



**Freitag, 16. Juni 2023 / Friday, 16 June 2023**

**09.00 – 09.45h Keynote 5**

**Prof. Dr. Dirk Geldof PhD** *Growing up in an asylum centre. The lived experience of children und youngsters in Belgian asylum centres (English)*

**Institution:** Odisee University of Applied Sciences & University of Antwerp

**Place:** Antwerp, Belgium

#### **Abstract**

One third of the refugees in their asylum procedure in Belgium are children and youngsters (as part of a family or unaccompanied). On average, asylum seeking families spent one year in collective reception centres before they receive a decision, but for many this becomes a period of several years. At this moment, around 10.000 children and youngsters spend an important part of their youth in refugee or asylum centres, that are hosted in infrastructures that served other purposes in the past. It are seldom family-friendly places; certainly not child- or youth-friendly spaces. The often deteriorated infrastructures hinder homing processes of families. Living in reception centres alters child-rearing practices and family dynamics. How do accompanied children and youngsters experience their stay in reception centres? What is the impact for youngsters of living and growing up in collective asylum centres on their wellbeing and family dynamics? How is their wellbeing and that of their families affected by these environmental and structural dynamics? How do they deal with unsafe living conditions, from bullying to sexual abuse? And what is the role of social workers and asylum staff for these youngsters in limbo? In the paper, we focus on the children's & youngsters perspectives and their strategies, practices and resilient moves to cope with the life in exceptional conditions: a period of limbo in collective asylum infrastructures. The analysis explores why it is important to add the perspective of children & youngsters in research and asylum policies. The paper is based on a multi-methods AMIF-research on families and children & youngsters in Belgian collective refugee centres between 2020 & 2022, including 123 in-depth interviews with parents (58), children & youngsters (38) and staff of all levels (38) in 9 refugee centres in Flanders and Wallonia. (<https://www.odisee.be/kind-zijn-in-een-asielcentrum>) Key words: refugee-children/youngsters, asylum infrastructures, resilience, refugee studies.

#### **CV**

Dirk Geldof is professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Design Sciences at the University of Antwerp. He is senior Researcher at the Centre of Family Studies (Odisee University of Applied Sciences Brussels). His research focuses on superdiversity in Belgium, and on Belgian refugee families and asylum policies.