



WHY DOES MY AGE MATTER?

Child-friendly information leaflet
on age assessment procedures
for unaccompanied minors*

Why do I have to undergo an age assessment?

- When you have just arrived in Europe, the relevant authorities you come across with such as the child protection office, the police and the immigration authority have to know your age. This is important for your placement and also in relation to your asylum or immigration procedure.
- The age assessment can take different forms. If you have submitted papers (ex. identification documents) about your age to the authorities, the authorities might need to check the validity of these.
- If you have not submitted any written proof (including identification documents) suitable to prove your age, the authorities need to conduct an age assessment procedure to identify your exact age.
- You should know that these procedures are not against you and they do not question what you have said. However you have to know that if you do not tell the truth about your age, this can undermine your credibility and ultimately can have a negative impact on the future decision of the immigration authority about your asylum claim.
- The aim of the assessment is to guarantee that only children are granted those specific rights that they deserve and that no adults are channelled into the child protection system.



Who will be involved in the age assessment, can I bring someone I trust to the examination?

- During age assessment and identification procedures, you will meet **a range of professionals** including police officers, medical staff, reception staff, staff of asylum and immigration authorities, guardians, legal representatives, and judicial staff such as judges, private legal counsellors and lawyers. These professionals have to explain to you the aim of the procedure and the methods they will use so that you can prepare yourself in advance. (ex.: medical examination in the hospital, talking with a psychologist or a social worker etc.)
- **Right for a guardian:** you also have the right for a professional to be appointed who is responsible to support your rights and needs. You can turn to him or her whenever you have problems, questions about the age assessment procedure or the asylum procedure or any other issues that make you feel uncomfortable. Be aware that your guardian is allowed to be there with you during the age assessment procedure.



*This child-friendly paper was compiled based on the Council of Europe's Handbook for frontline professionals on How to convey child-friendly information to children in migration, December 2018, accessible here: <https://rm.coe.int/how-to-convey-child-friendly-information-to-children-in-migration-a-ha/1680902f91> (accessed on 12 December 2019) and Bundesfachverband unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge: Welcome to Germany, a Guide for Unaccompanied minors, 2016, accessible here: https://kommgut.de/content/uploads/2018/04/welcometogermany_english.pdf

What if I do not want to undergo an age assessment procedure?

- It is important for you to know that you have **the right to refuse** to undergo an age assessment procedure. However in this case it can happen that in the end the authorities will consider you as an adult and you will no longer have the right to be accommodated in a child protection facility, you will lose the right to have a guardian and will no longer be treated as a child.



Where should I turn to if I do not feel comfortable or have any problems during the age assessment procedure?



- **You have the right to human dignity:** this procedure shall not make you feel uncomfortable in any way, for instance if during the procedure a professional is talking to you in a humiliating, degrading way, or in any case you do not feel safe, someone hurts you or you have a problem, you should contact your legal guardian or any other professional you trust and tell him/her about your concerns.

What is my status during the age assessment procedure?

- **You have the right to be treated as a child not as a migrant** throughout the whole procedure and benefit from children's rights.
- You have to know that the age assessment procedure is not about deciding whether you are entitled to refugee status, subsidiary protection status or any other specific form of protection. This will be looked upon at a later stage.

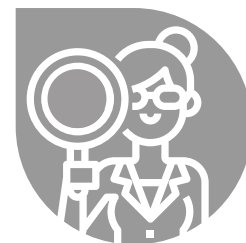
What will be the language of the procedure?

- You have the right to be informed in your mother tongue. You also have the right to ask for an interpreter.



Where will the age assessment take place? When will the age assessment take place? How long will the age assessment last?

- During the age assessment procedure – depending on the national laws of the state where you stay – you will be accommodated in a child protection facility or you will be held in detention until the authority has certified that you are under 18. You have the right to get information on the length and whereabouts of the age assessment procedure. Consult your guardian or any other professional working in the facility you are accommodated in for further information.



How will the authorities assess my age?

- You are certainly curious about what the assessment looks like.
- If you do not have any (identification) documents with you, then it is difficult to determine your exact age. And sometimes it occurs that your age is not believed. If you cannot receive your ID document from your home country or the document is not available, then sometimes a **medical examination** is used to help estimate your age.
- The doctor may examine your body, your bones, your arms and your teeth, and then (s)he decides on how old you are. For every appointment your guardian should accompany you.
- You have the right to a doctor of the same gender as you. A girl must therefore be examined by a woman, a boy must be examined by a man.
- **Non-medical methods** are also used in some states. For example the age assessment can be made on the basis of a preliminary assessment based on physical appearance and demeanour and an interview by a social worker according to guidelines which include the general background of the applicant, family circumstances, ethnic and cultural considerations, education and history.

What will happen when the decision is made about my age?

- Sometimes an age assessment happens without you noticing. When you sign an official document, you always have to pay attention that your age is correctly indicated!
- If you are – according to the age assessment – estimated to be 18 or older, you can talk about it with your lawyer or receive advice from an expert. You also have the possibility to ask the court to reconsider this decision.
- If the appeal to the court is not successful, you will be considered an adult and will no longer benefit from the rights that are granted to children.



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