

Press Release

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EASO age assessment practice in Europe publication

The EASO age assessment practice in Europe publication is now available online on EASO's website. The purpose of this publication is to provide practical support to Member States in the field of age assessment. While the aim of this publication is to address age assessment in the specific field of asylum, it may also serve as a useful reference in other areas where age assessment is key.

Age assessment is the process by which authorities seek to establish the chronological age, or range of age, or whether an individual is an adult or a child. It is an important, yet complex and challenging issue that authorities may need to undertake in order to determine whether an individual is an adult or a child in circumstances where their age is unknown. This is so as to ensure children are protected and afforded the provisions entitled to them under law, and also to prevent adults from being placed amongst children and from taking advantage of additional provisions, such as access to education, provision of a representative, that are not afforded to adults. Age assessment should only be used where there are grounds for serious doubt of an individual's age.

In recognising age assessment as a 'critical' issue, which triggers a number of procedural and legal guarantees within legislation, the European Commission action plan on unaccompanied minors specifically called upon EASO to organise training activities on age assessment and develop best practices regarding reception conditions, asylum procedures and integration of unaccompanied minors, including a handbook on age assessment. In doing so it highlights the variety of procedures and techniques currently in use throughout Europe and in particular raises concerns about proportionality, reliability and standards of procedures.

Further to this, the European Parliament's own initiative report on the situation of unaccompanied minors adopted on 12 September 2013, '...calls on the Commission to include, in the strategic guidelines, common standards based on best practices, concerning the age assessment method, which should consist of a multidimensional and multidisciplinary assessment, be conducted in a scientific, safe, child-sensitive, gender-sensitive and fair manner, with particular attention to girls, and be performed by independent, qualified practitioners and experts; recalls that age assessment must be conducted with due respect for the child's rights and physical integrity, and for human dignity, and that minors should always be given the benefit of the doubt; recalls also that medical examinations should only be conducted when other age assessment methods have been exhausted and that it should be possible to appeal against the results of this assessment; welcomes the work of EASO on this subject, which should be taken as a basis for dealing with all minors.'

In this context, the purpose of this publication is to provide practical support to Member States in the field of age assessment. This publication is a non-binding tool for interpretation and implementation of the EU *acquis* and should serve as a reference tool to support policymakers and officials active in the development, review or implementation of age assessment policy and procedures.

As such, it seeks to highlight the key points, in accordance with international, European and national legislation, which should be taken into consideration when undertaking age assessment.

The following have been identified as key issues for consideration:

- the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in age assessment procedures;
- the circumstances in which age assessment may be a legitimate and necessary aim;
- the relevant procedural measures and safeguards which should be in place during the age assessment procedure;
- the possible methods in use, their respective advantages and disadvantages and what needs to be in place to ensure they meet the minimum requirements of legislation;
- the role of other actors within the age assessment procedure.

Further to this, there are also several reference tools to support users. These include:

- checklists to support users in identifying key points for consideration;
- instances of Member State practice and expert recommendations;
- a comprehensive glossary of defined terms used, which identify the source of definition as well as highlighting where a term may be confused with another, or alternatively also termed or referred to by a similar name;
- overview of the international, European and national legal and policy frameworks, as well as international guidance on age assessment practice;
- summary of the legal provisions, thematically categorised according to the procedural measure or safeguard they address, along with a reference to the relevant article of the legislation.

The publication is currently available in English via the following link: <http://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EASO-Age-assessment-practice-in-Europe.pdf> As of April the publication will also be available in French, German, Greek, Italian and Spanish.

Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office by contacting Mr Jean-Pierre Schembri on the following e-mail address: jean-pierre.schembri@easo.europa.eu