by which foreign minors enter and reside into the Republic of Latvia unaccompanied by parents or guardians is determined by the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on December 16, 2003 No.707 „Procedures by which Foreign Minors Enter and Reside in the Republic of Latvia Unaccompanied by Parents or Guardians”² that is issued in accordance with the Section 7³ of the Immigration Law⁴.

Entry and residence of unaccompanied minors into the Republic of Latvia is recorded and controlled by **the State Border Guard, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs** and **the State Police** in cooperation with **the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, custody courts (parish courts) and local governments**⁵.

In order to enter into Latvia unaccompanied minors need following documents⁶:

- 1) Valid travel document. The travel document is valid if:
 - a. term of validity exceeds the period of time of the planned residence in the Republic of Latvia by at least three months;

² Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on December 16, 2003 No.707 „Procedures by which Foreign Minors Enter and Reside in the Republic of Latvia Unaccompanied by Parents or Guardians”, the Latvian Herald No.180, 19.12.2003. [Into force from 20.12.2003.]

³ Section 7 of the Immigration Law determines that procedures by which foreign minors enter and reside in the Republic of Latvia unaccompanied by parents or guardians are determined by the Cabinet of Ministers.

⁴ Immigration Law, the Latvian Herald No.169, 20.11.2002. [Into force from 01.05.2003.]

⁵ Clause 3 of the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on December 16, 2003 No.707 „Procedures by which Foreign Minors Enter and Reside in the Republic of Latvia Unaccompanied by Parents or Guardians”.

⁶ In accordance with the first part of the Section 4 of the Immigration Law and Sections 5 and 6 of the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on December 16, 2003 No.707 „Procedures by which Foreign Minors Enter and Reside in the Republic of Latvia Unaccompanied by Parents or Guardians”.

- b. it has at least two free pages for visas and official marks about crossing of the State border;
 - c. it contains all identity data and photo of the unaccompanied minor;
 - d. it does not contain any corrections that are non-annotated by the issuer of the document;
 - e. it does not have indications of forgery;
 - f. it does not have mechanical corrections or smears due to which it is not possible to identify the holder of the document, to read the information indicated in the document or to detect document forgeries.
- 2) Has a valid visa, residence permit, European Community long-term resident residence permit in the Republic of Latvia, or to a foreigner who abroad has received a new travel document previous travel document with valid residence permit in the Republic of Latvia.
 - 3) Has a valid health insurance policy, which guarantees the covering of expenses related to health care in the Republic of Latvia, including the conveying of the third-country national back to the country of residence in the case of his serious illness.
 - 4) Does not have any other obstacles prescribed by the law or other regulatory enactments for entry into the Republic of Latvia.
 - 5) Has the necessary financial means in order to reside in the Republic of Latvia and return to the country of residence or to depart to a third country to which he or she has the right to enter.

As the cases of unaccompanied minors entering into Latvia are very rare the State Border Guard **does not gather** separate statistical data about unaccompanied foreign minors **crossing the border**.

If an unaccompanied minor who **does not have** one of the above mentioned documents wishes to cross the Latvian border, but his **identity is known** officials of the State Border Guard, in order to send this person to corresponding country, **immediately gets in touch** with the competent institution in the country of citizenship, country of residence or in the country where the relatives of the unaccompanied minor live, or in the country that is ready to accept the unaccompanied minor and that is able to provide corresponding reception and care (hereinafter – host country)

Up to now the State Border Guard has not faced the above mentioned cases.

If an unaccompanied minor whose **identity is unknown** wishes to cross the Latvian border the official of the State Border Guard **immediately begins to identify** the identity of the unaccompanied minor.

In 2008 in the territory of the airport “Riga” **four** unaccompanied minors without identification documents were detained. Identification of identity was complicated as the persons provided contradictory and false information about themselves and their parents as well as about the conditions of entry.

While the identity of the unaccompanied minor is being clarified, the State Border Guard places the unaccompanied minor in the nearest structural unit of the State Police that is meant for minors.

At the moment there is only place where to place unaccompanied minors, namely, the Minor Prevention Division of the Public Order Police Department of the Riga Region Board of the State Police.

In accordance with the information provided by the Minor Prevention Division of the Public Order Police Department of the Riga Region Board of the State Police one day maintenance of a child at the Minor Prevention Division costs Ls 188.27 (~ € 268). Wages of inspectors, disposable dishes, laundry washing, catering, phone conversations are included in this sum. This sum does not include electricity, water, heating and transportation expenses.

Specially trained official of the State Boarder Guard is appointed for the work with unaccompanied minors (for example, to clarify the identity).

If a minor third-country national who has not reached the age of 14 years and is not accompanied by parents or his legal representative illegally crosses the State border of the Republic of Latvia or has in other ways violated the procedures for the entry and residence of third-country nationals in the Republic of Latvia specified in regulatory enactments, a State Border Guard official shall act so as to ensure the rights and interests of the child in accordance with regulatory enactments regulating the protection of children’s rights⁷.

An unaccompanied minor who arrives in Latvia in order to receive asylum or alternative status shall submit an application to a border guard at the border control point before entry into the Republic of Latvia. If the unaccompanied minor is already located in Latvia application shall be submitted to the territorial unit of the State Border Guard.

⁷ In accordance with the third part of the Section 51 of the Immigration Law.

After receiving the application the official of the State Border Guard **immediately** informs the custody court who **appoints a representative** to the unaccompanied minor for the process of asylum granting. Specially trained officials of the State Border Guard and the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs perform the negotiations with the unaccompanied minor in presence of the appointed representative.

The State Border Guard sends the information gained during the negotiations to the Department of the Refugee Affairs of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs that makes a decision about granting or refusal to grant refugee or alternative status in the terms⁸ indicated in the law.

In the time period from 2002 till 2008 **seven (7)** unaccompanied minors have applied for asylum in Latvia (see table 2.1.).

Table 2.1.
Unaccompanied minors who have applied
for asylum in Latvia, 2002-2008

Country of nationality	Total	Women (years)		Men (years)		
		14	16	14	16	17
Year: 2005						
Somalia	3	1		1		1
Year: 2008						
Afghanistan	4		1	2	1	
Total	7	1	1	3	1	1

⁸ Examination time of applications is described in section 13 and 16 of the Asylum Law, the examination time of the application depends on the place where the application is submitted and on the content of the application.

3. LEGAL STAY, INCLUDING INTEGRATION MEASURES

If the State Border Guard in cooperation with the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter – the Consular Department) has not clarified the identity of the unaccompanied minor during the period of one month the State Border Guard informs **the territorial unit of the State Police** in whose administrative territory the minor foreigner was detained.

The official of the corresponding territorial unit of the State Police **issues an order** about placing the minor foreigner into the educational institution in the administrative territory where he was detained. **Duties of the guardian** of the foreign minor placed in the prevention centre or educational institution are fulfilled by the head of the corresponding institution.

The State Police had not placed any unaccompanied minors in the Latvian day-care centres at the moment when the study was developed. Therefore the State Police does not possess information which are the institutions and what are the maintenance expenses of one unaccompanied minor in such an institution.

After the clarification of the identity of the unaccompanied minor the State Border guard informs the Consular Department about it.

In its return the Consular Department gets in touch with the diplomatic or consular representation, corresponding competent institutions or nongovernmental organizations that overlook compliance of rights of children in the host country and implements other necessary activities to send them to the host country.

Medical examination is performed in the State Centre for Forensic Medical Examination in cases if the true age of the unaccompanied minor is doubtful. On average the costs to the State for the medical examination are around Ls 300 (~ € 430).

In case if the minor foreigner while residing in Latvia has lost parental or guardian care he or she is placed in the nearest educational institution or the custody court (parish court) in the procedure described in the Civil law appoints a temporary guardian to this unaccompanied minor for a period of time while he/she resides in Latvia.

If the **identity** of the minor foreigner, who has lost parental or guardian care, while residing in Latvia, **is not known** the official of the State Border Guard establishes his country

of citizenship or residence and in cooperation with the Consular Department clarifies his identity.

If the **identity** of the minor foreigner, who has lost parental or guardian care, while residing in Latvia, **is known** the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs informs the Consular Department about it.

The Consular Department gets in touch with the diplomatic or consular representation, corresponding competent institutions or nongovernmental organizations that overlook compliance of rights of children in the host country and implements other necessary activities to send them to the host country.

If an unaccompanied minor who has not reached the age of 10 is illegally residing in Latvia and within one year it has not been possible to clarify his identity the registry office on the basis of proposal of the Head of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs **awards new identity** according to actual place of residence of the unaccompanied minor.

If the unaccompanied minor is in the age between 10 to 16 years and his identity has not been clarified, **after reaching lawful age** the registry office on the basis of proposal of the Head of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs **awards new identity** according to actual place of residence of the unaccompanied minor.

If a new identity has been awarded to the unaccompanied minor five years after it has been awarded he **can be adopted**.

The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs had not faced the above mentioned cases on the moment when the study was developed.

The unaccompanied minor while residing in the educational institution, accordingly to his mental and physical development, **attends a school**. Expenses related to his nurturing at the school are covered by the corresponding educational institution.

Social guarantees defined in other legal enactments that are meant for children, who have remained without parental care, are **not applied** to unaccompanied minors.

The unaccompanied minor **can apply** for the Latvian citizenship in the procedure described in the legal enactments regulating person's naturalization.

During the asylum granting procedure the State Border Guard provides accommodation to the unaccompanied asylum seeker in the facilities meant for this purpose – asylum seekers reception centre, at the guardian appointed by the custody court or day-care

centre (for example, orphanage) as well as sustenance, provision with goods of hygiene and prime necessity, emergency medical help and primary health care, primary medical inspection.

The decision about facilitating the unaccompanied minor in the reception centre, at the guardian appointed by the custody court or in the day-care centre is made by the custody court, taking into consideration opinion of the Refugee Affairs Department of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs. The custody court makes a decision taking into consideration interests and opinion of the unaccompanied minor corresponding to the age and maturity following these regulations:

- 1) Unaccompanied minor is facilitated together with adult relatives;
- 2) Children of one family can not be separated, except in the cases when it is done in the interests of the child;
- 3) The place of residence of the unaccompanied minor is changed only in the case when it corresponds to the interests of this person.

The unaccompanied minor asylum seeker has rights to receive free of charge legal aid during the asylum granting procedure.

In accordance with the regulations on the allowed expenditures on food, hygiene products and other basic necessities for asylum seekers, and the procedures of reimbursing those expenditures ⁹ for asylum seekers (including unaccompanied minor) following expenditures per day are defined:

- ❖ Ls 1.50 (~€ 2.13) if the person resides in the asylum seekers reception centre;
- ❖ Ls 1.80 (~ € 2.56) if the person resides in the territorial unit of the State Border Guard or border control point.

Money to the asylum seeker who is residing in the asylum seekers reception centre is paid once a week in the form of prepayment for seven days.

Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on May 26, 2008 No.360 “On the Procedure how the Expense of the Local Authorities are Reimbursed from the State Budget for Maintenance of Unaccompanied Minors in the Day-care Centre” ¹⁰ define the procedure and

⁹ Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on February 8, 2005 No.119 “On the Allowed Expenditures on Food, Hygiene Products and other Basic Necessities for Asylum Seekers, and the Procedures of Reimbursing those Expenditures”, the Latvian Herald No.27, 17.02.2005. [Into force from 18.02.2005.]

¹⁰ Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on May 26, 2008 No.360 “On the Procedure how the Expense of the Local Authorities are Reimbursed from the State Budget for Maintenance of Unaccompanied Minors in the Day-care Centre”, the Latvian Herald No.83, 29.05.2008. [Into force from 01.01.2009.]

amount how the expense of the local authorities are reimbursed from the state budget for maintenance of unaccompanied minors in **the day-care centre**. The regulations are issued in accordance with the eight part of the section 11 of the Asylum Law¹¹.

Expenses of the local authorities **14 lats** (~ 20 euros) per day are reimbursed from the state budget for maintenance of unaccompanied minor asylum seeker in the day-care centre that is financed by the local authority.

A possibility to receive education is provided to unaccompanied minor asylum seeker in accordance with the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on Augusts 9, 2005 No.586 “Procedure by which Education is to be Ensured for Minor Children of Asylum Seekers or Minor Asylum Seekers”¹².

Elementary and secondary school education is provided to unaccompanied minor asylum seeker. Possibility to receive secondary school education is also provided after the asylum seeker has reached full age. Education is provided till the day when the refugee or alternative status is granted or the status is refused. Access to the education is ensured in three months time after the application is submitted.

Necessary standards of curriculum and teaching aids to ensure unaccompanied minor asylum seekers with the possibility to receive education are developed by [the Ministry of Education and Science](#).

Teachers’ salary and services for the development and publishing of teaching aids for ensuring possibility to receive education are financed from the means included in the operating budget of the current year of the Ministry of Education and Science.

In the phase of basic education with in the limits a possibility to acquire native language is provided to the asylum seeker.

¹¹ Part eight of Section 11 of the Asylum Law defines that the expenses of the local authorities that have emerged from maintaining of unaccompanied minor in the day-care centre in the procedure defined by the Cabinet of Ministers are covered from the State budget means allocated to the Ministry of Children, Family and Integration Affairs for the current year.

¹² Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers on Augusts 9, 2005 No.586 “Procedure by which Education is to be Ensured for Minor Children of Asylum Seekers or Minor Asylum Seekers”, the Latvian Herald No.126, 11.08.2005. [Into force from 12.08.2005.]

International protection status in Latvia has been granted only to three minor citizens of Somalia who were detained in 2005. Namely the alternative protection status has been granted to the persons by issuing temporary residence permit for period up to four years.

Also four citizens of Afghanistan left the asylum seekers reception centre not waiting for the decision about granting or refusal to grant the status and in the person's file the decision was made to dismiss the case. Besides during the medical examination of the citizens of Afghanistan it was established that two of the minors are adults.

4. RETURN PROCEDURE

The State Border Guard in cooperation with competent institutions or nongovernmental organizations of the host country ensures sending of the unaccompanied minor to the host country.

If sending of the unaccompanied minor to the host country threatens his life or health, on the basis of humanitarian considerations a person designated by the Head of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs takes a decision to issue a **temporary residence permit** until the situation will change in the host country.

The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs had not issued this type of temporary residence permits up to the moment when the study was developed.

Neither the State Border Guard nor the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs up to the moment when the study was developed have not issued a return decision to unaccompanied minor and/or made decisions about forced expulsion of unaccompanied minor from the country.

If a minor foreigner who has reached the age of at least 14 years is illegally residing in the Republic of Latvia and his identity has not been determined or there is a reason to believe that he might burden his return from the country, this minor foreigner is detained in the procedure prescribed in the Immigration Law and placed in the detention facility of illegal immigrants (apart from adults). This foreigner is returned from the Republic of Latvia in the procedure prescribed in the Immigration Law.

Up to the moment when the study was developed no such minor foreigners have been returned.

It is worth to mention an event that took place in December 25, 2008. Minor citizen of the Russian Federation born in 1992 in cooperation with minor citizen of Latvia illegally brought into Latvia five citizens of Syrian Arab Republic. The State Border Guard arrested both carriers, but the citizens of Syrian Arab Republic were sent back to the Russian Federation. The court made a decision to punish the minor with two year detention. The punishment is suspended with a probation period of two years. The person was released in the court room.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Unaccompanied minors, who have entered Latvia until year 2008, were using it as a country of transit not as a destination for their travel.
- The number of unaccompanied minors who have entered Latvia during the period of time from 2002 till 2008 is insignificant therefore it is hard to evaluate the efficiency of the system.
- There is a determined procedure in Latvia for entry and residence of unaccompanied minors, as well as definite range of institutions that record and control the entry and residence of unaccompanied minors in Latvia.
- In Latvia also the return procedure (both voluntary and forced) of unaccompanied minors to the person's country of residence or origin is defined, but return has not been used in practice.
- At this point it is hard to forecast whether an influx of unaccompanied minors can be expected in Latvia.

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