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BELIEVE IT OR NOT
Conference program

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International asylum conference on credibility assessment in SOGIESC cases

This conference is organized by the Striking Sirens Coalition.

Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and online
20 September 2024

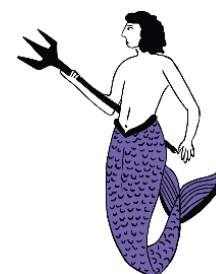


Program

TIME	PROGRAM	ROOM
8.30 – 9.00	Registration	Entrance
8.30 – 9.00	WALK-IN with coffee and tea	Foyer
9.00 – 9.15	Opening and welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domenica Ghidei (chair) • Astrid Oosenbrug (chair COC Netherlands) • Sabine Jansen (coordinator Striking Sirens Coalition) 	Grote Zaal
9.15 – 10.00	Keynote speech <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuno Ferreira, Professor of Law, University of Sussex 	Grote Zaal
10.00 – 10.30	Speeches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brian, story of a refugee from Uganda • Adriana Rojas, UNHCR 	Grote Zaal
10.30 – 10.50	Break	Foyer
10.50 – 12.05	Round 1	
Paper presentations	1. Queer (in)visibilities <i>Chair Sophia Zisakou</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asta Sofie Stage Jarlner & Maya Ellen Hertz: Trans enough for protection? Experimenting with credibility in refugee status determination • Samuel Ballin: Non-binary gender and the Refugee Convention • Irene Manganini: The credibility of gender identity claims: in need for a research agenda 	Grote Zaal
Paper presentations	2. Proving SOGIESC <i>Chair Claire Fletcher</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roos Geurts and Louisa Bergsma: Is your love life a credible story? Profoundness in the Dutch LGB+ procedure • Annelie Neumann: Heteronormativity of the European border regime • Diego Garcia Rodriguez: Challenging homosecularism: Faith, spirituality and LGBTIQ+ asylum in the UK 	Workspace
Paper presentations	3. Challenging stereotypes I <i>Chair Sonia Lenegan</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simone Lugtmeijer: A study of intersex inclusivity within the Dutch asylum chain 	Expo

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alex Powell: Sexuality through the kaleidoscope: Cultural translation and transnational sexual diversities • Alexandra Andersson: Tasked with determining believability: Insights to asylum caseworkers' experience of SOGIESC asylum assessment (Online) 	
Workshops 1	<p><i>Chair Lisa Menke</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint workshop Alexandra Politidis Palm & Elias Tissandier-Nasom: Credibility assessment in children's SOGIESC asylum claims • Sharalyn Jordan & friends: Reflections on Canada's Guideline on SOGIESC refugees: lessons learned from LGBTQI-led community based research and advocacy (Online) 	Meetingroom
12.05 – 12.50	<p>Plenary discussion I with Striking Sirens Coalition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aino Gröndahl • Andrea Vige Grønningsæter • Claire Fletcher • Sabine Jansen • Sophia Zisakou 	Grote Zaal
12.50 – 13.50	Lunch	Foyer
13.50 – 15.20	Round 2	
Paper presentations	<p>4. Challenging stereotypes II <i>Chair Maarten den Heijer</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Million Kassa Bekele: Queer enough for the Netherlands? The role of stereotypes in queer asylum decisions and its outcome • Ifigeneia Intzipeoglou: Beyond Stereotypes: Dismantling rape mythology in LGBT+ refugee asylum claims • Davide Tomaselli: Opening up possibilities for SOGIESC asylum seekers: (In)credible stories between judicial biases and European sexual imaginaries • Raawiyah Rifath: Credibility assessments and trauma-informed methods (Online) 	Meetingroom
Paper presentations	<p>5. Means of proof <i>Chair Karen Geertsema</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jess Walmsley: The 'cycle of rejection': How has the digitisation of the UK asylum system impacted LGBTQ+ asylum seekers? • Hedayat Selim: Eliciting and evaluating asylum claims based on sexual orientation: Findings from Finland • Iene Maveau: Afghan gay men: assessment of the need for international protection • Pip McKnight: Between a rock and a hard place: expectations of performance and participation in SOGIESC asylum claims in the UK 	Grote Zaal

Paper presentations	6. Towards a more inclusive assessment <i>Chair Alexandra Politidis Palm</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leens van Kessel: Preventing stereotyping in credibility assessments with SOGIESC asylum claimants: a toolbox for decision-makers • Noam Falk: Closing Gaps: Using intersectionality to ensure narrative justice for SOGIESC asylum claims • Abby Field: Re-envisioning terminology for a more Inclusive credibility assessment • Sophia Weiser and Marty Huber: What's it worth: Community against the machine. A study of non-stereotypical queer realities in the asylum procedure 	Workspace
Workshops 2	<i>Chair Tienieke Sumter</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willemijn van Kempen: Worlds apart: A stumbling credibility assessment in a trans asylum claim • Joint workshop Aadarsh Gangwar & Evgeny Shtorn: Worlds apart: A stumbling credibility assessment in a trans asylum claim 	Expo
15.20 – 15.40	Break	Foyer
15.40 – 17.10	Plenary discussion II with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuno Ferreira • Adriana Rojas • Aino Gröndahl • Andrea Vige Grønningsæter • Sabine Jansen 	Grote Zaal
17.10 – 17.30	Wrap up	Grote Zaal
17.30 – 18.30	End and drinks	Foyer



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Round 1

Paper session 1: Queer (in)visibilities

Chair: Sophia Zisakou

1. Asta Sofie Stage Jarlner & Maya Ellen Hertz: Trans enough for protection? Experimenting with credibility in refugee status determination

To be granted asylum under the 1951 Refugee Convention, queer asylum seekers must convince authorities of a *risk group existence* as well as of their *risk group affiliation*. Especially the latter leaves queer asylum seekers vulnerable to decision makers' bias. In this article, we explore the construction of credibility focused on SOGIE-based asylum claims. We explore similarities and differences between the sub-groups of LGBTQ+ claimants, paying attention to the less studied subgroup of transgender asylum claimants.

Employing empirical analysis, our study unfolds in three parts. First, we examine the evolution of SOGIE claims through the lens of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board. Subsequently, we scrutinize gender identity-based claims, discerning patterns in credibility establishment from concrete cases processed by the Board. Finally, we conduct an experimental study to probe how these identified patterns influence decision-making.

Our findings reveal nuanced insights. If the claimant presents a narrative of having been aware of their trans-identity since childhood, they are more likely to be perceived as credible. Conversely, cases where individuals come out as transgender later in life necessitate a documented history of gender-affirming medical interventions for credibility. Moreover, we find evidence of a similarity effect, as respondents self-identifying as LGBTQ+ exhibit are less likely to find the narrative constructed, regardless of the experimental conditions. Further, we find that women and non-binary individuals are more likely to believe the claimant and grant asylum compared to their male counterparts.

2. Samuel Ballin: Non-binary gender and the Refugee Convention

This paper examines the construction of non-binary gender and the 'particular social group' (PSG) under the Refugee Convention. In particular, it analyses the ways in which the gender of a non-binary asylum claimant is discussed in the case of *Mx M*, when the UK first recognised a refugee on the basis of their non-binary gender. It identifies four central challenges for the (re)presentation of gender under the Refugee Convention, informed by queer theory and Judith Butler's notion of a

'double movement' in which identity categories are at once invoked and affirmed, whilst also held open to change and contestation. The assertion of a clear identity, of belonging to a group or category that is intelligible to courts and administrators, is an essential feature of asylum law. At the same time, this can often reinforce fixed and static ideas about gender, and risks imposing the understandings or presumptions of immigration authorities as stereotypes upon heterogeneous asylum claimants. The four challenges are expressed in the paper as the demand for recognition; the threat of erasure and/or misrepresentation; the contestation of universal, objective and/or essentialist categories; and the inseparability of violence from resistance. The article ultimately argues that a form of 'strategic flexibility' to pursue the need for successful asylum decisions at the same time as resisting harmful stereotypes.

The paper is based on an article by the author, published in 2023. The article is available to read (Open Access) in the Australian Feminist Law Journal at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13200968.2023.2187527>.

3. Irene Manganini: The credibility of gender identity claims: in need for a research agenda

In my work on the invisibility of gender identity claims across jurisprudence and scholarship, my main argument is that claims based on gender identity still largely rely on scholars' speculations, and very little specific research is being carried that might reveal their specificities, particularly if compared with sexual orientation claims. I in fact suggest that SOGI asylum scholars' well-meaning efforts of inclusion of gender non-conforming identities under the 'LGBT asylum scholarship' label risk instead to render this group's specific issues invisible once their specificities are not explicitly researched and only kept as additional appendix, as it often happens. In this paper, I will argue in particular that this tendency and the main point of divergence between the two kinds of claims may be found precisely in the issue of credibility. As I will show, in fact, this might after all not be *the* queer asylum issue in that gender identity claimants do not seem to find it a particular barrier in the RSD process. Perhaps unsurprisingly, my research shows that transgender and other gender non-conforming cases seem to be believed once there is any form of visual corroboration in the eyes of the asylum officer that the gender expression of the person they are or will be interviewing does not match the one they read on their documents. This finding raises the wider question that this paper aims to address: is this invisibility produced by the system or might it be showing that, simply, the absence of evidence to the contrary proves that trans cases are generally believed? And if so, what does this tell us of the system itself?

Paper session 2: Proving SOGIESC

Chair: Claire Fletcher

1. Roos Geurts & Louisa Bergsma: Is your love life a credible story? Profoundness in the Dutch LGB+ procedure

For LGBTQAI+ refugees the most important proof in the asylum procedure is their words. Since defining your gender or sexual orientation is based in self-identification, the question is how would you be able to objectively prove something that is subjective? Even when people have a long-term relationship, and extensive proof of this (from friends, social workers and LGBTQAI+ organizations), the immigration services may still deny asylum.

How is it possible that someone with a long-term LGBTQAI+ relationship is not believed to be LGBTQAI+? Is there enough space outside of the heteronormative western framework for people with different frames of reference and ways of expressing their feelings to tell their story in a credible way during the asylum procedure? And why does a relationship need to be long lasting, sustainable and profound to be valid? We would like to set up a comparative case study with people that are not refugees, and either belong to the LGBTQAI+ community or not. Asking them the same questions about their sexuality, relationships and experiences, and judging their answers from an IND framework on credibility. "When did you found out about your sexuality? How was it growing up in your country (where although it is legal, it is still frowned upon and not always safe to express)? Can you explain why you love your partner, why you are attracted to the person you are currently seeing, or why you are single?"

2. Annelie Neumann: On the heteronormativity of the European border regime

In this paper I want to examine heteronormativity (Warner 1993; Butler 1991; Sedgwick 1990) as a co-constitutive element in the (re)production of territorial borders of the CEAS (Common European Asylum System). With special regard on administrative and juridical reviews and assessments of the legitimacy of (queer) asylum requests I explore how heteronormativity influences legal border crossing – and therefor functions as a tool for the (re)establishment of the European border regime (Hess/Kasperek 2017). Following E. Tendayi Achiume's theory on racial borders (2022), I ask about heteronormative borders.

To do so, I present the data of my ethnographic border regime analysis, in which I use a mixed-method-approach to investigate the various dimensions of border

production (Hess/ Schmidt-Sembdner 2021: 201) - with regarding administrative and juridical asylum proceedings as crucial part in border performance. My examination is based on the everyday experiences of queer people which go or went through the asylum procedure. To catch this perspective adequately, I accompany several appointments and hearings to offices and courts with the methodological framework of participatory observation and ero-epic conversations (Girtler 2001). In addition, I examine the notifications from migration administration and jurisprudence using intersectionally informed reading methods (McCall 2005, Babka/Hochreiter 2008) as a discourse-analytical tool.

In the paper I would like to present some of these results, classify them in terms of power criticism and transfer them to the arena of European border negotiations.

3. Diego Garcia Rodriguez: Challenging homosecularism: Faith, spirituality and LGBTIQ+ asylum in the UK

This article examines the interplay between religion, gender, sexuality, and asylum in the UK. Contrary to the simplistic notion that faith and non-normative genders and sexualities are mutually exclusive, this study indicates that religion can play an agentic role in the lives of LGBTIQ+ people seeking asylum. Based on qualitative data from 50 in-depth interviews, participants from various religious backgrounds reveal how faith contributes significantly to their coping mechanisms during the asylum process and provides a sense of community and belonging. Despite systemic challenges, including scepticism from asylum authorities regarding the authenticity of their religious and sexual identities, many find strength and solace in their faith. The findings suggest that religious communities often serve as crucial support systems, offering both spiritual comfort and practical assistance. The implications of these findings are significant, advocating for a re-evaluation of how asylum systems understand and integrate the religious dimensions of LGBTIQ+ identities.

Paper session 3: Challenging stereotypes I

Chair: Sonia Lenegan

1. Simone Lugtmeijer: A study of intersex inclusivity within the Dutch asylum chain

Although research has been done on Dutch asylum policies for LGBT refugees, insights on procedures and policies for intersex refugees are lacking. Therefore, this research focuses on the inclusivity of Dutch asylum policies for intersex refugees. This research uses a literature study and discourse analysis to analyze the degree of inclusivity of intersex asylum seekers and refugees within the Dutch asylum chain. Furthermore, this research zooms in on the Dutch credibility assessments and the stigmatization and stereotypes surrounding them, particularly on how they affect intersex refugees. The credibility assessment insists that the refugees provide a detailed and transparent story of their experiences in their home country during the asylum application. However, this is challenging for intersex refugees, who have been conditioned to keep their intersex status a secret throughout their lives. The Dutch credibility assessment is at odds with the needs and experiences of intersex people, and therefore endangers inclusion and the right to a fair asylum application.

Moreover, this research shows that despite policies being aimed at the LGBTI community, intersex people are systematically excluded from the concrete policies, even when the acronym 'LGBTI' implies that they should be included. My research highlights the harmful impact of the current Dutch credibility assessments on intersex refugees. In sum, this research shows that the Dutch asylum chain is not inclusive of the needs and experiences of intersex people. This is caused by the invisibility, stigmatization, discrimination of intersex asylum seekers within the Dutch Asylum policies.

2. Alex Powell: Sexuality through the kaleidoscope: Cultural translation and transnational sexual diversities

This paper critically considers the role of cultural translation within attempts to make sense of the narratives of sexually diverse people. Drawing on the author's research with sexually diverse asylum claimants and legal practitioners as well as representatives of the third sector in the UK, this paper proposes that greater cultural competency training would improve the quality of credibility assessment by providing relevant skills to decision-makers. The author argues, training would ensure informed interpretations of behaviour and identity that are less contingent on culturally specific interpretations. As this author's previous research has shown,

poor-quality credibility assessment—overly reliant on models such as the DSSH model that privilege hegemonic western conceptualisations of sexual difference—have significant detrimental effects on asylum claimants resulting in trauma and significant legal complications (Alex Powell, “Sexuality” Through The Kaleidoscope: Sexual Orientation, Identity and Behaviour in Asylum Claims in the United Kingdom (2021) 10 *Laws* 90).

For example, my previous research has explored how UK decision-makers frequently place inappropriate weight in the idea that attendance in particular spaces and engagement with particular people is indicative of sexual or gender identity (Alex Powell, *The Place Where Only Gays Go: Constructions of Queer Space in the Narratives of Sexually Diverse Refugees*. *Journal of Place Management and Development* (Online First)). As such, this paper frames how a culturally informed approach can help to improve the quality of credibility assessments and, in so doing, protect the welfare and legal rights of sexually diverse asylum claimants.

3. Alexandra Andersson: Caseworkers' perspectives on assessing SOGIESC asylum (online)

My paper proposal includes findings from this research: the essentialising of SOGIESC, caseworkers' understanding of their role, and internal criticism. To distinguish between 'actual' gays and deceitful asylum seekers, caseworkers adopt a sceptical and interrogative stance during the reliability assessment. Furthermore, the process is based on Western stereotypes about sexuality, gender, and culture – which several of the participants acknowledge.

All participants find the assessment difficult as there is no 'right way' to determine an individual's SOGIESC. There is a sense of hopelessness regarding the system that they navigate using strategies such as compartmentalization. The main criticisms are unclear guidelines from the SMA, unsatisfying educational opportunities for caseworkers, disappointment with the government, and shortage of time and staff. I question, through a social constructionism and queer theory framework, whether the SMA and caseworkers are suitable to enter a debate about the ontology of SOGIESC and whether it is appropriate for government authority to determine the probability of an individual's SOGIESC at all. Unless caseworkers are trained comprehensively about queer realities outside of Europe, the assessment should focus on the grounds for persecution rather than the identification of seekers' SOGIESC.

Workshops 1

1. Alexandra Politidis Palm & Elias Tissandier-Nasom: Credibility assessment in children's SOGIESC asylum claims

Chair: Lisa Menke

Alexandra Politidis Palm: Credibility assessment of an inner process: The application of credibility criterias, lost child and youth perspectives and the road forward

The workshop will focus on how credibility criterias are being applied in SOGIESC cases and especially in cases concerning inner processes. The most commonly used criterias are level of detail and constancy. Why are these criterias used at all? Are they adapted to the assessments concerning inner processes? How does the application of these criterias affect to what extent stereotypes occur? And what happened to the child and youth perspectives in SOGIESC cases? Are young asylum seekers expected to have all the answers concerning their identity, childhood, sexual orientation etc. just like adults? How does this affect the credibility assessments? How can the child and youth perspectives be strengthened in SOGIESC cases?

By showing where and how the stereotypes in SOGIESC cases occur the critique can be more constructive. The workshop will also provide food for thought concerning how the method of assessment of inner processes can be adjusted, if it is to remain as a part of the credibility assessments at all.

Elias Tissandier-Nasom: A child's rights approach to the assessment of credibility in children's SOGIESC asylum cases

The number of people seeking asylum on grounds of their SOGIESC is increasing. Assessing the credibility of such claims to determine whether asylum-seekers meet the criteria for refugee status is a complex task for asylum officials, notably when the claimant is a minor. There is currently extremely little attention given to the intersection of age, SOGIESC and asylum. This article aims to study the ways in which preconceived ideas about children and LGBTQIA+ persons impact the ability of minors to obtain asylum on grounds of their SOGIESC. Specifically, it will address the "queer child" paradox following which officials tend to erase either part of the applicant's identity, deeming that if they are queer they are too mature (and sexualised) to be considered children in legal proceedings, or to the opposite, if their age is not questioned, then their ability to have a 'true' queer identity is often denied. Drawing from this study, it will then ask the question: How should credibility assessment be carried out in asylum claims lodged by minors on grounds of SOGIESC? To do so, it will highlight the current lack of attention given to international children's rights law, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), during the assessment of these claims. Using the principles

established by the UNCRC, this article will develop the ways in which those credibility assessments should be conducted to ensure respect of LGBTQIA+ children's real lived experiences and specific needs.

2. Sharalyn Jordan & friends: Reflections on Canada's Guideline on SOGIESC refugee proceedings: Lessons learned from LGBTQI-led community based research and advocacy (online)

The global refugee protection system is a critical, yet inadequate, safety net so long as persecution of sexual and gender diversity persists. The current intensification of anti-LGBTQI hate makes the need for fair and responsive adjudication of SOGIESC related refugee claims imperative. This paper highlights LGBTQI civil society advocacy and community-based research knowledge mobilization projects aimed at enhancing the Canada's refugee protection system. Qualitative research using narrative and ethnographic methods, including direct observation of hearings, generated a view of the distinct qualities of sex and gender based persecution and their implications for LGBTQ refugees during hearings and throughout settlement (Jordan, 2010). The study showed that to receive protection, LGBTQ refugees must repeatedly testify on hidden, highly stigmatizing, sometimes traumatic, aspects of their lives. Research explicated common assumptions, stereotypes and microaggressions that can occur in refugee hearings. It showed that dominant narratives of the deserving vs bogus refugee and Western models of LGBTQ identity based on the coming out story often underlie credibility assessments. In 2017, we had the opportunity to put this research to use during community consultations for the development of Canada's Chairperson Guideline on Proceedings related to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (May 1, 2017). When applied, this guideline instructs adjudicators on respectful, SOGIE responsive and trauma informed practices, challenges myths and stereotypes, and outlines processes for an intersectional analysis of risk. In 2022, the guideline was amended and in 2024, we are working with the Immigration and Refugee Board to revise training and implementation processes. This workshop will both present and critically reflect on learnings from this longterm civil society engagement with improving SOGIESC refugee determination in Canada.

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Round 2

Paper session 4: Challenging stereotypes 2

Chair: Maarten den Heijer

1. Million Kassa Bekele: Queer enough for the Netherlands? The role of stereotypes in queer asylum decisions and its outcome

The Netherlands, though proclaim to embrace queerness that is disassociated from problematic stereotypes, heavily relies on it for its decision-making in queer asylum applications (Jansen & Spijkerboer, 2011). Thus, queerness in the asylum system is very much mobilized through stereotypical modalities, that attempt to box queer asylum seekers from diverse cultural, religious, political, educational, and economic backgrounds into one format (Jansen, 2018). As a result, the asylum process universalizes the Western queer experience, not only by negating diverse queer embodiments but also alienating queerness from all the social forces that formulate it. Being poor and queer or queer in the colonies and queer in the imperial core means experiencing queerness through these very realities, and this experience not only produces a distinctive queer experience but also what it means to be queer (Ahmed, 2006; Butler, 2011). Nonetheless, queer people who could not fit into the stereotypes, have a hard time being “credibly” queer, as a result, are made into deportable subjects (Morgan, 2006). These queer stereotypes are not only Eurocentric and queerphobic but also classist, that promote normative ideals within the queer community. And normativity always serves those who are better positioned, be it culturally, economically, or racially (Puar, 2007). Thus, with this paper, I will argue that these stereotypes even though enable some queers to obtain refugee status, they also disable other queer asylum seekers to do so.

Consequently, it is important to understand how class, social position, and queer stereotypes are intertwined in the asylum system, and play a part in asylum decisions outcome. This is why, studying the role of stereotypes, and how queer asylum seekers navigate these obstacle for safety and security in the margin of the state and society, is an important area that needs further research.

2. Ifigeneia Intzipeoglou: Beyond Stereotypes: Dismantling rape mythology in LGBT+ refugee asylum claims

It is well documented that LGBT+ refugees fleeing persecution often face significant challenges in seeking asylum due to the particularity of their claims. Asylum services and the officers who conduct the interviews widely use homonormative criteria to reach conclusions that do not reflect the claimants' lived experiences. One key hurdle in the potential for disbelief of their accounts is the involvement of sexual violence. This disbelief can be rooted in harmful stereotypes and misconceptions

about gender-based violence and sexual assault, collectively known as rape mythology. This concept, developed by the feminist movement in the 1970s, has been widely studied in criminal justice but not so much in the asylum system while it is crucial for the acceptance of asylum applications.

This article will explore the intersection of rape mythology and the experiences of LGBT+ refugees seeking asylum in Greece. Drawing from relevant literature, I will begin by documenting common rape myths manifesting in the context of LGBT+ refugee applications in the first instance procedure of personal interviews and present the specific obstacles that LGBT+ refugees face when reporting sexual violence during that process. Subsequently, I will examine the way that training and awareness programs for asylum officers and decision-makers help to mitigate the influence of rape mythology and share some strategies to overcome these issues during the asylum interview from the claimants' perspective.

3. Davide Tomaselli: Opening up possibilities for SOGIESC asylum seekers: (In)Credible stories between judicial biases and European sexual imaginaries

In recent years, several comparative, socio-legal studies have extensively documented the status of SOGIESC asylum seekers and refugees navigating European legal systems. On top of elaborating indispensable considerations regarding the possible improvements of SOGIESC experiences, this body of research has highlighted the epistemological significance of empirical data collected on the ground. This contribution builds on similar data collected in the spring of 2022 in Florence documenting the system of SOGIESC asylum from the perspective of the judicial procedures carried out at the Court of Florence. Namely, the article focuses on some judicial biases that have been detected during the assessment of SOGIESC claims through the analysis of court decisions as well as interviews with judges and lawyers. More specifically, these biases can be catalogued in four categories: identitarian, cultural, performative, and informative. Building on these biases, the paper tries to develop two possible rationales underlying them. On the one hand, the limitations characterising the context of the Court and its actors are analysed, especially highlighting the lack of training and resources. On the other hand, the legal positionality of SOGIESC claimants is framed and assessed into the broader political, symbolic discourses that cast them, at the European level, as both a token of European sexual imaginaries and as a justificatory narrative for the enforcement of the migrant/refugee binary. Based on these considerations, the article concludes by tracing some tentative paths leading out of the persistent mismatch between personal trajectories and legal recognition in the field of SOGIESC credibility.

4. Raawiyah Rifath: Credibility assessments and trauma-informed methods (online)

Often decisions related asylum claims that are based on sexual and/or gender identity rely on credibility reasoning. Current approaches to assessing credibility, where people are basing their claims on their sexual and/or gender diversity, include high evidentiary burdens and the use of models or structures that are based on Western stereotypes about predicted experiences. Using examples from the UK's current asylum process, we demonstrate that these approaches ignore insights into how experiences of trauma act as a barrier of expressing one's identity openly. These approaches have the risk of retraumatising and negatively impacting mental health and wellbeing - this in turn will affect their ability to engage in the demands of legal process. Utilising a transdisciplinary approach of law and psychology, this paper proposes that the accuracy of credibility assessments could be improved whilst protecting wellbeing by using a culturally competent framing of sexual and gender diversity as well as trauma-informed methods. In particular, it will be shown how trauma-informed methods can be input into the asylum decision-making process. For example, insights into how trauma impacts memory could be adopted into the asylum process so that consistent oral testimonies are no longer the expectation. Another example would be to reform late disclosure policies so that there is an appreciation of the impact of hiding identity as well as how hypervigilance impacts one's ability to focus. This will result in more accurate expectations of evidence. These proposals are based on applying principles of compassion that underlie the right to asylum.

Paper session 5: Means of proof

Chair: Karen Geertsema

1. Jess Walmsley: The 'cycle of rejection': How has the digitisation of the UK asylum system impacted LGBTQ+ asylum seekers?

This paper investigates the role of digital tools within the UK Home Office's current credibility assessments on LGBTQI+ individuals seeking asylum. In navigating the pervasive 'culture of disbelief' embedded within the asylum system, LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are pressured to provide evidence not only of their credible fear of persecution but also of their sexual orientation. As digital technology has become accessible, photographs, social media, videos and messaging history have become integral components of LGBTQI+ asylum applications. Moreover, a 'pattern of rejection' concerning oral and written statements in the appeals processes has allowed more intimate forms of evidence to be admitted. This study argues that digital evidence is pivotal in asylum claims, particularly when oral testimony and written statements alone have proven inadequate in establishing credibility. Reviewing existing literature and analysing transcripts from UK tribunal court appeals as case studies reveals the extent to which digital evidence is relied upon in claims. For example, when prompted to show WhatsApp messaging history in court, the judge scrutinised an applicant's use of emojis between themselves and their partner. Following this, lesbian applicants, are often subjected to present further pervasive evidence including pornographic content between themselves and partner. Using themes of homonationalism to address how narratives and forms of evidence are performed and taking an intersectional lens to see how gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation demand different expectations from the Home Office, this paper seeks to show how a rise in digital evidence being accepted as part of an LGBTQ+ asylum claim has negatively impacted asylum applicants.

2. Hedayat Selim: Eliciting and evaluating asylum claims based on sexual orientation: Findings from Finland

To date, research on asylum cases based on sexual orientation in Finland remains scarce. Drawing on 129 asylum interview transcripts and corresponding written decisions obtained from the Finnish Immigration Service, we analyzed patterns in asylum officials' interviewing techniques and credibility assessments to determine whether and to what extent these are in line with established research in investigative and legal psychology. We also investigated asylum applicants' stated reasons for delaying the disclosure of their sexual orientation in the asylum process, and how these delays influenced the officials' decision-making. Consistent with

previous findings from other European countries, we found negative credibility judgements to be the primary reason for rejecting SOGI claims in Finland. Officials most often justified these findings based on the argument that the applicant's claim was not sufficiently detailed and specific. Yet, officials asked mainly closed questions to elicit the claim, thereby restricting the length of applicants' responses. Analyzing applicants' statements, the main reason provided for delaying the disclosure of their sexual orientation was not knowing that the latter constituted a ground for seeking asylum. We discuss our findings and propose recommendations based on best practice guidelines in psychology and law.

3. Iene Maveau: Afghan gay men: assessment of the need for international protection

Afghan applicants for international protection in Belgium face an exceptionally high refusal rate and a particularly unreasonable burden of proof. Those applying for international protection in Belgium because of their sexual orientation face some additional difficulties. In particular, asylum authorities often assess that they would 'only' have sexual relations or perform sexual acts. Thus, no credibility is given to the applicant's alleged sexual orientation and, consequently, to the fear of persecution because of homosexuality. Only the applicant's homosexual intercourse is given credibility, but since that would not be a fundamental part of the applicant's identity, this would not be sufficient to trigger the international protection framework.

The question that then arises is how this distinction is made in practice and on what grounds it is decided that a particular applicant for international protection does not demonstrate a credible sexual orientation, but only the existence of sexual practices. How is it concluded that the applicant's invoked sexual orientation - regardless of sexual practices - is not deemed credible? This paper will present an analysis of the Belgian asylum authorities' reasoning. Subsequently, NANSEN will argue that there is nevertheless a need for international protection for these Afghan men.

4. Pip McKnight: Between a rock and a hard place: Expectations of performance and participation in SOGIESC asylum claims in the UK

In June 2023, the Belfast Pride parade was led for the first time by a group of LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers and refugees. Although finally safe to do so according to the letter of UK law, many participants felt compelled to cover their faces as the public celebration of their sexual or gender identity was complex and not without risk. Participation in UK LGBTQIA+ culture is almost a requirement in sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) asylum claims. In a system which assumes heterosexuality as default, the burden of proof falls to claimants to provide evidence of sexual or gender orientation based on Western conceptions of relationships and stereotypes of how queerness is

performed. In this paper we use data from the SEREDA research programme into forced migration and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) to explore how survivors traverse in/visibility, past and present trauma, and hetero/homonormativity to make their case for sanctuary. Drawing on interviews with 14 specialist service providers and 15 SOGIESC claimants from across the UK, this paper argues that the UK asylum system's stereotyped expectations of performance and participation in queer life form part of a continuum of violence experienced by SOGIESC claimants which can compound trauma and create vulnerability to further SGBV, for example, through exposure to hostile co-ethnic communities or violent dependency in relationships. We call for a system of assessment and support that ensures SOGIESC claimants are safe to present their case for asylum through specialist services, appropriate housing, trauma-informed assessments and be centring of intersectional queer experiences.

Paper session 6: Towards a more inclusive assessment

Chair: Alexandra Politidis Palm

1. Leens van Kessel: Preventing stereotyping in credibility assessments with SOGIESC asylum claimants: a toolbox for decision-makers

The UNHCR 2012 Guidelines No. 9 need to change, because the credibility assessments of LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers must not be based on stereotypical assumptions and expectations. My paper will propose to prevent stereotyping through the 'unlearning of expectations' by those who conduct interviews with asylum seekers.

The paper offers guidance for these interviewers to question their own expectations of queer experiences, so that they can unlearn these and prevent relying on stereotypes when asking questions related to the credibility assessment. It brings together the literature on stereotyping in LGBTQIA+ asylum claims and intersectionality and cultural sensitivity. It offers a toolbox for interviewers to undo their biases related to LGBTQIA+ asylum claims.

The toolbox emphasises that interviewers shall be aware of:

- The importance of a safe space during the interview;
- the importance of having the applicant take the lead through self-identification;
- the diversity in queer experiences;
- the concept of intersectionality;
- the possible vulnerabilities of an LGBTQIA+ applicant;
- the queer experience as an individual, ongoing process;
- their own positioning when talking to LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers.

The paper will discuss these points, as well as the importance of an explicitly nuanced and individual approach to asylum interviews, so that the diversity of queerness is honoured. The central aim of this paper is to offer a framework so that interviewers at organisations such as the Dutch IND, can access and understand the necessary tools to unlearn their expectations before entering the interviewing room.

2. Noam Falk: Closing gaps: Using intersectionality to ensure narrative justice for SOGIESC asylum claims

To find solutions to the credibility assessment of SOGIESC asylum cases without defaulting to models or stereotypes, there are three existing gaps that need to be addressed. These gaps are interrelated and serve as determining factors for how credibility assessments are approached, both in theory and in practice.

The first gap is epistemological. It is what renders the current approach to credibility assessments unequipped to recognize the real-life experiences of LGBTIQ+ refugees. The solution lies in integrating interdisciplinary and intersectional perspectives to be part of the discussion.

The second gap relates to the idea of what knowledge is and who can produce it. It is the gap between those who draft the guidelines on international protection and those in need of international protection. Recognizing the importance of including perspectives of LGBTIQ+ refugees in the formulation of solutions, cannot only be theoretical (first gap), but needs to be realized through participatory processes.

The last gap is that between the theoretical idea of the credibility assessment and the conditions within which many RSD practitioners work, including their institutional status, their resources, and the investment in their capacity development. Not addressing this gap will render any theoretical solution to the current problem with credibility assessments in SOGIESC claims ineffective.

The paper will expose the existence of three interrelated gaps to show the inequity permeating the credibility assessments of SOGIESC asylum claims and to propose new approaches in both theory and in practice.

3. Abby Field: Re-envisioning terminology for a more inclusive credibility assessment

People with minority sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics continue to face procedural violations and systemic failures during the credibility assessment in Greece.

Underlining and driving the wrongful assessments is a fundamental misunderstanding of what sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) are and how they manifest within a cross-cultural and intersectional context.

The current credibility assessment overlooks the lived experience of SOGIESC asylum seekers. People seeking asylum are expected to articulate and culturally-translate their identity into something understandable for the caseworker. Moreover, the Western-centric understanding of SOGIESC as rigid and disconnected identities fails to capture the fluid and overlapping nature of sexual orientation and gender

identities. Within the asylum, this is particularly the case given the prevalence of compelled concealment and societal stigma.

I argue that whilst the use and imposition of stereotypes and expectations, as well as problematic questioning hinders people's rights to asylum, these wrongful practices are a symptom of the inaccurate Eurocentric framework within these assessments. Improving the credibility assessment of SOGIESC asylum seekers, thereby enhancing their right to asylum, requires a fundamental re-envisioning of what terminology is and how it should be used to allow accessibility and encourage accuracy within the asylum services. It requires a division between terminology for reception and dissemination, as well as community-driven knowledge regarding the communication of different orientations and identities from different cultures.

4. Sophia Weiser & Marty Huber: What's it worth? Community against the machine. A study of non-stereotypical queer realities in the asylum procedure

Access to a fair asylum procedure that doesn't rely on stereotypical check boxes means providing an infrastructure of self-determining and empowerment. The Austrian organization Queer Base follows a concept of holistic support offering a basis for developing a sense of self-definition that is not focusing on prescribed ideas. In this paper we will provide insights from our practical experiences on the effects of LGBTIQ-specific housing, access to community and legal advice right from the start of an asylum procedure. Alongside detailed data we will examine different examples from Austrian hearings at the asylum office up to Highest Court decisions. Coming out later in life, cases of discrete living in Austria and the country of origin, racist biases and the devaluation of lesbian parents are concrete examples.

One aspect of assessing credibility is living openly in the country of refuge. This assessment follows different stereotypical expectations of queer life that is not taking into consideration for example traumatic experiences when it comes to gay men while over-emphasizing the experience of sexual violence in queer women. Our experience furthermore shows that when it comes to believability, racist biases had and have to be dismantled, in particular concerning countries like Uganda, Cameroon and Bangladesh.

Country of origin reports focus more or less exclusively on cis gay men, in rare cases COI hints towards trans women but lesbians and bisexual women are under- or undocumented. In the last years, Queer Base succeeded in forging new aspects and possibilities in assessing SOGIESC asylum claims, shifting the decision-making of asylum offices and courts and this paper strives to share these strategies and progresses in national and international judicature.

Workshops 2

Chair: Tienieke Sumter.

1. Willemijn van Kempen: Worlds apart: A stumbling credibility assessment in a trans asylum claim

I can contribute in a valuable way to the conference. The core of my contribution is the case analysis and extensive rebuttal I wrote in 2023 in defence of a trans person seeking asylum in the Netherlands. She was deemed not to be credible in her identity. This rebuttal was added in the final appeal at the highest administrative court. It contributed strongly to the subsequent withdrawal of the negative credibility judgment by the immigration services. Together with the trans woman in question we prepared for the second interview to be held again. This time she was deemed credible. This content can be developed into a workshop and paper under the title "Worlds Apart". The case lays bare the various credibility issues in a Dutch asylum procedure in a vivid and exemplary way. It leads to reflections on the huge gap between the positions and realities of asylum officers and trans asylum seekers. Also, I will include observations from negotiating improvements in trans asylum procedures with the immigration services governance on behalf of the transgender network. In the workshop, I aim at involving both the actual asylum lawyer and trans person to explore the flaws and chances in the system from their perspective. One takeaway is my critique on the UNHCR guidelines of international protection no. 9 and the necessary improvements to steer trans asylum procedures adequately. Other takeaways are the lessons to be drawn and possible improvements in the exploration of lived experiences and circumstances in asylum interviews.

2. Aadarsh Gangwar & Evgeny Shtorn: Self-organising and knowledge exchange among LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and rights' advocates

Aadarsh Gangwar: Channels of knowledge exchange among LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees, and rights advocates: opportunities and challenges

This workshop will focus on the role organisations supporting LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers play as venues for knowledge exchange about credibility assessment, and the asylum process at large. It will draw on my doctoral fieldwork, which explores the ecosystem of knowledge around credibility assessment that circulates among Swiss LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees, and rights advocates. Data demonstrate that authorities in Switzerland do not provide precise and detailed information to LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers about what to expect from the asylum process. Further, state-appointed lawyers do not give them adequate legal counsel on their rights as enshrined in international guidelines or on how best to present their case. Interactions with other LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, refugees, and rights advocates can

therefore play a crucial role in guiding asylum seekers while presenting their verbal testimony, documents, and other evidence, resulting in a better experience and sometimes a better outcome. While the ambiguity and arbitrariness that shrouds credibility assessment can be alleviated through sharing of experiential knowledge, there is also a need to address its attendant challenges, including: not all LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers are aware of and feel comfortable participating in such spaces; unease around “strategic” behaviour by asylum seekers; tactical questions (whether focus should be on legal/administrative reform *within* the asylum system). Leveraging the interprofessional and international nature of this conference, this workshop will foster dialogue on the role spaces of knowledge exchange play in improving the experience of credibility assessment for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in different regional contexts.

Evgeny Shtorn: Self-organising and peer-to-peer support for LGBTIQ+ people seeking international protection (case of Ireland) as part of the solution!

Queer Diaspora Ireland is an independent peer-to-peer grassroots initiative that aims to provide information about all the organisations and initiatives that work with asylum seekers, refugees and LGBTI individuals.

Queer Diaspora Ireland approaches its work from an intersectional perspective of BAIME and LGBTIQ+ human rights movement. LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees often suffer double isolation in direct provision centres as both ‘migrants’ and sexually ‘different.’ Queer Diaspora Ireland seeks to facilitate the creation of an intersectional community where everyone feels welcome, protected and engaged in local organising.

Peer-to-peer support also corresponds to the building of trust and friendship of those isolated individuals and helps them to exchange their knowledge about the available resources and share it, supporting each other during the exhausting waiting period and while receiving the decision, often having to face judicial review for the law credibility in their claims. Peer-to-peer grassroots movement development can become part of the solution while on the credibility assessment because it contributes to the sense of community, helping the LGBTIQ+ people seeking international protection to emancipate further, gain a better understanding of the existing challenges during the asylum process and build links to existing established NGOs who can share their resources but do not intervene in the peer-to-peer dynamics.

The image features a vibrant, abstract background composed of large, overlapping shapes in shades of blue and purple. A prominent dark blue shape on the left side resembles a stylized arrow or a pointed triangle. A large, light purple shape dominates the center and right, with a circular cutout at the top. The text "Who is who" is centered in a bold, white, sans-serif font, positioned over the dark blue shape on the right.

Who is who

Who is who

Alexandra Andersson

Alexandra Andersson is a MSc in sociology student at Lund University. In her thesis, she investigates the Swedish Migration Agency's (SMA) caseworkers and their interpretation of the credibility assessment of SOGIESC asylum seekers. She interviewed seven caseworkers from Sweden's four largest cities, focusing on unravelling how power dynamics manifest in the SOGIESC asylum process and how LGBTQI+ is defined and assessed.

Jan Antfolk

Jan Antfolk is professor in applied psychology and Head of the Department of Psychology at Åbo Akademi University. He is the Principal Investigator of the 5-year PsychAid project (*Psychology at the Frontiers: Asylum Interviewing and Decision-making*), which seeks to improve asylum adjudications in Europe, drawing on established evidence in legal psychology. He is together with Professor Julia Korkman heading the research group in legal psychology, LePå. His research interests in forensic psychology include the etiology of child sexual abuse, family dysfunction, eye-witness testimony, investigative interviewing, and expert testimony. His research also focuses on the evolutionary understanding of conflict of interest within the family. His list of publications includes both original research and meta-analyses.

Samuel Ballin

Samuel Ballin (he/they) is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Migration Law, Radboud University. They write on a range of critical approaches to migration law, including the economic and ecological vulnerabilities of migrant workers, gender and asylum. Samuel has a Graduate Diploma in Law from the University of Sheffield and an LLM International Migration and Refugee Law from the VU Amsterdam. They are a coordinator of the Netherlands Network of Human Rights Research Working Group on Human Rights and the Climate Crisis and a member of the Working Group on Migration and Borders.

Louisa Bergsma

Louisa Bergsma has a masters in Public International Law, with a focus on human rights law. For the past two years she has been working at the Dutch Refugee Council in Amsterdam as a legal consultant for undocumented people. She takes a special interest in cases surrounding gender and sexual orientation. Besides being a legal expert, Louisa expresses her activism on topics like affordable housing and other social challenges by writing and organizing. In 2023 she co-organized an awareness week on dealing with a mild intellectual disability in the asylum procedure.

Noam Falk

Noam Falk (they/them) have 10+ years' experience working with refugee protection, including as RSD Officer with the Swedish Migration Agency and UNHCR in Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle East. They have a Master Degree in Human Rights Law from SOAS, and are currently finalizing an LLB with University of London.

Being a non-binary transracial adoptee who struggled with finding their own place in the world, questions related to mental health, feminism and intersectionality, non-discrimination and identity are all close to their heart, in addition to human rights and international refugee law.

Nuno Ferreira

Nuno Ferreira is a Professor of Law at the University of Sussex, UK. Previously, he was a Senior Lecturer at the University of Liverpool and Lecturer at the University of Manchester. Nuno's teaching and research focuses on refugee law, European law, and human rights – especially LGBTIQ+ and children's rights. Nuno has been a Horizon 2020 ERC Starting Grant recipient, leading the SOGICA project (2016-2020, www.sogica.org), as well as a co-investigator in the Horizon 2020-funded TRAFIG project (2019-2022, www.trafig.org) and Principal Investigator in the ESRC-funded project 'Negotiating Queer Identities Following Forced Migration' (2022-2024, <https://iranqueerefugee.net/>). More information available on <https://profiles.sussex.ac.uk/p396218-nuno-ferreira>.

Abby Field

Abby Field (they/them) is the Head of the Legal Empowerment Programme and SOGIESC consultant at Fenix Humanitarian Legal Aid. Prior to their work on Lesbos, Abby obtained a Masters (LLM) in International Human Rights Law, with a focus on the credibility assessment of SOGIESC asylum seekers, from the University of Sussex. Since 2019, they have worked as on Lesbos providing legal support to people seeking asylum. During this time they have worked closely with, and provided consultations for, SOGIESC asylum seekers. As the chair of Greece's LGBTIQ+ Working Group, they foster a collaborative and community-forward approach through advocacy, guidelines and capacity bridging.

Claire Fletcher

Dr Claire Fletcher is an academic and consultant, currently at Solent University in the Social Sciences department. Claire's research interests focus on the UK asylum system, especially regarding the intersection of the legal asylum system and social factors for those with queer subjectivity in the UK. Her previous, ESRC funded, PhD research project focused on the intersection of queer subjectivity, asylum seeking and experiences of religion in the UK. Alongside academia she has previously worked and volunteered in charities working with refugees and people seeking asylum, including Rainbow Migration, British Red Cross and the Refugee Council.

Aadarsh Gangwar

Aadarsh Gangwar is an Indian anthropologist in training and a doctoral candidate at the Geneva Graduate Institute. His research concentrates on LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers' experiences, perceptions, and critiques of credibility assessment practices within the Swiss asylum system, and their imagined alternatives to these practices. His research is supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Since 2020, he also volunteers with Asile LGBTIQ+, an association providing socio-economic support to LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers and refugees in and around Geneva.

Diego Garcia Rodriguez

Diego is a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow at the University of Nottingham (UK) researching the experiences of LGBTIQ+ religious refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. His latest book, "Gender, Sexuality and Islam in Contemporary Indonesia: Queer Muslims and their Allies", was published in August 2023. He holds a PhD in Gender and Sexuality Studies from University College London, where he explored the religious lives of Indonesian LGBTIQ+ Muslims and the development of progressive Islam. Diego has received numerous prestigious scholarships and fellowships, including the ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowship and the UBEL DTP ESRC PhD grant.

Karen Geertsema

Dr. Karen Geertsema is assistant professor migration law at the Centre for Migration Law, Radboud University, Nijmegen. Her research focuses on the role of the judiciary in migration law, the procedural aspects of migration law and the effects of international and European law on national procedural laws. Besides her academic work she is substitute judge at the District Court of Overijssel. She has published extensively about the credibility assessment of asylum cases in the Netherlands. With the judiciary she developed a course for legal practitioners on credibility assessment of SOGIESC asylum claims. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3389-830X>

Roos Geurts

Roos Geurts has a masters in EU and international law with a special focus on Migration and Refugee law. She currently works as a legal consultant for undocumented people at Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland in Amsterdam. Over the past years, she has specialized in complex cases with a focus on vulnerable people (LGBT+, cognitive disabilities and psychiatric diagnoses among others). Next to that, she is passionate about setting up projects that make the city more accessible for undocumented people on a local level (ground-up).

Domenica Ghidei Biidu

Domenica Ghidei Biidu is an independent strategic adviser, Human Rights lawyer, coach and trainer on Equity, Inclusiveness and Diversity. She works with Governmental Institutions across Europe, with Academia, NGO's, arts institutes, Police and (Refugee) Grassroot organisations. At the moment she is the Vice-Chair of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). She was member of the working group that drafted GPR No. 17 on preventing and combating intolerance and discrimination against LGBTI persons <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/recommendation-no.-17>. She was an Equal Treatment Commissioner and a Human Rights Commissioner (2005-2017) at the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights and its predecessor the Dutch Equal Treatment Commission.

Aino Gröndahl

Aino Gröndahl is a lawyer at RFSL, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights. She has specialized in SOGIESC asylum claims since 2012 and has published several reports examining more than 3360 asylum decisions in SOGIESC asylum cases. Her research found that the Swedish migration authorities' credibility assessments rely on unlawful stereotypes

and that discretion reasoning still exists in Swedish SOGIESC asylum case law. Before her research, Aino worked as a public counsel for asylum seekers with SOGIESC asylum claims.

Andrea Vige Grønningsæter

Andrea Vige Grønningsæter is an associate professor at the faculty of law at the University of Oslo. In June 2024, she completed her dissertation “Concealment, Credibility and the Construction of the Sexual Minority Refugee”. As a part of her research, Grønningsæter has analysed the practice of the Norwegian immigration authorities and the courts in asylum claims concerning sexual orientation.

Maarten den Heijer

Maarten den Heijer is state councillor in the Dutch Council of State, where he sits in the general chamber and the migration chamber. Maarten has a parttime appointment at the Law School of the University of Amsterdam, where he previously worked fulltime as associate professor of international law. As academic, Maarten published regularly on migration law; including the topic of SOGIESC asylum claims. He still teaches the course European Migration Law at the University of Amsterdam.

Maya Ellen Hertz

Maya Ellen Hertz (they/them) is a recent graduate of the MSc in Social Data Science at the University of Copenhagen. They worked as a research assistant at the Center of Excellence of Global Mobility Law and wrote their thesis on credibility assessment of transgender claimants in the Spring of 2024 in collaboration with the center. Maya is affiliated with LGBT+ Asylum, a non-profit in Denmark providing counselling and social activities for queers in the Danish asylum system.

Marty Huber

Marty Huber (she/they) is a queer-activist and co-founder of Queer Base – Welcome and Support for LGBTIQ Refugees in Vienna Austria. Works on human rights for LGBTIQ refugees, holds trainings for social workers, asylum officers and judges, is a member of the Consultative Forum of the EUAA.

Ifigeneia Intzipeoglou

Ifigeneia Intzipeoglou is a lawyer and human rights defender. She holds an LLB from Aristotle’s University in Thessaloniki and an LLM from the London School of Economics and Political Science with a focus on International Law and Human Rights. She has 8 years of working experience in refugee law on a national and supranational level as she has engaged in litigation before the ECtHR and the CJEU, worked as a legal officer for IOM and EASO in Greece and is currently appointed as a judicial researcher in the Greek Council of State.

Sabine Jansen

Sabine Jansen works for COC Netherlands since several years. She was the initiator and main researcher of the 2011 *Fleeing Homophobia* report, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4ebba7852.pdf> and she was involved in the gay asylum cases XYZ and ABC at the CJEU. In 2014 she drafted a Good Practices report for ILGA-Europe: <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5433a8124.pdf>. In her 2018 report *Pride or Shame?* she investigates LGBTI asylum practice in the Netherlands

with a special focus on credibility assessment:

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/5c6eb3344.html>. After Dutch policy changed she undertook a new research: *Pride or Shame? The Follow-Up*:

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/644fa4bf4.html>. She is proud to be the project leader of the Striking Sirens Coalition.

Asta Sofie S. Jarlner

Asta Sofie S. Jarlner (she/her) is a PhD Fellow at the Center of Excellence for Global Mobility Law, University of Copenhagen. As part of the project Algorithmic Fairness for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, she mainly works with computational methods to identify how features in interaction may predict if a claimant is perceived as credible or not, paying special attention to how the Danish Refugee Appeals Board determine risk group affiliation for identity-based claims. Her overall research aims to shed light on human bias in decision-making at time of increasing automation, to avoid embedding and exacerbating marginalising patterns.

Sharalyn Jordan

Sharalyn Jordan (she/they) is an educator, researcher, counselling psychology practitioner and advocate for LGBTQI+ migration rights, mental health and social support equity. She is an Associate Professor in Counselling Psychology and Equity Studies in Education at Simon Fraser University. Jordan has been an organizer with Rainbow Refugee since 2004, conducting community-based knowledge production projects that have informed strategic litigation, policy development and advocacy. Since 2010, she has helping initiate and develop the Rainbow Refugee Assistance Partnership, a community sponsorship program that supports LGBTQI refugees to arrive in Canadian cities. In 2017, Jordan worked with Rainbow Refugee to inform the development of the Refugee Board's SOGIESC Guideline. With legal scholar Nicholas Hersch, Jordan designed and delivered training for Refugee decision makers on SOGIE guideline 9. She helped form From Borders to Belonging, a solidarity coalition with LGBTQI refugees in 2018. Jordan has published in *Refuge*, *Forced Migration Review*, *Qualitative Health Research*, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, and *Sexualities*. About Rainbow Refugee and From Borders to Belonging:

<https://www.rainbowrefugee.com/>

<https://fromborderstobelonging.ca/>

Million Kassa Bekele

Originally from Ethiopia and living in Amsterdam, Million studies in the interdisciplinary social science department at Utrecht University, doing his PhD thesis "Being and Making Queers in the Margins of the State: A Study among Queer Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands". The research is about queer refugees in the Netherlands, with a focus on the asylum system: mainly how the Netherlands Immigration and naturalization service (IND) decides which queer asylum seeker to give refugee status to and which to deny. It will explore issues such as "safe country", the Dublin agreement, the credibility of queerness and more. His interest in the topic comes from his personal experience of being subjected to the same procedure, and meeting other queer refugees, who also were seeking asylum in the Netherlands because of their SOGI.

Willemijn van Kempen

Willemijn van Kempen is a Dutch queer trans woman, born in 1961 in a rural, linguistic minority region. She works on trans emancipation in various capacities, including as a research and advocacy associate at Transgender Network, focusing on trans asylum procedures. Together with Alejandra Ortiz she conducted research on trans asylum procedures in the Netherlands (Transcript from the Margins, 2021). This led to a period of advocacy with the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security and the immigration service. In 2023, she contributed successfully to turning a negative credibility assessment around in a trans women's asylum case in the Netherlands.

Leens van Kessel

Leens van Kessel holds an LL.M. in Transnational Law from King's College London and an LLB from Utrecht University (UU). She is currently pursuing the Legal Research Master's Programme at UU. Her research focus is human rights and migration. She is interested in improving the human rights protection of vulnerable migrants, such as women, LGBTQIA+ persons, and migrants subjected to human trafficking. Leens has been active at the Dutch Council for Refugees, the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights, and the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking and Sexual Violence Against Children. She is also founder and host of the podcast Talking Human Rights:

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/0V4MFhbGZ1QrJBdhnlvM9t?si=HHcVPbZ8TliKLGfa4Z0rKw>

Sonia Lenegan

Sonia Lenegan is a qualified solicitor and policy specialist, with a particular expertise in LGBTQI+ asylum. She has been practising as a solicitor for over 13 years and was previously Legal Director at the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association and Legal and Policy Director at Rainbow Migration. Sonia is currently the Editor of the Free Movement blog and is also Non-Executive Director - Policy for Micro Rainbow.

Simone Lugtmeijer

Simone is currently pursuing an MSc degree at the Radboud University. She is studying the master track: Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Politics. From January until May, Simone has been working as a research intern at the NNID (Netherlands organization for sex diversity/ Radboud University (Nijmegen, the Netherlands)) to research the inclusivity of intersex refugees in the Dutch asylum system.

Irene Manganini

Irene Manganini (she/they) is a PhD candidate in International Law at the Graduate Institute of Geneva and current visitor of the Amsterdam Centre for Migration and Refugee Law (VUA). Her research focuses broadly speaking on the encounter of queer migrants with the international migration law framework. Irene also works as UNHCR-designated asylum adjudicator in the Territorial Asylum Commission of Milan (first instance). Prior to that, she worked in different capacities with IOM in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bangladesh and with UNHCR in Italy, as well as with human rights NGOs and grassroot activist groups working on migration issues.

Iene Maveau

Iene Maveau holds a Master in Law and a Master in Gender and Diversity (University of Ghent, Belgium). Her presentation will be held on behalf of NANSEN, the organisation she works for as a legal officer since September 2023, leading on SOGI related claims for international protection. NANSEN is a Belgian NGO, centre of legal expertise on international protection. They provide legal assistance to applicants for international protection, and offer publications and trainings to lawyers specialised in migration law. Their target group includes, among others, SOGI-applicants for international protection.

Pip McKnight

Pip McKnight is a Research and Impact Fellow in the Institute for Research into International Migration and Superdiversity (IRiS) at the University of Birmingham. Her work focuses on research and policy change in forced migration, health inequalities and sexual and gender-based violence. A registered midwife, she is currently undertaking an ESRC-funded PhD considering Cultural Safety in the maternity care of asylum seekers in the UK.

Lisa Menke

Lisa Menke works for COC Nederland as an intervention and development specialist for the security and education teams. She develops interventions and trainings for social workers and other professionals that work with LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers. Additionally, she conducts research on the experiences of LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers in the Dutch asylum system. Her previous research has focused on Indigenous activism in Canada as well as on constructions of citizenship in Dutch society. Her interests lie in social justice, discourse and intersections with queerness and gender.

Annelie Neumann

Annelie Neumann studied Critical Intercultural Communication (BA) and European Studies (MA) (TU Chemnitz), accompanied by a certificate in Gender Studies (TU and HU Berlin). Next to her studies, she worked part-time as consultant for queer asylum procedures (2019-2023). Still today she supports queer NGOs in Germany (LSVD Germany, Rosa Asyl 2.0) with examining and archiving German administrative and court decisions on queer asylum cases and transferring changes or with accompanying queer asylum seekers to various appointments. Since 2023 she works on her PhD on the heteronormativity of the European Border Regime at the Laboratory for Critical Migration and Border Regime Research at Georg-August-University Göttingen, Germany.

Astrid Oosenbrug

Astrid Oosenbrug is a Dutch politician and activist. She served as a member of the House of Representatives from 2012 to 2017. Oosenbrug is known for her commitment to (digital) human rights, privacy, and inclusivity. After her term in the House of Representatives, she focused on various social and technological initiatives. Since 2018, she has been the chair of COC Netherlands, advancing LGBTIQ+ rights and visibility. With a background in ICT and a passion for social justice, Oosenbrug remains an influential voice in public discourse, driving meaningful change and inspiring many within and beyond the LGBTQ+ community.

Alexandra Politidis Palm

Alexandra Politidis Palm is a Swedish lawyer specialized in asylum law and human rights. She works at The Swedish Youth Federation for LGBTQI rights - RFSL Ungdom and published in 2020 a legal review of SOGIESC asylum cases concerning youth (under 20 years) on the application of the credibility criterias. The results of the review show that the application of credibility criterias are not adapted to assessments concerning inner processes. During 2024 the legal review from 2020 will be updated and a new review, with new cases will be published. Politidis Palm is also currently contributing as an expert in a reference group in a Swedish research project at Uppsala University conducting quantitative and qualitative analyses out of 3600 randomized asylum cases from the Swedish Migration Agency.

Adriana Rojas

Adriana Rojas is a humanitarian professional with over 14 years of experience at UNHCR, specializing in the field of refugee status determination and asylum capacity development. Based at UNHCR Headquarters in the Division of International Protection, she serves as the focal person for refugee claims based on diverse SOGIESC. In this role, she provides expert guidance, training, and support to field operations.

Raawiyah Rifath

Dr Raawiyah Rifath is a lecturer in law at the University of Exeter and specialises in International Refugee Law and policy as well as International Human Rights Law. Raawiyah completed her PhD with the Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health at the University of Exeter. Raawiyah used a transdisciplinary approach of law and psychology to research the burden and standard of proof relating to asylum claims based on sexual orientation. The results of this research proposed reforms to the UK's asylum process to better accommodate vulnerability and protect wellbeing.

Hedayat Selim

Hedayat Selim is a doctoral researcher in legal psychology at Åbo Akademi University in Finland. She is part of a research group investigating the psychological aspects of asylum decision-making. Her thesis investigates how Finnish asylum authorities evaluate the credibility of asylum claims based on religion and sexual orientation. Since 2012, Hedayat has worked in the field of asylum and migration with UN agencies, NGOs, and universities in Egypt, Italy, and Finland. Her experience includes assisting asylum-seekers in applying for international protection, interviewing and determining the refugee status of asylum-seekers, and training policy-level actors. Hedayat holds a master's degree in human rights studies from Columbia University (New York) and a bachelor's degree in Sociology from the American University in Cairo.

Evgeny Shtorn

Evgeny Shtorn is a writer, activist, and researcher from St Petersburg. Due to his involvement in civil society work, he was forced to leave Russia in 2018. In 2019, he was granted international protection in the Republic of Ireland. He currently works as a Social and Cultural Diversity Consultant collaborating with different universities, and cultural and civil society institutions. Evgeny's writing has been published in

academic journals, anthologies and new media outlets in Russia, Spain, Germany, and Ireland. As an activist, he has been involved in human rights and LGBT advocacy for almost two decades. He is a co-founder of Queer Diaspora Ireland, an initiative that supports LGBT refugees. His novel *Refugee Chronicles*, written in direct provision, was published in St. Petersburg in 2020. The same year in recognition of his efforts Shtorn was awarded the GALAs Person of the Year by the National LGBT Federation of Ireland (NXF).

Tieneke Sumter

Tieneke Sumter works since 2021 for COC Nederland. As a senior officer at 'communities and network' she is in contact with several groups and organisations inside and outside COC. She coordinates the cocktail groups for LGBTI+ asylum seekers and the helpline Switchboard. She also has a special focus on queer (50+) people of colour. A human rights activist for over 40 years, she was part of the first black queer organisation in this country SUHO (1980) and a member of the lesbian feminist group Sister Outsider (1984). She was one of the founders of the Surinamese LGBT Platform and since 2017 she is the chair of the Mikel Haman Foundation, an organisation for Surinamese-Caribbean queer people.

Elias Tissandier-Nasom

Elias Tissandier-Nasom is a PhD candidate in the department of Children's Rights and Health at Leiden University researching 'Asylum claims lodged by minors on grounds of SOGIESC'. They obtained a bachelor degree in Political Sciences from Sciences Po, as well as a master in Public International Law and an advanced master in European and International Human Rights Law from Leiden University. His areas of research focus on asylum, migration, LGBTQIA+ human rights and children's rights and health.

Davide Tomaselli

Davide Tomaselli is a PhD researcher in Law at the European University Institute, Florence. I am currently working on queer critical approaches to EU law and legal scholarship. I have studied international relations at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies and Public International Law at the University of Amsterdam. During my university years, I have dedicated most of my research to the topic of SOGIESC asylum seekers from a critical, socio-legal point of view. In parallel, I have always tried to couple my academic work with my activist engagement, especially with student groups advocating for women and LGBT+ rights.

Jess Walmsley

Jess Walmsley is a Master's student at the University of Manchester studying in the Global Development Institute in the Migration, Mobility and Displacement department. My undergraduate degree was with HCRI in International Disaster Management and Humanitarian Response. After completing a dissertation on the role of digital media in UK LGBTQ+ asylum claims, I have gone on to found 'Queried about being Queer' a blog keeping up to date with LGBTQ+ asylum and complete freelance work with UoM's Queering Migration research group. My specialist areas of study include migration, LGBTQ+ experiences, GIS mapping and digital media research.

Sophia Weiser

Sophia Weiser works as a legal advisor for the Austrian organization Queer Base. In her law studies, she specialized on asylum law and now counsels and represents queer asylum seekers in all instances of the Austrian asylum procedure.

Jessica van Zadelhoff

Jessica van Zadelhoff is program manager social safety at COC Netherlands. She has over 10 years of experience working on projects aimed at improving the safety and wellbeing of LGBTIQ asylum seekers and refugees, and she has worked with various governmental and grassroots organizations. Additionally, she currently works on the prevention of intimate partner violence and sexual violence amongst LGBTIQ youth.

Sophia Zisakou

Sophia Zisakou is a PhD candidate at the Department of Sociology of Law at Lund University in Sweden and an asylum lawyer in Greece. Her research draws on the intersections of decolonial feminist, queer, and affect theory and focuses on credibility assessment in queer asylum claims in Greece. Her work has been published in journals such as *Sexualities* and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

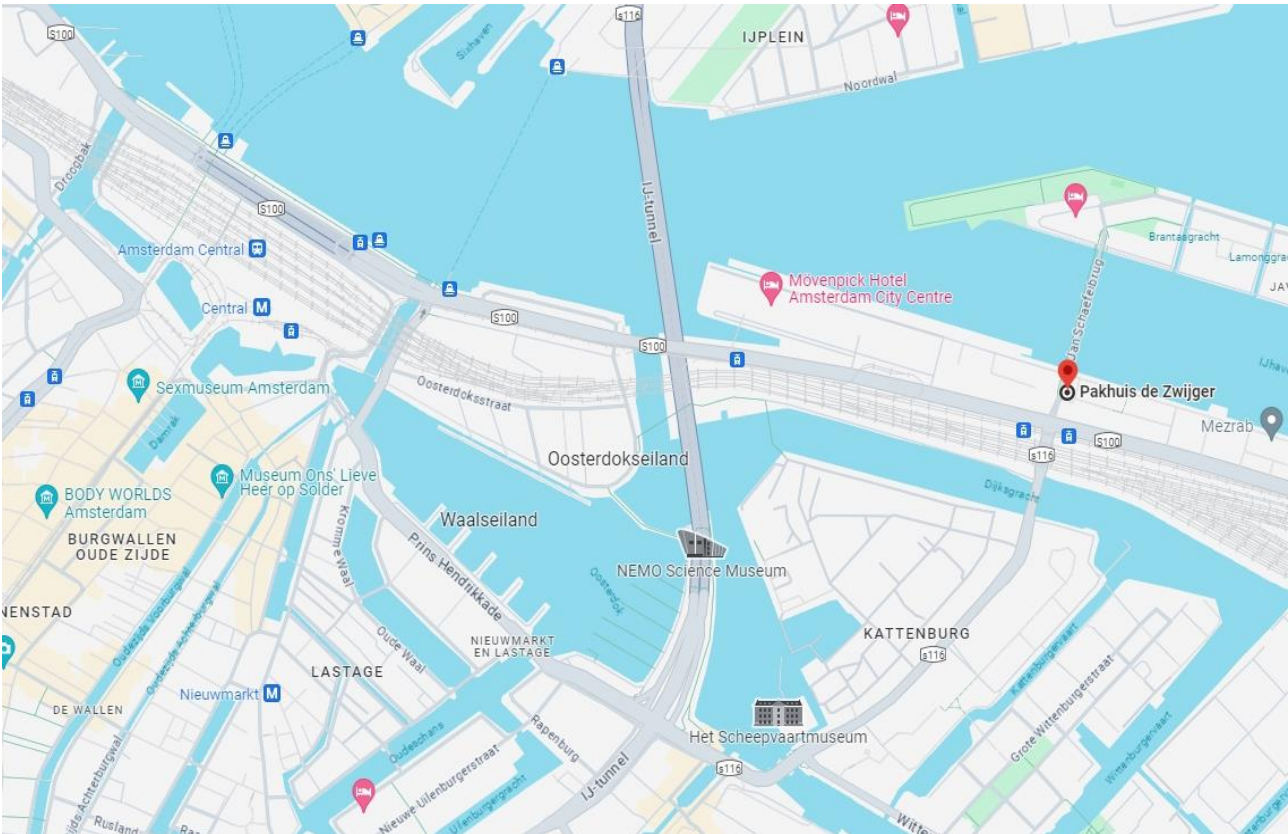
The background features a large, light purple circle at the top center. Below it, a dark blue shape resembling a stylized arrow or a curved banner points downwards. The overall composition is abstract and modern, using a limited color palette of blue, purple, and white.

Practical information

Location

Pakhuis de Zwijger

Piet Heinkade 179
1019 HC Amsterdam



Travel directions – from Amsterdam Central Station

Pakhuis de Zwijger is located near Amsterdam Central Station. Travelling there by public transport takes about 5 minutes. You can travel either by tram or bus:

- **Tram 26** – direction IJburg. Get off at the stop Kattenburgerstraat.
- **Bus 43** - direction Borneo Eiland. Get off at the stop Jan Schaeferbrug.

Please note that both the tram and bus depart from the 'IJ-zijde' of central station. This is behind central station, near the water.

For up-to-date timetables and information about travelling by public transport in Amsterdam, please visit the GVB website: <https://www.gvb.nl/en/visit-amsterdam/tourist-guide-en>

