

FROM PRINCIPLES TO PRACTICE: INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS CONVENE IN GENEVA TO DISCUSS THE INTEGRATION OF LEGAL SAFEGUARDS WITH THE SCIENCE OF INTERVIEWING SKILLS

Expert meeting “Safeguarding Against Ill-Treatment in Interrogation: Aligning Disciplines for Effective and Fair Interviewing”, held in Geneva on 23–24 April 2026, was organised in the framework of the COST Action CA22128 – Establishing Networks to Implement the Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations (ImpleMéndez) in cooperation with the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights.

The meeting brought together a diverse group of experts, practitioners, and distinguished guests from all around Europe and the US to exchange views on advancing non-coercive interviewing practices. Across a series of thematic sessions, participants explored key challenges and practical approaches to implementing the Mendez Principles in different contexts.

Professors David Walsh, Chair of the ImpleMéndez Cost Action, and Cécile Aptel, Executive Director of the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, began the discussions with their opening remarks. They emphasised the importance of moving away from coercive interviewing practices and advocating for better protection of human rights.

Discussions under **Theme 1. Integrating Legal Safeguards into Interviewing Practice**, chaired by Robert Roth, President of the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), former Director of the Geneva Academy of Humanitarian Law, focused on how legal safeguards can be better integrated into interviewing practice.

Therese Rytter (Legal Director at DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture, former Vice-President of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT)) explained that safeguards are framed differently across law, training, and monitoring. She argued that this fragmentation weakens protection and showed that effective safeguards depend on consistent implementation and strong monitoring systems across Europe.

Knut D. Asplund (Norwegian Centre for Human Rights) challenged the idea that safeguards and interviewing skills are in tension. He stressed that training should combine legal standards with rapport-based methods, noting that focusing only on rules can create resistance among practitioners. Instead, he called for approaches that align professional effectiveness with respect for human rights.

Steven J. Barela (University of Geneva) examined the concept of “integration” itself. He argued that differences between law, science, and ethics cannot be fully resolved, and that implementation requires ongoing coordination rather than uniformity.

Discussions under **Theme 2. Juvenile Justice and Vulnerability**, chaired by Cécile Aptel, Executive Director of the Geneva Academy, with over 30 years of experience in various roles across the United Nations, focused on how investigative interviewing can better protect vulnerable persons while ensuring fair outcomes.

Professor Ray Bull (University of Leicester, UK) examined the long history of juvenile interviewing, stressing that despite decades of research, weak training can still lead to harmful or unfair practices. He raised concerns that failures may lie not only with young suspects but also with investigators who neglect proper standards.

Anželika Banevičienė (Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania) outlined key safeguards for children, including access to lawyers, non-coercive methods, and proper recording of interviews. She argued that the main issue is not the lack of rules but poor application in practice, calling for stronger training and oversight.

Professor Gavin Oxburgh (Northumbria University, UK) shifted attention to interviewers, showing how neurodivergent officers may face both strengths and limits in communication, and that these factors should be reflected in training and guidance.

Valentina Cadelo (Association for the Prevention of Torture) highlighted risks faced by groups such as LGBTIQ+ and indigenous persons, noting gaps between formal safeguards and real use. She stressed the need for better recognition of overlapping forms of vulnerability.

Discussions under **Theme 3. Visibility and Leverage: Recording, Access, and the Practice of Transparency**, chaired by Professor Maya Hertig-Randall, professor at the Geneva Academy and University of Geneva, focused on how audiovisual recording and access can strengthen transparency, accountability, and interview quality.

Emily Alison (University of Liverpool, UK) explained how rapport-based methods, including the ORBIT model, support more effective and ethical interviews. She highlighted how policy change and training reforms, particularly in the United States, helped move away from accusatory practices.

Zeynep Reva (Özyeğin University, Turkey) presented comparative findings on recording practices, noting that while many systems accept recording as a safeguard, its use, storage, and access remain uneven across jurisdictions.

Mark Fallon (ClubFed, LLC, US) described the shift in the United States from confession-driven approaches to information-based interviewing grounded in research and procedural fairness.

Nicole Hogg (Secretary General of the Association for the Prevention of Torture) stressed that recordings protect both interviewees and investigators and enable oversight bodies to ensure accountability, despite privacy and access challenges.

Discussions under **Theme 4. Managing Informal Practices**, chaired by Professor Andrew Clapham, International Law at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, the first Director of the Geneva Academy, former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Iraq, and UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan from 2017 to 2023, examined how informal practices in policing and detention can undermine legal safeguards and oversight.

Professor Yvonne Daly (Dublin City University, Ireland; Vice-Chair of the ImpleMéndez Cost Action) argued that off-record questioning risks weakening core rights such as access to a lawyer, the right to silence, and proper recording of interviews. She stressed that safeguards must apply from the earliest stage of proceedings.

Suzanne Jabbour (Chief Executive Officer at the Restart Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture (Lebanon); UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture) focused on detention settings, showing how informal practices increase risks of coercion and ill-treatment, and calling for stronger monitoring beyond formal compliance.

Professor Violeta Vasiliauskienė (Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania) discussed how Lithuanian law treats statements from informal exchanges, highlighting uncertainty about when such information becomes evidence and its impact on fair trial rights.

Denis Solodov (University of Warmia and Mazury, Poland) explained why informal police interviews persist in Poland, pointing to legal and structural factors that allow such information to influence cases indirectly, even when formal rules are bypassed.

The closing remarks for the expert meeting were delivered by Mark Thomson, Co-Chairperson of the Steering Committee for the Méndez Principles and former Secretary General of the Association for the Prevention of Torture. He reflected on the key discussions, highlighted the importance of continued cooperation within the ImpleMéndez framework, and emphasised that advancing effective and fair interviewing requires sustained dialogue between legal professionals, practitioners and researchers, as well as shared commitment to integrating safeguards into everyday practice across jurisdictions.

The meeting provided a valuable platform for sharing experiences, identifying common priorities, and strengthening professional networks. The diverse perspectives shared have provided a strong basis for further work on the Méndez Principles. It also laid the groundwork for future activities within the ImpleMéndez COST Action.