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5. Unaccompanied minors and vulnerable applicants



The EU asylum acquis includes provisions on identifying and providing support to applicants who are in need of special procedural guarantees. Overall, effective and swift identification of vulnerable applicants remains a challenge, especially with regard to non-visible vulnerabilities, such as psychological consequences of torture or trauma.

Among vulnerable applicants, one of the key groups is unaccompanied minors seeking protection without the care of a responsible adult. In 2019, approximately 17 700 applications for international protection were lodged by unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries, representing a 13 % decrease compared to 2018. Applications by unaccompanied minors accounted for 2 % of the total number of applications.

As in previous years, many initiatives were launched in 2019 to improve the situation of vulnerable applicants. Some countries introduced measures for early identification and provision of procedural safeguards. Steps were also taken to improve or adjust age assessment methodologies, while civil society and international organisations continued to observe gaps and deficiencies in the process. Legislative and policy changes were introduced for legal representation to expedite the appointment of guardians and improve the overall quality of the guardianship system.

Poor reception conditions and detention of unaccompanied minor asylum applicants remained concerns in several countries

International and civil society organisations commented on improving the appointment process, the scope of a guardian’s tasks, communication between the representative and the child, and the guardian’s workload and training in general. To provide information more clearly, some EU+ countries adapted communication material on asylum and reception to the specific needs of minors. However, other vulnerable groups were typically not covered in these initiatives.

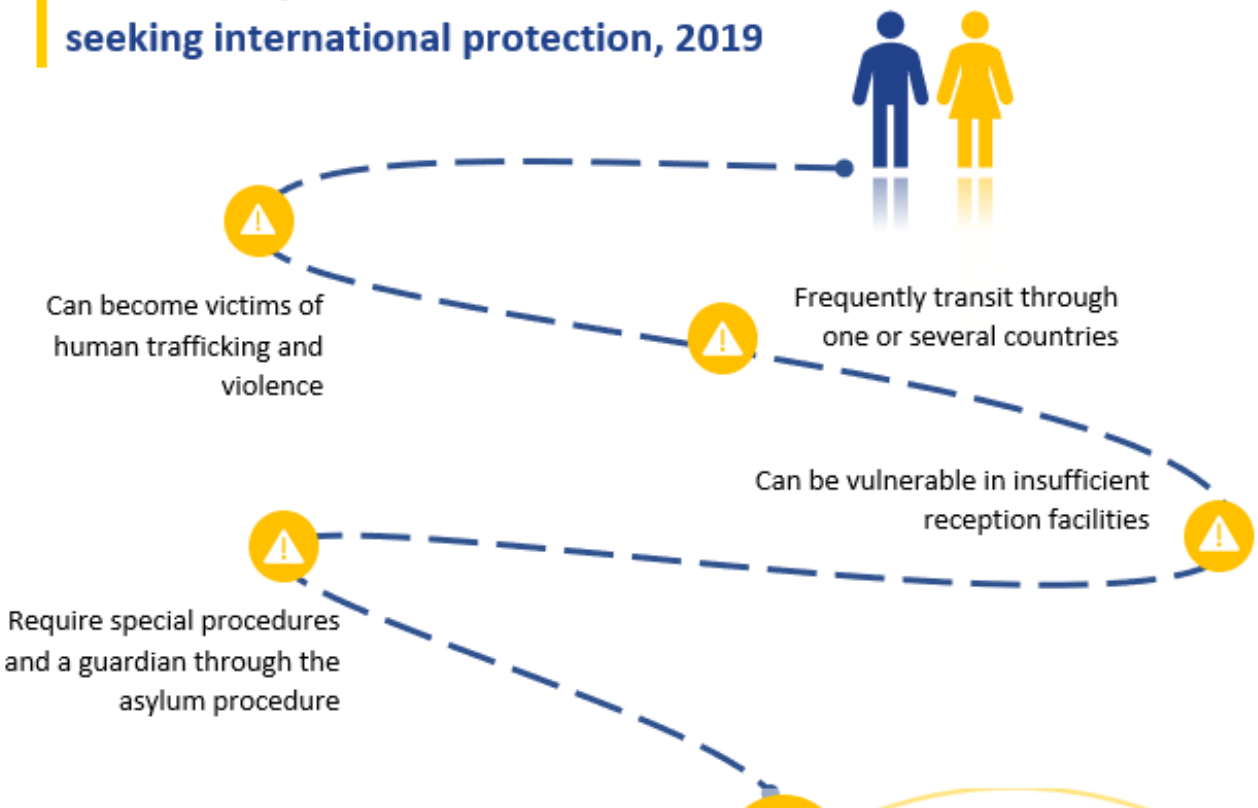
In first instance procedures, only a few initiatives were reported toward improving procedures for minors and ensuring the best interest of the child. Slightly more focus seems to have been turned toward enhancing procedures for girls at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM), victims of domestic violence, victims of trafficking and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) applicants.

In regard to reception conditions, efforts by EU+ countries in 2019 focused on adjusting capacity at facilities and increasing the quality of reception conditions for minors and vulnerable applicants; improving specialised reception facilities; and training staff managing vulnerable applicants, especially unaccompanied minors. Nonetheless, civil society organisations expressed concerns about poor reception conditions for vulnerable persons in a number of countries. In addition, the detention of vulnerable applicants, especially children, continued to raise fundamental questions in many EU+ countries, and became the subject of several rulings in European and national cour

The situation of transiting unaccompanied minors was of concern for both national authorities and civil society organisations across Europe. Due to diverse and complex reasons, including the length of the asylum process and the provisions of the Dublin III Regulation, unaccompanied children frequently try to remain unidentified and transit through one or several countries to arrive in a particular Member State.

Unaccompanied minors

seeking international protection, 2019



17 700 applications for international protection were lodged by unaccompanied minors in EU+ countries

86 %

of unaccompanied minor applicants were boys. 90 % of them were between 14-18 years old.

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