

Workshop: SAFE SPACES in GENDER SENSITIVE INTERVIEWS

Date: Monday 8 April 2024

Time: 10:00am-12:00 Central European Time (please adjust for your own time zone)

Zoom link: <https://universityofsussex.zoom.us/j/94780263348>

Research and experience show that gender-sensitive asylum interviewing is critical for women and survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) to feel able to give a full account of the reasons for their claim. Without this, there is a risk of poor communication, re-traumatisation, misunderstanding, failure to collect relevant evidence and – consequently – an unfair decision. Due to limited guidanceⁱ and failure to implement existing guidance, evidence suggests that many claimants do not have a good experience at their interview.ⁱⁱ

To support improved understanding and good practice, WiRL is holding a participatory workshop in which experts from academia and the field will share knowledge and provide guidance based on their own experience as the basis for interactive work with participants.

Agenda

Introduction to the workshop and objectives (Moira Dustin and Christel Querton, WiRL)

Part 1. Impact of interviews on decision making

- The use of rape myths and resulting victim-blaming mechanisms in asylum interviews and decisions on the grounds of SGBV (Lore Roels)

Part 2. Interviewing techniques & questions

- Gender-sensitive interviews in refugee status determination and beyond: the PEACE model and using dialogue in interviews (Giulia Cragolini and Denise Venturi)
- Reflection on interview techniques, questions and the impact on decision making – discussion in breakout groups
- Breakout group feedback and plenary discussion

Break (5 minutes)

Part 3. Safe spaces

- Building safe spaces (Devika Kapoor)
- How would you build a safe space? (Devika Kapoor)

Conclusion: ways forward (Moira Dustin and Christel Querton)

Participants: This workshop is for advocates and caseworkers who work with asylum-seeking and refugee women and survivors of GBV, as well as for academics who conduct semi-structured interviews with these groups as part of their research.

Follow-up: this is a closed workshop for a limited number of participants, however materials from the event will be published on the WiRL website after the event. Knowledge shared during the workshop will contribute to the development of WiRL guidelines on Gender Sensitive Interviewing.

Biographical notes of facilitators

Giulia Cragolini is an independent expert in the field of migration and asylum. She has been working for refugee protection for more than ten years with the UN Refugee Agency. She operated in Italy and in some of the biggest protection operations, such as Turkey, Niger and Rwanda. She has extensive experience in refugee status determination and capacity development. She has conducted several trainings on behalf of UNHCR and EUAA (European Union Agency for Asylum, previously EASO) and has a specific focus on interview techniques, in particular of vulnerable persons. She acted as peacekeeper at the United Nations Mission to Cote d'Ivoire, in the aftermath of the civil war. Her studies focused on human rights, asylum and migration issues. She holds a Masters degree in International Sciences and Diplomatic Relations and a Master of Arts in Human Rights and Conflict Management.

Devika Kapoor is a Trainer and Coordinator at Amna. Her work includes conducting Identity Informed and Trauma Informed Trainings. She also manages and coordinates the Humanitarian Wellbeing groups and Therapeutic groups.

Her experience includes providing mental health care to marginalised communities and individuals in conflict with law. Her practice is informed by a rights based approach to mental health and healing.

Lore Roels (she/her) is a PhD researcher at the Migration Law Research Group and the Gender & Violence Team of the International Centre for Reproductive Health at Ghent University, Belgium. She is a member of the University's interfaculty Centre for the Social Study of Migration and Refugees (CESSMIR) and Human Rights Centre (HRC), and a steering group member of the international Women in Refugee Law (WiRL) network. In the context of her research, she worked with NANSSEN NGO, a centre of legal expertise on international protection based in Brussels, where she developed guidelines and provided training for lawyers on misconceptions in gender-related asylum procedures. Her doctoral research echoes UNHCR's concern that asylum authorities might base credibility assessments on stereotypical and erroneous perceptions of gender. It aims to analyse the gender-(in)sensitivities in asylum application assessments of persons fleeing sexual and gender-based violence, using the Belgian asylum procedure and the non-refoulement procedure before the European Court of Human Rights as case studies.

Denise Venturi is currently a PhD Candidate in Law at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) and a Visiting Researcher at the Institute for International Law and Comparative Constitutional Law of the University of Zurich (Switzerland). Her research interests concern asylum, gender and sexual orientation, vulnerability and feminist theories. Throughout her career, Denise combined roles in academia with professional experience in law and policy in the field of asylum and migration. She has been a researcher at different academic institutions such as the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Germany) and the University of Liverpool (UK). Moreover, Denise has worked with UNHCR in various protection roles for several years, including as Asylum Liaison Officer with the UNHCR Liaison Office to the EU Agency for Asylum and as Reporting Associate with UNHCR Italy, where she was Focal Point on asylum claims based on sexual orientation and gender identity. With UNHCR, she also worked extensively on capacity development and training on refugee status determination, interviewing techniques and evidence assessment in gender-related cases, as well as on law and policy issues and on strategic litigation. Previously, she worked as a Legal Officer at the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, in other NGOs focused on asylum and migration, and as a qualified lawyer specialized on migration and criminal law in Italy.

ⁱ Hungarian Helsinki Committee. (2015) *Credibility Assessment in Asylum Procedures - A Multidisciplinary Training Manual, Vol 2*; UNHCR. (2005) *Ensuring Gender Sensitivity in the Context of Refugee Status Determination and Resettlement. Module 2 (Resource Package)* <https://www.refworld.org/reference/manuals/unhcr/2005/en/40043>.

ⁱⁱ Bögner, D., Brewin, C., & Herlihy, J. (2010). Refugees' Experiences of Home Office Interviews: A Qualitative Study on the Disclosure of Sensitive Personal Information. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36(3), 519–535.