# Tool 7
# Recommendations for age verification

*Content developed by CCR CSR as part of the project "Remedies Towards a Better Workplace" with input from all project partners: Hivos, Arisa, Unicef, AGT/SER, SAVE, READ, CCR CSR, WE Fashion, O'Neill, Prénatal, Hunkemöller, FNG, Cool Investments*

<u>For whom</u>: for AGT signatories, FLA affiliates, brands and companies.
<u>Objective:</u> This tool provides guidance to buying and supplying companies to verify ages of workers in case where there is doubt if the person has reached the minimum age for working.

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## 1. In what circumstances should age verification be done?[1]

- The child's interest and rights should ALWAYS be put in the first place. Age verification should be carried out in a manner respectful of the rights of the child concerned.
- Age verification should only be carried out when there are serious doubts about the age of a child and only as a measure of last resort. If there is no serious doubt, the benefit of the doubt should be given to the child. The age assessment procedure must be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to the age and maturity of the child.
- Age verification should only be done with the informed consent of the child concerned. Children should be given clear information about the purpose and process of the age verification procedure in a language they understand.
- Before the age of a child who is unaccompanied or separated from his/her parents is verified, it is important that a qualified independent guardian is appointed to advise the child. An adult female should be present when interviewing girl children.
- Children have a right to privacy that must be respected—medical examinations are not appropriate. These can be inaccurate and cause unnecessary stress to the child.
- Some children may find the process of age assessment distressing. A dispute over child's age could represents a challenge to the child's identity and integrity. Interviewers should be mindful of possible psychological stress for a child.

## 2. How should age verification be done?

Depending on the information available (most probably from a workplace audit), age verification comprises the (cross-) checking of identity papers, an interview with the child, a family/community visit, or a combination of two or all of these. The following section describes the role of the interviewer and different methods in detail.

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[1] United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2013) Age Assessment: A Technical Note

## 2.1 Qualification of the interviewer

Age verification must be done by appropriately skilled staff. Staff should be skilled in child-friendly and gender-sensitive communications, and be familiar with the child's culture, ethnicity, knowledgeable about children's physical, emotional and psychological development. Staff should establish a rapport and trust with the child through the entire age verification process.

## 2.2 Observation and Worker Interviews

The first suspicion of child labour is often aroused during observation. During visits to factories attention should be given to young-looking workers; workers telling that there are young workers present in the factory; many unused machines that look like they would regularly be in use; groups of young people leaving as the (assessment) staff enters.

Worker interviews are a useful source of information on child workers:

- o The focus on suspected child labour should not be highlighted, and interviews with young and old workers should be mixed
- o If the children themselves do not give information, others in the factory (or vendors at the factory gates) are sometimes more willing to talk

## 2.3 Checking ID / Human Resources records[2]

- Check ID papers, they might be fake, borrowed, falsified, obtained "real" ID by submitting false information to the government
- Checking management's lists of young workers, and parental permission letters, which may include information on underage workers
- Cross-checking contracts / ID card copies / employment letters / application forms etc. for consistency of date of birth and other personal details
- Checking birth certificates, family books.

## 2.4 Calendar of events[3]

In case reliable documentation or records are not available, it is recommended using an accurate local calendar of events (a customized calendar which provides dates of significant events for a specific geographic area) which can help to reduce errors in estimating a child's date of birth. When using the local calendar of events, the goal is to narrow down the age of the child to the nearest month and year of birth. This is done by asking relatives a series of 'before and after' questions with the aim of identifying two known events, one which occurred before and one which occurred after the child was born.

The calendar contains recurring yearly events (e.g. national, religious holidays, start of the academic school year, pastoral, seasonal, climatic events) and important events that occurred only once (e.g. elections of political leaders, fires, storms, death of a prominent person). Locally specific events, relevant to smaller geographic areas need to be incorporated. Key informants for establishing the calendar include community leaders and religious leaders familiar with major political and climatic events occurring in the area. Note: many cultures do not use the Gregorian (Western) calendar. Alternative calendars commonly used include the Islamic, Chinese and Indian calendar.

Consideration of where a child fits within the family regarding older and younger brothers and sisters and anecdotal evidence may also be useful. In addition, others involved in the child's life, such as a teacher, or a community leader may be able to offer an indication of the child's age.
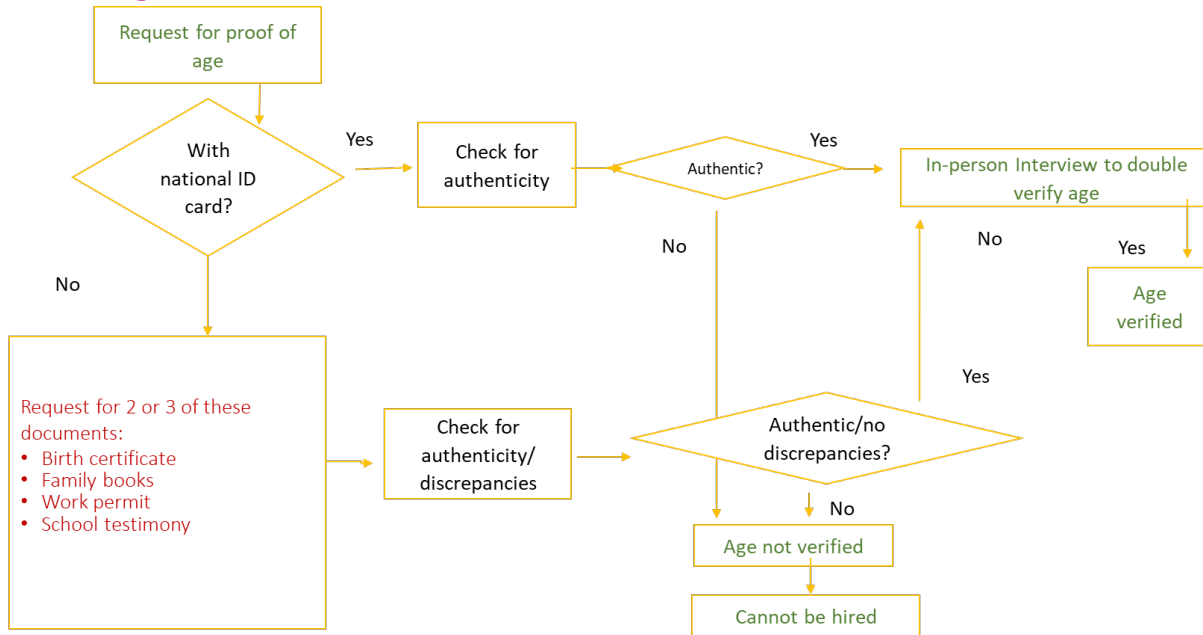
A person can state their age differently in different countries. A person born in May 2005 may say they are 14 once they have had their birthday in May 2019, while sometimes a person may say they are already 14 from the beginning of the year 2019 (i.e. Jan 2019) before they actually have had their birthday that year.

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[2] ILO Better Work Programme (2015), unpublished internal guidance document
[3] Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2008) Guidelines for Estimating the Month and Year of Birth of Young Children

# 3. Age verification flow chart



Request for proof of age → With national ID card? → Yes → Check for authenticity → Authentic? → Yes → In-person Interview to double verify age → Yes → Age verified

With national ID card? → No → Request for 2 or 3 of these documents:
- Birth certificate
- Family books
- Work permit
- School testimony

→ Check for authenticity/ discrepancies → Authentic/no discrepancies? → Yes → In-person Interview to double verify age

In-person Interview to double verify age → No → (back to Authentic/no discrepancies)

Authentic? → No → (down to Authentic/no discrepancies?)

Authentic/no discrepancies? → No → Age not verified → Cannot be hired

# 4. Sample questions related to age verification

Questions related to age should be natural and may start with a casual chat about the family situation:

- o Can you talk a bit about yourself? Where is your hometown? Do you like school? Why? Or why not?
- o How many members are in your family? What are your parents' names?
- o What are your parents doing? Where are they?
- o Do you have siblings? Are they studying or working? How many years older/younger than you are your siblings?
- o What is your birthday by day, month and year? So, in this case, how old are you?
- o What's your zodiac animal? What about your siblings?
- o When did you start junior middle school? Have you ever skipped a grade or been held back a grade?
- o Which grade did you finish and when?  Which grade are your siblings in? Or when did they finish school and at what grade?
- o Was this a school in your hometown? Where is it?
- o Do you have friends from the same hometown/school here? Do you still keep in contact with your classmates? Which grade are your classmates in now if some are still in school?
- o Is this your first job? Have you ever worked before? What kind of job have you done before? How long did you work for the last job?