Unaccompanied minors (UAMs) have different reasons and motivations for fleeing their country of origin. These reasons can include war, poverty, sexual abuse, lack of educational opportunities, human rights violations, natural disasters etc.

The number of UAMs seeking asylum in the EU has increased steadily since 2010, reaching a total of 24,075 minors in 2014. This is 4% of the total number of asylum applicants in 2014 according to Eurostat. The distribution of applications across states varies widely within Europe. Sweden (29%), Germany (18%), Italy (10%), Austria (8%) and the United Kingdom (8%) have received the highest numbers of UAMs in the EU. An increase is expected also during 2015 with slightly different distribution of applicants across the countries. The country of origin of the UAM also diverges, even though the majority are nationals of Afghanistan, Eritrea, Syria, Somalia and Morocco. In the awakening of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, also the Eastern Partnership countries have seen an increase in UAM or will at least have a need to prepare for such a scenario.

Smuggled children are at risk of becoming victims of sexual, economic or/and criminal exploitation. They should be efficiently protected from any form of abuse. UAM are sometimes sent as forerunners to trigger the family reunification process. Criminal networks are involved with human trafficking to the EU and this includes also exploitation of minors in criminal activities.

All EU Member States provide accommodation and other care facilities for UAM according to jointly agreed minimum levels in line with the EU acquis. This i. a. concerns housing, legal guardianship, healthcare and education. A number of disappearances from care facilities occur in several Member States, putting children at risk.
The asylum procedure for UAM is an important topic which requires a sensitive and customized approach which has been developed within the EU together with the Asylum Procedures Directive. Exact and consistent methods for the assessment of the age of an UAM are challenges that all countries face. The question of age is of particular concern not only in the context of ensuring the protection of minors but also to avoid abuse of the asylum process. Different methods are used (interviews, analysis of documents, medical and psychological examination) but none of them alone gives absolute certainty of the age.

The numbers of UAM returned are generally low, often due to high recognition rates. Returns are usually undertaken through programs and require adequate reception conditions in the country of origin as well as sufficient reintegration measures. Family tracing and reunification are key factors to consider.

The expert meeting within the Eastern Partnership Panel on Migration and Asylum will evolve around four main sessions:

- **Session I** will deal with the international and legal framework of unaccompanied minors.
- **Session II** will address the asylum procedure focusing on the crucial issues such as age determination, interview technique and returns.
- **Session III** will offer the participants an interactive session based on case methodology where the Swedish Migration Agency will present a specific case to be elaborated upon in small groups
- **Session IV** will address reception conditions, focusing on the special needs assistance offered to UAM.

The meeting will offer a platform for discussion and exchange of views between the EU and the Eastern Partnership, with the involvement of several experts from academia and international organisations among others. Prior to the meeting a discussion paper will be disseminated to serve as a comparison between the participating states and also to formulate questions for further discussion.

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