

BOOK III

Children's rights

WHAT IS A BEST INTERESTS ASSESSMENT?



WELCOME!



This story is about four young people — just like you.

They have arrived safely in Europe after a long journey.
Some of the young people arrived alone. Some of them arrived with family.
They have lots of questions — and they are helped by the people who work where they live.



This story can help you too!

You will learn:

- what **best interests assessment** means
- what to expect
- why it is necessary for you to participate and work with the officers
- who can help you
- about your rights

You can read this story:




- alone
- with a friend
- with someone who works here




Take your time. It's OK to stop and come back to it later.

If something is hard to understand, **ask for someone to explain it to you.**
Your guardian, social worker or lawyer can help you.

AT THE END, YOU WILL FIND:

-  a page with local information
-  a fun quiz
-  space to write your own questions and add useful contacts



For people **below 18 arriving alone**, a guardian will be appointed. In some countries, the guardian is also called a representative.

Also, in some countries, **asking for asylum** is called **asking for international protection**.



Lastly, be aware that all services offered at the reception facilities where you are staying are free. If a staff member asks you for money, talk to an officer you trust or your guardian.

MEET THE CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY

Mohamed

I am 17 years old. I am happy most of the time. I like helping my friends and family whenever I can. I arrived alone some weeks ago and I am looking for my grandfather. I am eager to start working.



Ahmed

I am 15 years old. I arrived with my older sister Jasmine, who has been taking care of me since our mother died. I like to hang out and make new friends. I really want to go back to school as soon as I can. At the moment, I am learning the local language here.

Jasmine

I am 24 years old. I arrived together with my brother, Ahmed, who I take care of as best I can. We arrived recently and are trying to join our uncle who has been living in Europe for some time. I love sports and I am very good at playing football.



Adam

I am 9 years old. I am here on my own.
For now, I have decided not to speak.
I experienced many bad things before arriving here. I need some time before I will talk again.
But I am smart and I understand everything. I am a very good listener and want to go to school.
I like all the new friends I have made so far.



Ms Ines

I am a guardian working in this reception centre. I try to support all children and young people seeking asylum as best I can. I love cooking and it makes me happy when everyone is busy and active. Exercise keeps us all physically and mentally healthy.



Mr Fred

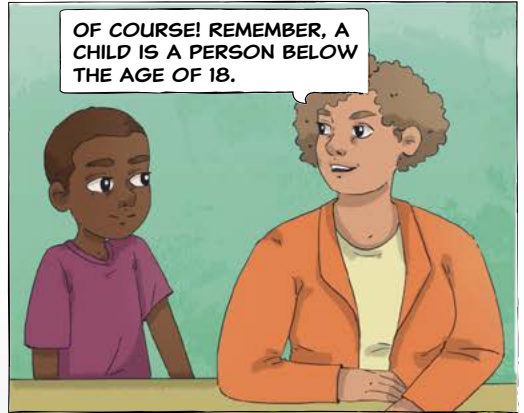
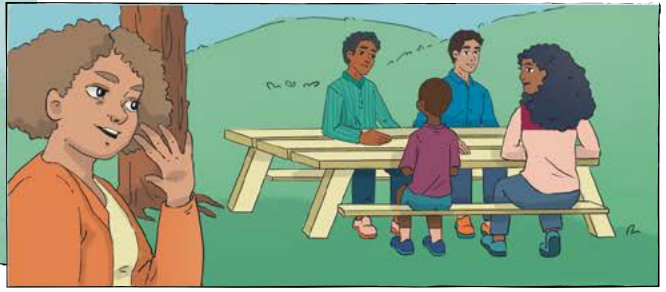
I am a legal counsellor, which is a type of lawyer. I work here together with many well-trained colleagues.
I give information and support to all asylum seekers on legal matters and on their asylum applications. I love wearing colourful t-shirts with a message.



A big thank you goes to all the young asylum seekers who read this story before it was published and helped to finish it so nicely.

They also helped choose the names of the main characters.

Thanks also goes to the authorities in Malta and the Netherlands who supported the discussions with the teenagers.



ADULTS WHO CARE FOR CHILDREN, LIKE PARENTS OR A GUARDIAN, SHOULD ALWAYS PUT YOU FIRST. EVERY CHILD DESERVES A SAFE AND HEALTHY LIFE, FOOD, SCHOOL, PLAYTIME AND A LOVING FAMILY.

PEOPLE TAKING CARE OF YOU, INCLUDING THE AUTHORITIES THAT MAKE DECISIONS FOR YOU, SHOULD ALSO LISTEN TO YOUR HOPES AND FEARS.

CONSIDERING THE BEST INTERESTS OF A CHILD MEANS MAKING THE BEST CHOICES AND FINDING THE BEST SOLUTIONS FOR A CHILD TO BE SAFE, HAPPY AND HEALTHY.





YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE YOU WHO ARE SEEKING ASYLUM IN EUROPE OFTEN ARRIVE ALONE AND NEED SUPPORT.



A GUARDIAN DOES NOT TRY TO REPLACE YOUR FAMILY BUT WILL SUPPORT YOU WHILE YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN. WE ENSURE THAT YOUR BEST INTERESTS ARE PROTECTED UNTIL YOU NO LONGER NEED HELP.

... BUT WHAT IF A CHILD ARRIVES WITH FAMILY MEMBERS?



EVERY CHILD'S BEST INTERESTS MATTER. ANY ADULT TAKING CARE OF A CHILD SHOULD CONSIDER WHAT IS BEST FOR THEM. BUT ... IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY. SOMETIMES CAREGIVERS MIGHT STRUGGLE. THE SOCIAL WORKERS HERE CAN GIVE THEM ADVICE.

YOU CAN TALK TO A SOCIAL WORKER TOO, IF YOUR FAMILY IS OVERWHELMED OR THEY ARE NOT TAKING CARE OF YOU AS THEY SHOULD. ALL THESE CONVERSATIONS STAY PRIVATE!



YOU CAN SHARE ALL YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS WITH YOUR GUARDIAN.



ALSO... THE AUTHORITIES MIGHT HAVE TO MAKE DECISIONS THAT WILL AFFECT YOUR LIVES. SO A GUARDIAN WILL HELP YOU TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE HEARD.



CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF A DECISION THEY NEED TO MAKE?



SURE. DECISIONS CAN BE WHAT MEDICAL CARE YOU SHOULD RECEIVE, WHERE YOU SHOULD LIVE AND WITH WHOM.



BUT I THINK I'M OLD ENOUGH TO DECIDE FOR MYSELF! I WANT TO BE WITH MY GRANDFATHER WHO I LOST DURING OUR JOURNEY.



I UNDERSTAND. YOU SEE, GUARDIANS LISTEN TO YOU.

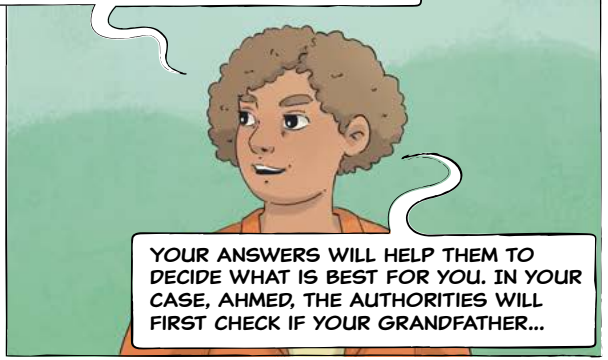
THEY TAKE YOUR OPINION SERIOUSLY AND HELP THE AUTHORITIES UNDERSTAND YOUR PERSONAL SITUATION ... AND DECIDE WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU.



HOW DO THEY DO THAT EXACTLY...?



TRAINED OFFICERS WILL ASK YOU QUESTIONS, TO LEARN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ABOUT YOUR SITUATION.

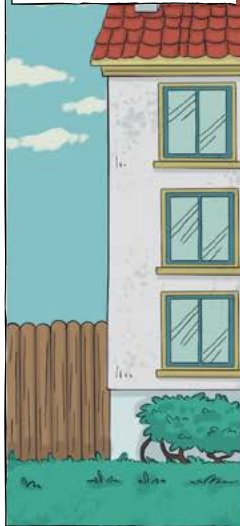


YOUR ANSWERS WILL HELP THEM TO DECIDE WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU. IN YOUR CASE, AHMED, THE AUTHORITIES WILL FIRST CHECK IF YOUR GRANDFATHER...

... IS HEALTHY AND STRONG ENOUGH TO CARE FOR YOU...



... LIVES IN A SAFE PLACE...



... CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH FOOD, CLOTHES AND EDUCATION...



... AND HAS TREATED YOU WELL IN THE PAST.





TRUE... ALL THIS IS IMPORTANT!



YES... THIS AVOIDS PROBLEMS AFTERWARDS. SOMETIMES, WHAT A CHILD WANTS AT ANY GIVEN TIME MIGHT NOT BE IN THEIR BEST INTERESTS.



I UNDERSTAND... THE AUTHORITIES WANT TO GET IT RIGHT...



EXACTLY!



NOW I UNDERSTAND WHY THEY ASKED ME SO MANY QUESTIONS ABOUT MY GRANDFATHER...



YES, ASKING SPECIFIC QUESTIONS, ESPECIALLY WHEN IMPORTANT DECISIONS NEED TO BE MADE, IS CALLED A BEST INTERESTS ASSESSMENT.



SHARE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN.

REMEMBER, THIS ASSESSMENT CAN TAKE PLACE AT DIFFERENT TIMES, IN MORE THAN ONE MEETING AND FOR DIFFERENT REASONS. IN YOUR CASE, FOR UNITING YOU WITH YOUR FAMILY MEMBER, ALSO CALLED FAMILY REUNIFICATION

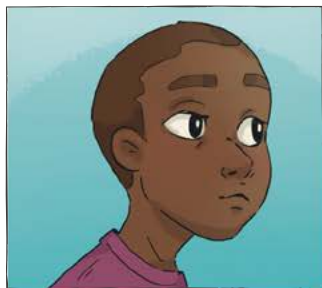
... WHICH IS THE PROCESS OF BRINGING FAMILY MEMBERS TOGETHER WHICH WERE SEPARATED. CAN YOU THINK OF ANOTHER EXAMPLE?



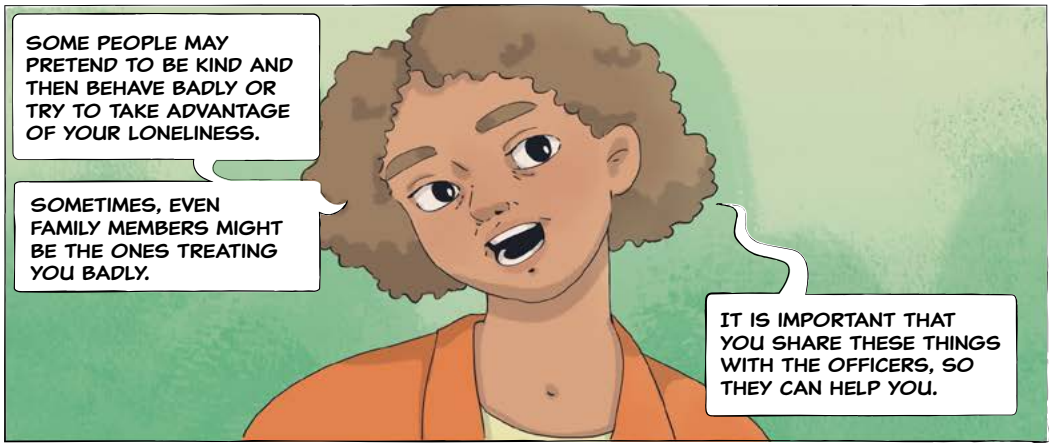
... WHEN A CHILD LIVES IN A PLACE THAT IS NOT SAFE.

EXACTLY!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY 'NOT SAFE'?



UNFORTUNATELY, NOT ALL CHILDREN ARE SAFE, PARTICULARLY WHEN THEY ARRIVE ALONE.



SOME PEOPLE MAY PRETEND TO BE KIND AND THEN BEHAVE BADLY OR TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR LONELINESS.

SOMETIMES, EVEN FAMILY MEMBERS MIGHT BE THE ONES TREATING YOU BADLY.

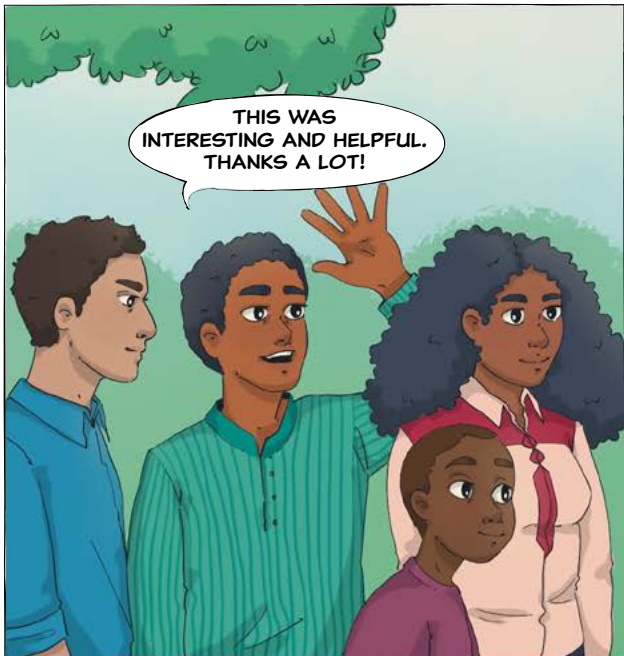
IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU SHARE THESE THINGS WITH THE OFFICERS, SO THEY CAN HELP YOU.



THE OFFICER WHO ASKED ME THE QUESTIONS WAS VERY KIND...



YES, OFTEN THEY ARE SOCIAL WORKERS OR CHILD PSYCHOLOGISTS.



THIS WAS INTERESTING AND HELPFUL. THANKS A LOT!



YOU ARE WELCOME! NEVER STOP ASKING QUESTIONS!

IMPORTANT

In this country ...

The authority here that provides a safe place to live, which is also called **reception**, is:

If I want to know more about:

- general benefits I can be given, like clothes or hygiene products, I can contact or go to:

- what to do when I feel sick, I can contact: _____

- how to go to school, learn a skill or the local language, I can contact: _____

The authority responsible for working on my **asylum application** is: _____

My guardian's name is: _____

If I am interested in learning more about the **best interests assessment**, when it takes place and what happens with the information I share, I can talk to my guardian or check:

IMPORTANT

In this country ...

I can also contact a legal counsellor for free to learn more about the asylum procedure and related topics. For this, I can contact: _____

If anyone working here, like the officers, legal counsellors, social workers or my guardian, treat me badly, I can make a complaint and contact: _____

In case of an emergency, I can contact the ambulance at _____
or the police at _____

Other important information: _____

QUIZ

I am checking my knowledge on what I have learnt about the best interests assessment.

✓ Tick the correct answers.

- 1 Considering the best interests of the child means...
- a. The authorities listen to me and my guardian to understand my feelings, needs and views, so they can make the best decisions for me.
- b. Nobody will listen to me.
-
- 2 To learn about my needs and what is best for me in a specific situation, the authorities will ask me questions during a best interests assessment.
- a. True
- b. False
-
- 3 Why do the authorities do the best interests assessment?
- a. To find the best solution for me when big decisions need to be made, such as where I should live and with whom.
- b. Because they like talking.
-
- 4 The best interests of the child are relevant only to children who arrive without parents.
- a. True
- b. False
-
- 5 The officers working where I live will regularly check with me and my guardian if I have any new needs.
- a. True
- b. False

Answers to the quiz

Question 1: a Question 2: a Question 3: a Question 4: b Question 5: a

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