

2.2.2. Interviews must be sufficiently in-depth

Case law related to international protection has addressed how interviews must be conducted during an age assessment, more specifically looking at the depth of the assessment, language accessibility, the qualifications of the interviewer, and the presence of interpreters and representatives. The case law underscores that even when an interview formally takes place, an inadequate way of carrying it out may entail a violation.

A significant principle which can be drawn from case law is that interviews must be carried out in a meaningful and substantive way to give the minor a chance to react to any doubts expressed by the interviewer and to submit documents and other evidence supporting their statements. The interview is devoid of substance if the process is merely a routine marking of a form, without input required from the applicant, and if the officer immediately directs the applicant to undergo a medical examination (see *F.B. v Belgium*, 6 March 2025, paras 82-83). The CRC Committee has grounded this principle in the child's right to be heard under Article 12 of the CRC, specifically to be heard in a language the child understands, in a child-friendly, gender-sensitive and culturally-appropriate manner (*A.L. v Spain*, 31 May 2019, para 12(4) and *A.D. v Spain*, 4 February 2020, paras 10(10) and 10(11)).

Furthermore, the ECtHR has stressed the importance of involving staff with expertise in communicating with children early on and providing proper representation, so that an applicant may participate meaningfully in the process (*Darboe and Camara v Italy* and *F.B. v Belgium*). It also follows from the court's reasoning in *F.B. v Belgium* that there is an obligation for the interviewer to go beyond fact-gathering and ensure informed participation for the applicant, as an earlier social interview can ensure that the applicant is properly informed of their rights. Although not in the asylum context, the CRC Committee also confirmed the importance of a thorough social interview at an early stage, including proper interpretation and representation (*S.E.M.A.* v *France,* 6 March 2023, para 8(7)).25

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  UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *S.E.M.A. v France*, CRC/C/92/D/130/2020, 6 March 2023, para 8(7).

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