Age matters!
Exploring age-related barriers to service access and the realisation of rights for adolescents

Nina Ferencic
TransMonEE Network Meeting of National Statistical Offices In Europe and Central Asia
26-27 November 2019, Vienna
Minimum age definitions directly influence the realities of children, adolescents and young people: when they can make independent health choices, be tried and held in adult courts and prisons, access financial credit for business, be heard in judicial proceedings, consent to marriage and many other things...
Mapping minimum age requirements in 22 countries in Europe and Central Asia

• 72 age-related data points
• 6 domains explored
  ✓ Civil-legal participation
  ✓ Political participation
  ✓ Social participation
  ✓ Economic participation & education
  ✓ Health
  ✓ Safety & security
• National legislation & state reports
Health

Age at which children can seek independent medical advice

GC recommendation: Removal of age restrictions
Age at which children can independently ask for medical advice

- **15 years**: SL
- **16 years**: BG, ES, LT, NL, UK
- **18 years**: CY, EL, HU, IT, LV, MT, RO, SK
- **depends on maturity**: AT, BE, CZ, DE, DK, EE, FL, FR, IE, LU, SE
- **not regulated**: HR, PT
- **no data**: PL

Source: EU Fundamental Rights Agency
What do adolescents think?

From what age can a young person seek medical/health advice by themselves?
We asked adolescents 10-17 y.o. from 5 countries: Armenia, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Romania, Ukraine.

About their knowledge and experiences.

On-line surveys: 5,725 answered.

Qualitative focus groups - 6 per country, including with the most vulnerable adolescents.

241 adolescents participated in the FG.
Close to 70% agree or strongly agree that a young person their age should be able to seek medical advice by themselves if they want to.
Most adolescents felt capable to speak to a doctor independently and ask for advice

“I am capable enough to:” “talk to a doctor by myself without my parents/guardians” by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 62.0% of survey respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they are capable enough to talk to a doctor by themselves without their parents/guardians
- At age of 14 and above: more than 50%
...but some are refused by doctors

“Did a doctor ever refuse to give you medical advice because your parents/guardians were not with you in the room?”
by gender, general health status, and existence of long-term health problems

- **One-in-six (15.0%)** of all respondents reported that a doctor refused to give them medical advice because their parents were not present.
...or avoid seeking medical advice because their parents have to be with them

“Did you ever avoid seeking medical advice because your parents/guardians had to be with you in the room?”

by gender, general health status, and existence of long-term health problems

- Close to one third (28.3%) of respondents avoided seeking medical advice because their parents had to be with them in the room
- Rates of refusal and avoidance undoes any protective function a minimum age law may have intended to have
...and they particularly avoid seeking services on sensitive issues, like mental and sexual health.

Of those who answered “Yes” to avoiding seeking medical advice -
“What were you seeking medical advice for?” [select all that apply]

- “Mental health” was the number one issue on which respondents avoided seeking medical advice because their parents had to accompany them
- “Having more people to talk to about their problems” was identified as a key factor that could increase wellbeing
Does age matter?

Protection vs autonomy...
Regulating age vs. the evolving capacity & competence

Capacity of care providers to:
- assess competence
- exercise professional judgement - but be protected

Would removal of age barriers to accessing medical advice improve adolescents’ wellbeing?

To be continued....
For more information:

UNICEF/YPL Age Matters!

www.agemattersnow.org
Nina Ferencic
Senior Regional Adviser on HIV/AIDS & Adolescent Health, Development and Participation
nferencic@unicef.org

Cristina Bacalso
Research Coordinator
cristina@youthpolicy.org