

All you need to know about **age assessment**



January 2022

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021

Print	ISBN 978-92-9485-863-4	doi: 10.2847/1255	BZ-06-20-110-EN-C
PDF	ISBN 978-92-9485-842-9	doi: 10.2847/443893	BZ-06-20-110-EN-N

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INTRODUCTION

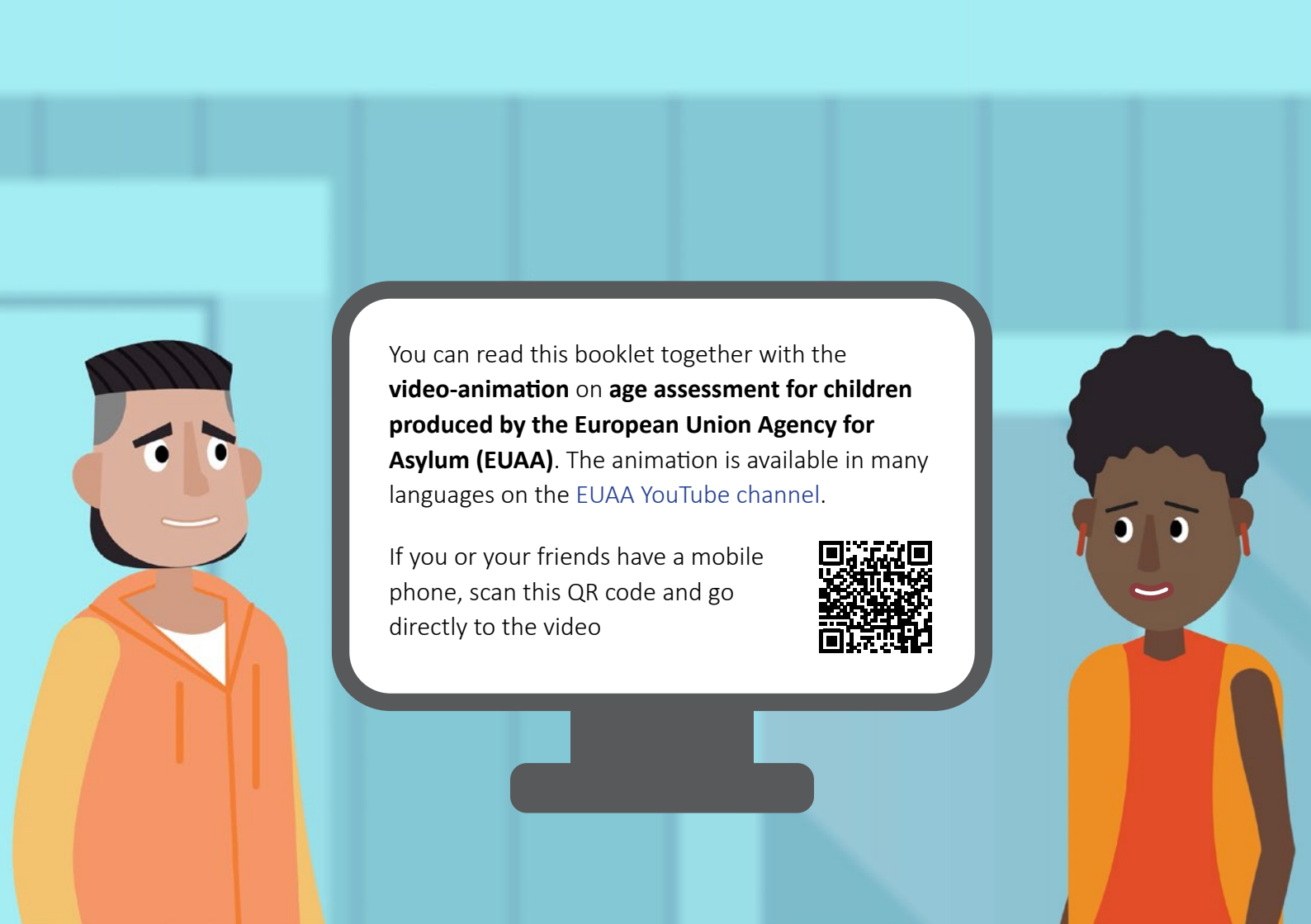
Every child has the **right to an identity**. Identity means that you do not only have a name, but also **a date and place of birth** and a document stating this.

When young people arrive in Europe, they often do **not have documents** proving their identity and age, like a birth certificate or passport. This is when **authorities ask** them **to undergo an age assessment** to decide if they are children or not.

In Europe, you are considered a **child** when you are **below 18 years** of age. As a child, you have the right to special forms of protection.

This booklet explains how an age assessment is done in most European countries. The procedures might change a bit depending on where exactly you are in Europe.





You can read this booklet together with the **video-animation on age assessment for children produced by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)**. The animation is available in many languages on the [EUAA YouTube channel](#).

If you or your friends have a mobile phone, scan this QR code and go directly to the video



WHO IS WHO?

Ahmed and **Samira** have both arrived recently in Europe without their parents. Since the authorities were not sure about their age, both were asked to undergo an age assessment. They are currently waiting for their age assessment to take place.



Ahmed



Samira

Dr Min is a paediatrician, a doctor for children. She examines children and provides a report to the authorities on her findings where needed.



Dr Min

Dr Sam is a radiologist who works closely with Dr Min. He takes pictures of bones called X-rays. These are sometimes used to suggest age.



Dr Sam

Paula



Paula is an officer with special skills in interviewing children and young adults. Normally she is among the first people to meet and speak to those applying for asylum when arriving in Europe.

Tony

... and I am **Tony**, a guardian and I will explain everything you need to know about age assessment.



John



John is a child psychologist. He helps in the age assessment process by talking and asking questions to young people arriving in Europe. He provides information to the authorities where needed.

TONY – THE GUARDIAN



A **guardian** is a person who is **assigned to children** who arrive in Europe **without parents or a legal caregiver**. In some countries guardians are also called representatives.

Guardians like me are there to help answer all questions children might have. For example, on how they can go to school, where they can live, or how to see a doctor if they do not feel well. You can ask your guardian for help on all these topics.

Now I will explain what an age assessment is and why it is important.



Remember

As a child you have the right to a guardian like me. I help you express your opinion, your feelings, and make sure you are heard.

WHY AN AGE ASSESSMENT?

When officers like Paula have doubts about the age of a young person entering Europe and there are no documents to prove the birth date, they can ask you to take part in an age assessment.

An **age assessment** is a **way of approximately finding out how old you are**.

After such an assessment you will have a document officially stating your age. If you are **below** the age of **18 years**, you are **a child**. People **older than 18 years** are **adults**.



NOT SURE?

Having your age written down on an official document is very important.

As a child, you will receive special support during your asylum procedure. Your age will determine where you live and who you live with. It will help authorities to decide, for example, if you should have a guardian or not, which school and class you should join and more.



GIVING CONSENT

Officers will normally ask you if you agree to do an age assessment. **Your agreement** is often **referred to as giving consent** for an age assessment to be conducted.

You have the right to ask questions when something is not clear. You have the right to ask for a **translator or interpreter** if you cannot understand the language used by the officers.

A **translator or interpreter** is a person who can speak in a language you **understand** and will help you communicate with the authorities when necessary. Their **role** is to **translate exactly** what you and the officers say.

When you understand what is expected from you during the age assessment procedure and why it is important for you to take part in it, you can comfortably give your consent.





THE AGE ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

These are the four most common ways to assess the age of a young person.

1. THE AGE ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW WITH A TRAINED OFFICER LIKE PAULA

Officers like Paula **will look at all the documents** you have shared with them. For example, documents you brought from your home country or papers you received while travelling. You also might be asked questions about your life before arriving in Europe. These questions can include, for example, if or where you went to school, how many brothers and sisters you have, questions about your family.

Your **honest answers** will help Paula to find out approximately how old you are. After this, Paula will make a decision. If she still has doubts and she is not sure what age to write down, and depending on the country you find yourself in, she will ask you to see a psychologist or a specialised social worker. They will then ask you a few more detailed questions.

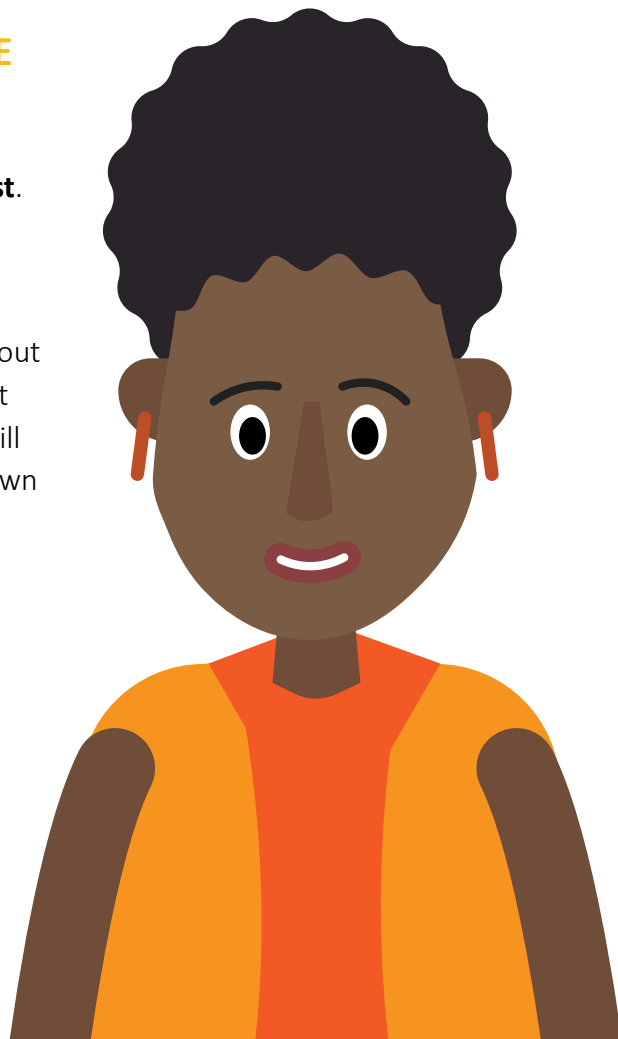


2. MEETING A CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST, LIKE JOHN OR A SOCIAL WORKER

You will meet someone like John, who is a **child psychologist**. In some countries you will see a social worker instead.

Child psychologists and **social workers** know how to talk to children in a gentle way. They will ask you general things about your life or your family back home. They might ask you what you like to do and what you do not like at all. Maybe they will ask you about your best friends and how long you have known them or learn from you what events took place back home.

Remember to always ask questions when you don't understand something or you need clarifications.







3. A PHYSICAL EXAMINATION BY A DOCTOR FOR CHILDREN

In some countries, they might ask you to see a pediatrician, a medical doctor like Dr Min who is a specialist in working with children. This medical visit might replace a meeting with a child psychologist or a social worker.

Doctors will check your weight, your height, maybe your teeth and will ask you how you generally feel. You might have to take off some of your clothes for the examination. However, you should never have to undress completely. Remember, if someone asks you to do so, you can just say **NO**.

In many countries, you have the option to ask for a female or a male doctor, depending on who you feel more comfortable with and who is available.



4. AN X-RAY BY A RADIOLOGIST TRAINED IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN

Pediatricians work closely with other doctors, such as radiologists like Dr Sam. Radiologists are specialised in taking photographs of bones with a big machine called an X-ray machine. The x-ray machine works like a big camera and can take a picture of your bones through your skin.

No worries, **taking this type of photograph** of your bones **does not hurt** at all. Actually, you will not feel anything. However, x-rays should not be done often, since they involve radiation.

Depending on the country you are in, a doctor could do an X-ray of your wrist, your collarbone or sometimes your teeth. The way your bones are connected and the way they look on the photograph can help the doctors to estimate your age.



Remember



Depending on the country you are in, the age assessment can be an:

- **age assessment interview,**
- an **interview with a child psychologist or a social worker,**
- a physical **exam by a pediatrician,**
- or an **X-ray exam by a radiologist.**

Sometimes, the age assessment is a combination of some of these different procedures.

If you have questions, you should always speak up and **ask!** The people involved in the age assessment process, like Paula, John, Dr Min or someone else, have to answer your questions. If you have problems understanding their language, tell them. They will try their best to find someone to interpret for you in a language you are comfortable in.

NOTES BOX

NOTE DOWN QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT STILL HAVE
ON AGE ASSESSMENT THAT NEED TO BE CLARIFIED.

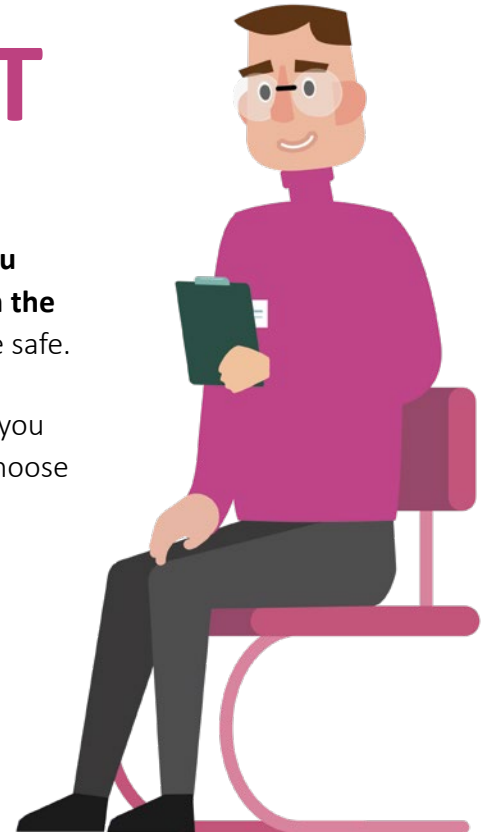


RESULTS OF THE AGE ASSESSMENT

After the age assessment process is finalised, in most countries **you will be notified** by a social worker **and receive a written letter with the decision** on your age. This letter is important, so keep it somewhere safe.

If at the end of the process officers **still have doubts** as to whether you are **below 18 years** of age or **above 18 years** of age, they have to choose **the younger age**.

This is called THE BENEFIT OF DOUBT!



WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU DO NOT AGREE WITH THE DECISION?

Sometimes the results of the age assessment may find you a little bit older or a bit younger than you might actually be.

If you **disagree with the decision** on your age, talk to your guardian or an officer who works where you live, for example a legal officer, reception officer or a social worker. They will help you prepare a document called an appeal.



Filing an appeal means to **contest or challenge the age assessment decision**. In most countries, you have to do this within a number of days after you receive the official age assessment decision letter. Make sure that you **do not wait too long** and immediately reach out for help to correct the decision!

**AGE
19?**



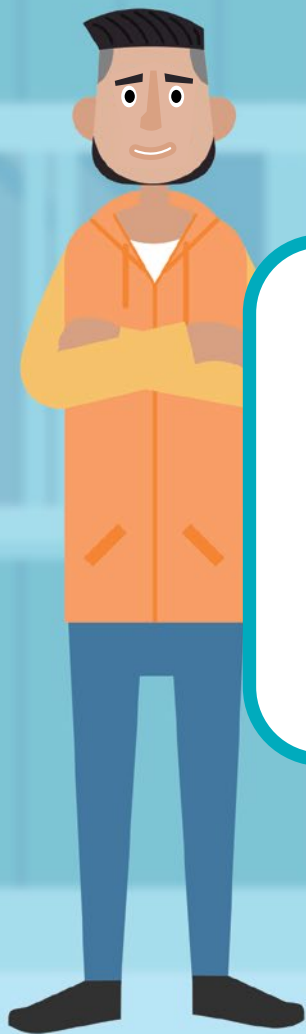
BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD

Officers should make sure that all decisions made by them are in the **best interest of the child**.

Considering the child's best interests is not just important when it comes to age, but also when deciding where a child should live and with whom, what school a child should go to, and more.

Guardians like me are there to help the authorities to **consider what is best for you**.





Remember



- You will receive **an official letter** with the decision on your age.
- You can appeal if you think that your age was assessed wrongly!
- You have **to file an appeal** shortly after you receive the decision letter.
- Always **ask questions** when something is unclear.



FINAL REMARKS

Remember, having an official document with your birth date is important for you for many reasons. It will help you to go to school, for example, and live with other young people of a similar age.

If you arrived in Europe without documents proving your age, taking part in an age assessment procedure can help you.

Remember, you are not alone in this process. Officers working where you live are there to help you.

Always ask for help if you need support and something is not clear to you!





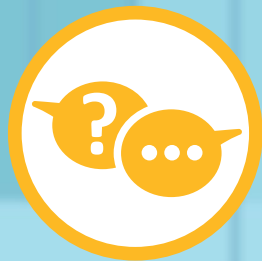


Lastly, also be aware that in Europe there are **rules and laws to protect children** from violence and harm.

All European countries are part of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, often referred to as the CRC. The CRC is a document detailing the rights of children and what needs to be done by governments for children to be safe, protected and to live a good life overall.

The CRC not only applies to child citizens of the country you find yourself in but to all children, including those arriving in Europe.

If you now want to test yourself and see how much you remember on the age assessment procedure, continue with the short quiz on the next page. Have fun!



AGE ASSESSMENT QUIZ



Q1. Can you remember any rights children have during the age assessment procedure? List the ones you can remember.

Q2. Do you remember the different ways age is being assessed in European countries?

Q3. How can a guardian help you?

Q4. Is it possible that the officers or doctors cannot agree on an age or get the age wrong? If yes, what can you do?



Q5. Do you remember what ‘the best interests of the child’ means?

WELL DONE, YOU ANSWERED ALL OF THE QUESTIONS!

FIND THE ANSWERS ON THE NEXT PAGE.

ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ



ANSWERS TO QUESTION 1

- Right to be heard
- Right to have a date of birth (important for further procedures)
- Right to protection
- Right to additional support while a child
(e.g. safe place to sleep/education)
- Right to be informed
- Right to ask questions
- Right to say NO (when asked to undress completely during a medical exam)
- Right to a guardian for support
- Right to choose the doctor's gender to do the exam
- Right to appeal the decision

ANSWERS TO QUESTION 2

- Initial interview with an officer
- Psychological assessment by a psychologist or social worker
- Medical examination by a doctor (e.g. checking teeth, weight and height)
- An X-ray, if needed

ANSWERS TO QUESTION 3

- To have the guardian present to support and help during the procedure
- To ask questions and have an interpreter to explain in a language you understand
- To choose if the doctor is female or male

ANSWERS TO QUESTION 4

- When age is unclear the officers should choose the younger age (benefit of the doubt)
- You have the right to appeal an age assessment result

ANSWERS TO QUESTION 5

- All steps taken during the process are to be done to ensure my best interests, this means authorities should always have my best interests in mind. This means the actions should be helpful to me. I am aware, however, that this does not mean the authorities can fulfil all the wishes I might have.



Many thanks to all the children and youth who provided their feedback on the age assessment animation for children. This booklet originates from your suggestion to have a handy leaflet to further support and inform young applicants in understanding what an age assessment is and how to effectively take part in this process.





Publications Office
of the European Union