

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS – EUROPE
Delegates Meeting – May 2017 – Reykjavík , Iceland
WORKING WITH YOUNG ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES
AGE DETERMINATION

PURPOSE

Should IFSW develop a policy on age determination of young refugees to help social workers deal with the difficult judgements they are sometimes required to make?

BACKGROUND

More people are on the move around the world than ever before and a large proportion of them are children and young people. This is the result of local conflicts, natural disasters and escape from poverty. When young people who are not with their family seek asylum or refugee status, the authorities must know their age because young people are legally entitled to support and protection which is not available to adults. Many young people do not have documents which prove their age or documents may not be reliable. It is therefore necessary to have a process to enable the authorities to make a decision about age.

This process, sometimes called '*age assessment*', requires authorities to gather information to help decide the age. In many cases there is no certainty about that information. The benefits of being assessed as a child or young person are significant so some people try to claim that they are younger than their true age. In the end, young people are given a date of birth, with consequences for their legal rights and their access to social services.

Social workers are sometimes told to make an age assessment or to work with others to do this. The assignment of an age ('*Age Assessment*') has serious legal consequences. BASW prefers to use the term '*Age Determination*', because the process is only an approximation. There is now significant evidence from around the world that there is no objective way for making an *Age Determination* and social workers are often not the best people to do this.

International bodies, such as the European Union, have provided guidance about age determination.

BASW is aware that social workers in some countries have been very heavily involved in managing refugee movements and is interested in helping member organisations to share experiences so that we can learn from each other and help IFSW to develop policy.

BASW POLICY (http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_31739-5.pdf):

1. It is necessary to determine the age of individuals whose age is unknown and whose rights depend on their age being known.
2. Age cannot be determined accurately.
3. Where there are doubts about whether a person is their claimed age, care should be taken in particular not to inappropriately categorise children as adults.
4. Determinations of age must be multidisciplinary (involve other professions).
5. Discrimination is a real risk when determining age, which must be avoided.
6. Social workers who take part in determinations of age are also responsible for ensuring that service users are helped to challenge the outcome of those determinations, and for raising awareness of oppressive and unfair practice.

BASW is aware that age determination is controversial and keeps this policy under review.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are social workers in your country required to undertake age determination?
2. If social worker **ARE** involved in age determination, do they do this on their own or with other professionals?
3. Should social workers be involved in age determination? Is it an appropriate task?
4. Do social workers in your country have problems with the age determination process?
5. Does the age determination process in your country follow the international guidelines?
6. Do you agree with the BASW principles (above)?
7. Should IFSW develop a policy on age determination of refugees and asylum seekers?

Thank you for participating in this consultation. If you wish to send us any comments outside the meeting, please send by email to policyadmin@basw.co.uk.

BASW (19 May 2017)