

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF  
PSYCHOLOGY AND LAW (EAPL)



# *Virtual* EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHOLOGY AND LAW



## ASYLUM INTERVIEWING CREDIBILITY ASSESSMENT AND DECISION MAKING

28/09/2022 - 3.00pm to 6.00pm

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# TIMETABLE

The event will be held, via Zoom, on **Wednesday 29.9.2022** from **3.00pm** to **6.00pm (CEST)**. There will be two keynotes, followed by three presentations. A round table discussion will then be held to further consider and discuss credibility assessments and decision making in asylum interviewing.

The speakers and timetable for this event are as follows:

## **3.00pm-4.00pm: Opening & Keynotes (Chair: Dr Julia Korkman)**

- Dr Jane Herlihy
- Prof. Dr Elina Pirjatanniemi

## **Comfort break: 10 minutes**

## **4.10pm-5.00pm: Presentations**

- Hedayat Selim
- Jenny Skrifvars
- Dr Zoe Given-Wilson

## **Comfort break: 10 minutes**

## **5.10pm-6.00pm: Roundtable discussion**

- Prof. Dr Amina Memon
- Prof. Dr Aldert Vrij

# KEYNOTES

## Dr Jane Herlihy

**Title of presentation: The credibility assessment of asylum seekers: addressing the psychological assumptions.**

Dr Jane Herlihy is a Chartered Consultant Clinical Psychologist. She has been writing, conducting and disseminating research on the decision-making process in refugee status claims since 2000. She has worked at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture between 2000 and 2001 and then from 2001 to 2005 at the Refugee Service of the Traumatic Stress Clinic, a centre for asylum seekers and refugees experiencing difficulties following traumatic experiences. She cofounded and was Executive Director (2005-2017) of the Centre for the Study of Emotion & Law. She is currently an Honorary Lecturer at University College, London and Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Emotion & Law at Royal Holloway University, London.

Dr Herlihy will outline studies of refugee status decision making that have shown that these difficult legal judgements are underpinned by assumptions about human behaviour, memory and motivation – the stuff of psychological study. She will discuss the difficulties of translating and applying the science in this area, where decision makers are told to rely on “common sense and experience”, despite incorrect judgments potentially leading to further persecution, and in some cases torture or even death.



# KEYNOTES

## Prof. Dr Elina Pirjatanniemi



**Title of presentation: Challenges with Credibility Assessment – A Human Rights Law Perspective**

Elina Pirjatanniemi works as a Professor of Constitutional and International Law as well as a Director of the Institute for Human Rights at Åbo Akademi. She is an alumni of both the University of Turku and Åbo Akademi and carries the title of Docent in Criminal Law at the University of Turku.

Elina works in the focus areas of ETMU as a teacher, researcher and expert. She has among others studied asylum and immigration law, human rights in the context of criminal law, human rights and societal change as well as the relation of national and international law. She has in-depth knowledge in issues relating to the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ). She has significant experience on the management and monitoring research projects.

From a legal perspective, asylum processes are one type of administrative decision-making. This starting point does not, however, tell the whole truth regarding these complicated decision-making situations. For the asylum-seeker, the decision can be about life and death. The risks of wrong decisions are, in other words, more significant than in other administrative processes.

In this context, the relevance of credibility assessments becomes crucial. In refugee law, credibility assessments refer to the phase when the decision-maker gathers relevant information from the asylum-seeker, examines it in the light of all the information available and determines whether and which of the statements and other evidence relating to material elements of the asylum-seekers claim can be accepted.

The aim of my presentation is to highlight some of the problems in credibility assessments from a legal perspective. Having said this, my key argument is that legal research is not enough, if we want to guarantee asylum-seekers a fair and humane treatment. Even the best of lawyers may be very bad forensic scientists, and even the best possible administrative processes may be significantly flawed.

# PRESENTATIONS

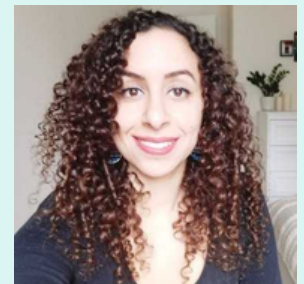
## **Jenny Skrifvars: Investigating and improving the quality of Finnish asylum interviews**

Jenny Skrifvars is a PhD candidate at Åbo Akademi University in Finland. Her doctoral research focuses on investigating the quality of Finnish real-life asylum interviews. She has published two studies analysing questions and answers in official asylum interview transcripts. Currently, she is developing a training program in evidence-based interviewing for asylum officials in Finland. The training program will be evaluated in a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental study during 2022-2023. In her talk, she will present the findings from her published studies and discuss the upcoming training program.



## **Hedayat Selim: Evaluation of asylum claims based on sexual orientation: the case of Finland**

Hedayat Selim is a PhD student in legal psychology at Åbo Akademi University (Turku, Finland). Her research investigates how asylum officials evaluate the credibility of asylum claims based on sexual orientation and religion. Prior to starting her PhD, she worked as a practitioner on migration and asylum issue with various United Nations and non-governmental agencies. She holds a master's degree in human rights from Columbia University and a bachelor's degree in sociology from the American University in Cairo. In this presentation, she will present preliminary findings on Finnish asylum officials' interviewing and decision-making strategies, based on a sample of 80+ asylum casefiles retrieved from the Finnish Immigration Service.



# PRESENTATIONS

**Dr Zoe Given-Wilson: Intersectional vulnerabilities of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors: Taking testimony and assessing credibility.**

Dr Zoe Given-Wilson is a Clinical Psychologist and Postdoctoral Researcher in the Centre for the Study of Emotion and Law at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Dr Given Wilson's research focuses on issues relating to young people seeking protection from persecution or danger. This research has included credibility indicators used in assessment of asylum claims such as limitation of autobiographical memory, developmental considerations, trauma and depression and cultural differences. Zoe has also investigated decision-making and interview practices and how these influence the detail and quality of information provided by interviewees.

Dr Given-Wilson has contributed to UNHCR guidance on credibility assessment in young people, UK Home Office training for asylum case workers and training for the European Asylum Support Office/European Union Agency for Asylum. She has also worked alongside 3rd sector organisations in the field of asylum.





# ROUNDTABLE COMMENTATORS

Prof. Dr Amina Memon



Internationally known for her work on eyewitness testimony and investigative interviewing, Prof. Dr Amina Memon directs the interdisciplinary Centre for the Study of Emotion and Law at Royal Holloway University of London.

Prof. Dr Memon's research in social and cognitive psychology contributes to best practice in forensic interviews of vulnerable witnesses. Her studies have included children, individuals with autism, seniors, police officers and judges.



# ROUNDTABLE COMMENTATORS

## Prof. Dr Aldert Vrij

Prof. Dr Aldert Vrij is Professor of Applied Social Psychology, University of Portsmouth (UK). His main research interest is deception, resulting in more than 600 publications, which have been widely cited (> 28,000 citations and H-index 83). He received grants from British Research Councils, Trusts and Foundations, Insurers, Federal Bureau of Investigation, High value detainee Interrogation Group, and American, British, Dutch, and Singapore Governments, totalling > \$11,500,000.

Prof. Dr Vrij works closely with practitioners (police, security services and insurers) in terms of conducting research and disseminating its findings. His 2008 book *Detecting lies and deceit: Pitfalls and opportunities* is a comprehensive overview of research into (non)verbal and physiological deception and lie detection. An overview article of 100 years deception research published in 2022 (doi: 10.1002/acp.3971) showed that Prof. Dr Vrij has the most publications and the most citations in the field. In 2016 he received the International Investigative Interviewing Research Group (iiiRG) Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his significant contribution to investigative interviewing.

