More than 22 million people seeking international refuge around the world. It’s the highest number since UNHCR was funded in 1950 in the aftermath of the second world war. Half of the people living as refugees today are children. Many of them are unaccompanied minors. IFSW (Europe) has developed this policy to highlight the importance of social workers perspective in age determination of unaccompanied minors.

Europe has seen a raise in the number of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the EU. Some of them have no documents and services have big difficulties deciding the age of some young people. Since children are entitled to a different care than adults, according to the UN convention on the rights of the child, age determination is of considerable importance both for young people and for services. Social workers are frequently caught up with these dilemmas and are concerned that the rights of children are sometimes being overlooked in the process.

IFSW (Europe) have received different examples of how age determination is done from our national associations. There are examples were social workers are forces do perform age determinations in ways that goes against good social work practice and the ethical code of Social Work. There are other examples were social workers assessment on maturity and age are not considered in the age determination. IFSW (Europe) are concerned about the way that children´s rights could be ignored and also the pressures this placed on social workers, who have no special training or competence to do age determination.

IFSW (Europe) states that

* the first responsibility of social workers is to ensure that the rights of children are respected and that their voice is heard.
* If a service is unsure of the age of a young person he/she should be treated as a child.
* There’s a need to determine the age of an unaccompanied child migrant in order to decide whether they are eligible for children’s services.
* Age determination is also an important tool to prevent adults and children being placed in the same facilities.

**Age determination - a multiprofessional process**

There are many social and psychological factors that affects the maturity of a young person. Unaccompanied minors have often been forced to take care of their own earlier than if they would have stayed with their family. Often together with other persons in the same age. This can make them appear more mature than young people who have not been forced to migrate without their families.

There is, to our knowledge, no evidence based way to determine the age of a young person, neither medically nor socially. There are combined medical examinations that can indicate an average age. Experienced Social Workers that see and work with young people that needs to prove their age have important knowledge to contribute with in the age determination process. The age determination process is also often filled with ethical and practical dilemmas for social workers. They cannot assess and determine the age on their own. A multi-professional age determination process is needed that can use various kinds of examinations and observations to give a qualified assessment. The determination of age is an arbitrary judgement which can have serious adverse personal consequences for the individual.

IFSW Europe states that:

– Social workers have an ethical duty to ensure the voice of the child is heard, that children’s best interests are respected and that the rights are protected.

– Age determination must be a multi-professional process.

– Social workers have an ethical duty to enable people to appeal against any adverse decision.