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Unaccompanied Foreign Minors: The Novara Experience as a HUB Center of Eastern Piedmont (Italy)

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The study, focusing on protocols for age estimation in living of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UFMs), analyzed the effectiveness of all the age assessments carried out between 2018 and 2023 at the Hospital "Maggiore della Carità" of Novara, designated by the Regional Protocol as the hub center for Eastern Piedmont area.

Demographic, registry, and medical data were collected for each case (301, 97% males). A descriptive statistical analysis of the data obtained was then carried out. The average age reported was 16.32 ± 1.35 years, while the average age estimated by wrist RX was 17.81 ± 1.52 years. The maximum age that can be assessed by wrist RX is 19 years, found in 41.4% of this sample.

In total, an estimated age of at least 18 years was found in 71.5% of the cases analyzed. Because of the statutory margin of biostatistical uncertainty, however, 2 years must be subtracted from the most probable age found. For this reason, even if the UFM was given the maximum detectable age (19 years old), the range of uncertainty would cause him or her to be considered legally as a minor (17 years old).

A comparison with similar international studies has allowed to detect how other protocols make it possible to go beyond the wrist radiograph by performing a dental overview and, if necessary, a CT scan of the clavicle. Indeed, by choosing to analyze districts that fully ossify at a later age, a more accurate age estimation can be made, even attributing more than 18 years old. Italian fragmented regulations, however, run counter to the protocols used in centers where certain diagnosis of greater age is made and, after almost completely eliminating the figure of the Medical Examiner from the age assessment, aim to scale back the use of radiological techniques, which are considered excessively invasive.

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