



**Karolinska
Institutet**

Health care policies for migrant children in Europe ISSOP-2017

**Anders Hjern MD, PhD
Karolinska Institutet and Centre for Health Equity
Studies, Stockholm, Sweden
Anders.hjern@chess.su.se**

Health status of refugee children at inscription in school in
Malmö during the autumn of 2015 (N=1018; Ages 6-18)
according to school nurse.

Kling & Hjern, manuscript 2016

Health problem	%
"Urgent" need of care	2.5
Severe mental health problems	4.9
Severe sleeping problems	15.1
Post traumatic stress	11.4
Disability	2.3
Daily medication	5.2
Impaired vision	7.1
Impaired hearing	7.6
Untreated caries	41.8

Vaccination status of refugee children at inscription in school
in Malmö during the autumn of 2015 (N=1018; Ages 6-18)
according to school nurse.

Kling & Hjern, manuscript 2016

	%
Have "all vaccinations" according to parents referring to country of origin	75
Have documentation of vaccinations	20



Models of Child Health Appraised

(A Study of Primary Healthcare in 30 European countries)

Migrant Children in Europe: Entitlements to Health Care

The UN Convention of the Child

Second Paragraph

1. “States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind...”



Entitlements to health care for refugee children in Europe and Australia

	Equal entitlements	Equal entitlements but in parallel health care scheme	Very unclear, non-existing or restricted entitlements	Special entitlements for unaccompanied children
Asylum Seekers	Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, UK	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia.	Germany, Slovakia, Australia	Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, UK.
Irregular/ Undocumented Migrants	Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden.	-	19 European countries (including Germany) and Australia	Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Lithuania, UK.



Diverse European policies..

- Four countries (*France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain*) explicitly entitle all migrant children, irrespective of legal status, to receive equal care to that of nationals. Sweden and Belgium also entitle equal care to asylum seekers and irregular non-EU migrants, while entitlements for EU migrants are unclear.
- Germany and Slovakia stand out as the countries with the most restrictive policies. They are the only countries that have policies that restrict health care for asylum-seeking children as well as for irregular migrant children originating outside of the EU/EEA area to emergency care. The German case is particularly troublesome, since it applies to so many migrant children, and in the case of irregular migrants is tied to a reporting duty.



Barriers for accessing care for children in transition/in an irregular situation

- **Legal obligation for health care professionals to report "aliens" to receive economic compensation; Germany and Bulgaria**
- **Fear of being recognised and handed over to police/authorities.**
- **Lack of funds to implement health care policy (Greece), unclear funding schemes (many countries)**
- **Negative attitudes and lack of knowledge of policy among health care professionals**



Health assessment

- Many refugee children come from countries with poorly equipped health care services because of poverty and/or war.
- A health assessment can identify hitherto unmet needs of health care, preventive as well as curative, and initiate this care.



Policies on health assessment for newly settled refugee children in Europe

	Screening for communicable disorders	Individual assessment of health care needs	Screening and individual assessment	No systematic health assessment
Mandatory	Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech republic, Germany,, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia,		Austria, Iceland, Malta,	Greece, Portugal, Spain
Voluntary	Belgium		Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden	



Health assessment

Thus, considerable resources are spent in Europe today for health assessment of refugee children, but often not in the “best interest of the child”.



Models of Child Health Appraised
(A Study of Primary Healthcare in 30 European countries)

How old? Child or adult?



Models of Child Health Appraised
(A Study of Primary Healthcare in 30 European countries)

UN Convention of the Rights of the Child

- “For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being **below the age of eighteen years** unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”
 - But...the UN Convention of the Child does not mention how age should be assessed when unknown.
-

Why do asylum seekers lack proof of age/ birthdate?

- Many countries of origin are "failed states" (Somalia, Afghanistan etc) where it has not been possible to register births during many years.
 - In a war situation and in a dictatorship it can be difficult to obtain official documents
-

EU directives

- “It is the applicant who has the burden of proof to show that he / she is a minor.” EU Resolution on unaccompanied minors (97 / C 221/03) .”
 - According to EU-directive (2005/85/EG) member states can use medical age assessment to determine age in asylum seekers.
-

European controversy



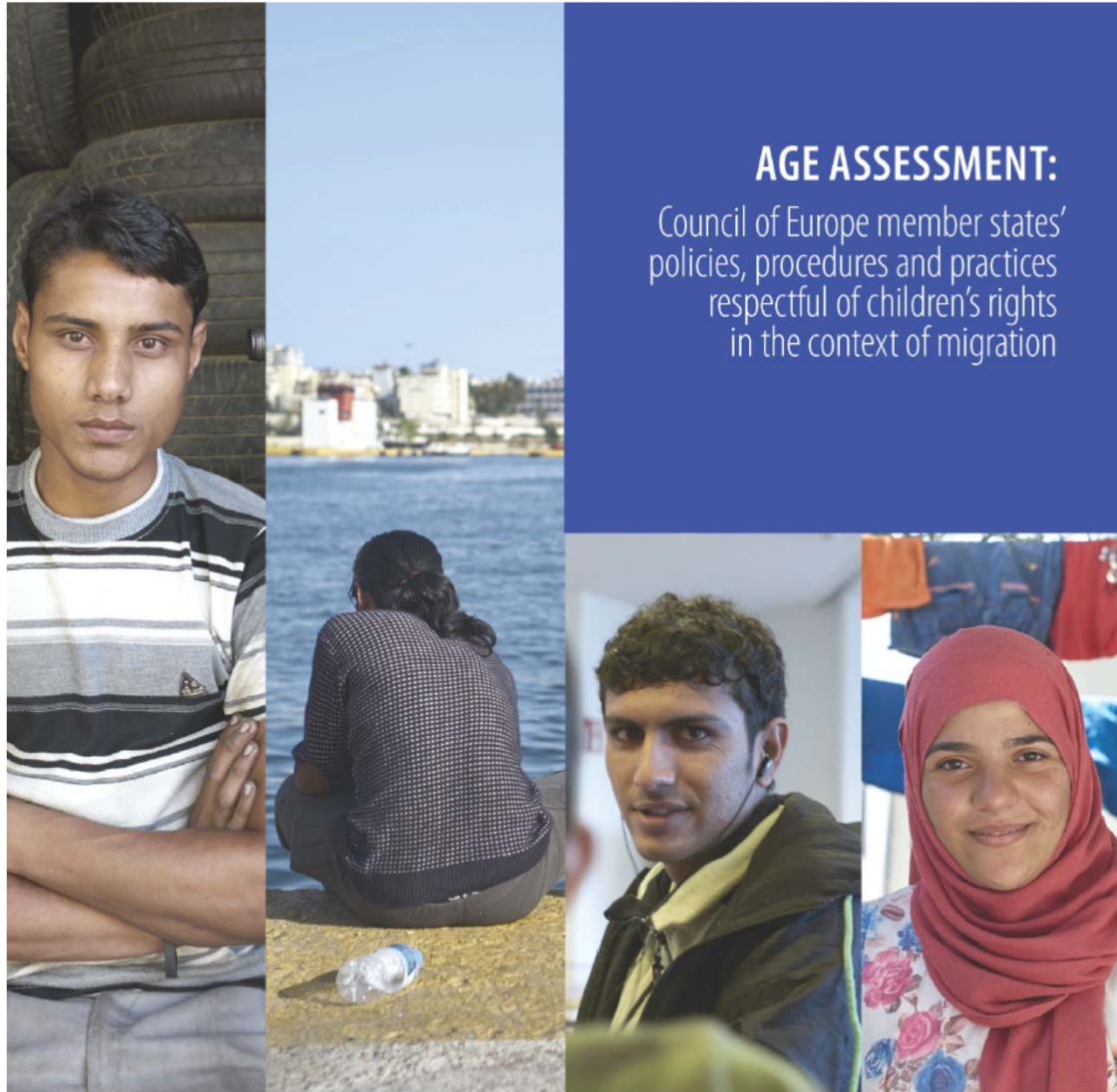
- Forensic doctors in 27 European countries assess age in asylum seekers based on imaging of the skeleton and/or teeth.
 - UK and Ireland rely on psychosocial assessment of age.
 - The European Academy of Pediatrics, national paediatric and medical societies in several countries, the network of the European Children's Ombudsmen and many NGO's have advocated against these methods because of their low precision in assessing age around the crucial 18 year mark.
 - In Sweden medical age assessment on a large scale has been implemented in 2017 based on X ray of the teeth and MRI of the knee.
-

Refugee policy in Sweden 2015-2016

- This is the Swedish prime minister and his coalition partner in nov 2015 declaring that Sweden closes the border for people without ID.
- **And that medical age assessment should be used more often.**



+ a number of other policy changes with the intention to put Sweden in the forefront of the "race to the bottom" for refugee rights.



AGE ASSESSMENT:

Council of Europe member states' policies, procedures and practices respectful of children's rights in the context of migration

Council of Europe
Children's Rights
Division

Report prepared by
Daja Wenke
Independent Researcher and
Consultant – Child Rights



**There are other policies than health care
that we need to get involved with...**



The logo for ENOC (European Network of Ombudspersons for Children) is displayed within a dark red rectangular box. The acronym "ENOC" is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below it, the full name "European Network of Ombudspersons for Children" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

ENOC

European Network of Ombudspersons for Children

SAFETY AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AT STAKE FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE (jan 2016)

- “The sea journey is dangerous for children – about 30% of migrants drowning are children. During the winter, children arrive wet and cold, and many are at risk of hypothermia, causing different illnesses, including pneumonia. Volunteers working at the shores in Greece are now reporting children dying of hypothermia upon arrival. Babies and small children are particularly vulnerable. “

The logo for ENOC (European Network of Ombudspersons for Children) is displayed within a dark red rectangular box. The acronym "ENOC" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Below it, the full name "European Network of Ombudspersons for Children" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

ENOC

European Network of Ombudspersons for Children

- SAFETY AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AT STAKE FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE
- “Upon arrival, children are placed in emergency shelters, designed to accommodate refugee children for just a few days. However, in most countries children stay in these facilities for weeks or even months, without the possibility of receiving education, having any form of privacy or taking part in leisure activities....” Often, there is no, or very limited access to health care in these shelters (in Greece, Sweden and the Netherlands).

Conclusions:

- Most European countries have health care policies that limit entitlements to health care for migrant children.
- Systematic health assessments of newly settled refugee children are carried out in most European countries, but often do not include assessment of health care needs.
- Medical age assessment is used as a political tool of deterrence in many European countries.
- Migrant policy is the main underlying cause of drowning in the EU.

Thus:

- **Advocacy is key in improving health for refugee children in Europe.**

Literature:

Literature:

- Hjern A, Østergaard LS, Norredam M, de Luna CM, Goldfeld S. Health policies for migrant children in Europe and Australia. *Lancet*. 2017 Jan 21;389(10066):249.
- Stubbe Østergaard L, Norredam M, Mock-Munoz de Luna C, Blair M, Goldfeld S, Hjern A. Restricted health care entitlements for child migrants in Europe and Australia. *Eur J Public Health*. 2017 Jun 14. doi: 10.1093/eurpub/ckx083.
- Hjern A, Brendler-Lindqvist M, Norredam M. Age assessment of young asylumseekers. *Acta Paediatr*. 2012 Jan;101(1):4-7.
- Council of Europe. Age Assessment: Council of Europe member states' policies, procedures and practices respectful of children's rights in the context of migration. Strasbourg: council of Europe, 2017.
<https://rm.coe.int/age-assessment-council-of-europe-member-states-policies-procedures-and/168074b723>
- MOCHA. Report on national policies for primary care for migrant children in Europe
- MOCHA. Migrant children in Australia: companion paper in comparison to the European situation
<http://www.childhealthservicemodels.eu/publications/deliverables/>



Thank you!
(anders.hjern@chess.su.se)