

The path of unaccompanied minors into Swedish society

In the past decade more than 60 000 unaccompanied minors have sought asylum in Sweden. An unaccompanied minor is defined as a person who is under 18 years and who arrives without a parent or other legal custodian. Germany and Sweden are the two countries in Europe that have received most unaccompanied asylum seekers, but the UK, Austria, Italy Hungary and Norway have also received large numbers. The most common countries of origin of unaccompanied individuals who have sought asylum in Sweden are Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Iraq. Most unaccompanied individuals are boys; only a quarter of those who were granted residence permits in Sweden in 2003–2014 were girls. The majority of the unaccompanied individuals who have sought asylum in Sweden have been given residence permits and are now on their way to becoming integrated in Swedish society.

How are unaccompanied individuals doing in their integration in Sweden?

In this report we examine what has happened to the unaccompanied individuals given residence permits in 2013–2014. Our study focuses on education and training and on integration in the labour market, but also looks at aspects such as mental health and civil status. We study to what extent unaccompanied individuals participate in education, their highest completed education, employment, type of occupation and earned income and how common it is among unaccompanied individuals to be-

long to the NEET group, i.e. Not in Education, Employment or Training. In our analysis we also look at how other factors, such as age when given a residence permit, gender, country of origin, time in Sweden, whether or not the person has been reunified with their parents, and county of residence, affect their integration. We compare unaccompanied individuals with young people who immigrated to Sweden with their parents from the same countries as the unaccompanied individuals and with young people born in Sweden.

The study is based on extensive register data material containing individual data from Statistics Sweden and the National Board of Health and Welfare.

Few unaccompanied individuals achieve an upper secondary qualification

Up to the age of 21 the great majority of unaccompanied individuals participate in some form of education or training. Many unaccompanied individuals continue to study at upper secondary level after the age of 19, often in municipal adult education but also at folk high schools or in other forms of education. Their results at upper secondary school are often unsatisfactory. Many leave upper secondary school after one or two years, and even among those who continue for three or more years few achieve an upper secondary qualification.

The fact that few unaccompanied individuals have an upper secondary education with a full set of grades or a higher education obviously affects their possibilities of finding a job. In 2013 and 2014 unaccompanied individuals did slightly better at finding jobs in Sweden than in previous years, but the share who have integrated in the labour market is still much lower than among Swedish-born individuals of the same age. At the age of 27, 66 per cent of unaccompanied men and 56 per cent of unaccompanied women had jobs, compared with 81 and 77 per cent among Swedish-born individuals. The lower employment rate among unaccompanied women can be explained to some extent by the fact that they continue their studies to higher ages than the men. The unaccompanied women who have found jobs also have much lower earned income than the men.

Unaccompanied individuals with post-compulsory school education are more often in work than those who only have a compulsory school education. In a comparison with Swedish-born individuals with the same level of education, unaccompanied individuals have roughly the

same employment rate. But it is important to stress that this comparison is mainly being made between unaccompanied and Swedish-born individuals with a low level of education. This is the group that contains the Swedish-born individuals who generally have most difficulty in becoming integrated in the labour market. Compared with young people who have immigrated with their parents, unaccompanied individuals are slightly more often in employment when account is taken of factors like age, education and time in Sweden, etc.

Great differences between different groups of unaccompanied individuals

Apart from education there are many other background variables of importance for the integration of unaccompanied individuals. Unaccompanied individuals who have come at a lower age are in employment more often than those who came at a higher age. One reasonable explanation for this is that the younger a person is when they come to Sweden, the more years they attend school in Sweden, and the better the knowledge they have of the Swedish language.

County of residence is another factor that seems to be of importance; unaccompanied individuals who live in the County of Stockholm have jobs much more often, and have higher incomes, than those who live in other counties. The most important explanation is probably that the labour market in Stockholm is much stronger than in the rest of Sweden, but it could also be because individuals with better job prospects or more motivation to find a job more often make their way to the Stockholm area, where there is a much greater supply of jobs to seek. Another explanation could be the existence of networks

in Stockholm – i.e. people from the same country who are already integrated and who can help the young people to find work.

Another clear result is that unaccompanied boys from Afghanistan do better at integrating in the Swedish labour market than unaccompanied individuals from other countries. Unaccompanied individuals who have been reunified with at least one parent in Sweden have jobs to a slightly smaller extent than those who have not been reunified; this applies especially to women. There are several conceivable explanations of this. It could be explained by the groups being different in terms of individual drivers to find work, but also by unaccompanied individuals who have not been reunified getting better networks in Swedish society through, for example, their housing situation or appointed guardian.

Many work in service and social care occupations

The majority of the unaccompanied individuals who have jobs work in service, social care and sales occupations or in occupations that do not require any special education or training. Health care and social care occupations dominate among the women. Many men also work in construction, manufacturing, or transport or as kitchen or restaurant helpers.

Belonging to the 'NEET' group, i.e. not being in education, employment or training, is much more common among unaccompanied individuals than among Swedish-born individuals aged between 19 and 27. We find the largest share of NEETs or 'inactive individuals' among unaccompanied women; about a quarter of individuals in this group are neither in employment nor in education or training. Most of the inactive individuals are in the group

of unaccompanied married women. Being registered for a long time as resident in Sweden increases the likelihood of neither being in employment nor studying or being in training, which is surely to do with the decrease over time in the share studying. In contrast, neither being in employment nor studying or being in training is less common among the group of unaccompanied individuals who have been reunified with at least one parent in Sweden. There are also differences linked to country of origin; unaccompanied boys from Afghanistan have a lower NEET share than boys from other countries. Another group with a lower NEET share is unaccompanied individuals resident in Stockholm (compared with those resident in other counties).

We find that unaccompanied individuals are more likely to be married than Swedish-born young people and young people who came with their parents, but also that many unaccompanied women divorce after only a few years. Another result is that unaccompanied individuals are much more likely to have been given a psychiatric diagnosis than young people with a Swedish background. The proportion with a psychiatric diagnosis is particularly large among unaccompanied women and unaccompanied individuals with a low educational level.

Conclusions

The main conclusion is that unaccompanied individuals are on the path out onto the labour market via education and that those who have a job have earned income that corresponds to their education. This is a relatively bright picture. But there are some warning signs and therefore also possibilities of taking action.

The first result to draw attention to is that many unaccompanied individuals leave upper secondary school wit-

hout a diploma. Completing at least an upper secondary education has become more and more important in the Swedish labour market. So one central issue is how this group will do in the slightly longer term. That points to the importance of further studies of how school education works for unaccompanied individuals and other refugee children, and of various forms of support to enable more individuals to get a complete set of grades.

The second result to draw attention to is that, given other known background factors, unaccompanied women are less often in employment and have lower incomes than unaccompanied men. Married women are in employment less often than unmarried women and are the group with the largest share who are neither working nor studying, which indicates that family circumstances are of importance. It is therefore urgent to reach this group of young women with information and support.

The third result to draw attention to is that unaccompanied individuals have different levels of success in finding jobs in different parts of the country; unaccompanied individuals resident in the County of Stockholm do best. This indicates that employment service measures for unaccompanied individuals may be particularly important in areas with weak demand for labour and in periods when the economy is weaker.

The fourth result to draw attention to is that unaccompanied individuals have varying success depending on what country they come from. The largest share in employment is among unaccompanied individuals from Afghanistan. So there is reason to give particular attention to the groups that have more difficulty in integrating in the Swedish labour market.



Aycan Çelikaksoy and Eskil Wadensjö
The path of unaccompanied minors and young people into Swedish society
Delmi Report 2018:3
The whole report is available at www.delmi.se

