



DIRECTORATE GENERAL
HUMAN RIGHTS AND RULE OF LAW (DG I)

DIRECTORATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS
DIVISION ON MIGRATION AND REFUGEES



Webinar

on Vulnerability of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees: Council of Europe and European Union standards

Organised by the Council of Europe Division on Migration and Refugees and
the Faculty of Law, Maastricht University, Jean Monnet Chair

Concept note and Agenda

Strasbourg, 20 March 2026

Online

CONCEPT NOTE

The issue of vulnerability transcends Council of Europe and EU legal and policy instruments in the area of migration and asylum, with the aim of providing specific legal and other forms of protection to certain individuals or groups which face particular barriers to effectively exercising and enjoying their rights. Given the growing recognition of complex, intersecting vulnerabilities among migrants and refugees —stemming from age, gender, health status, migration status, and other social determinants—there is a heightened need for harmonised legal and practical standards in the Council of Europe area.

In this framework, the [Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe \(2021-2025\)](#), through its four pillars of action, aimed to provide guidance and assistance to member States to improve their ability to proactively identify and address vulnerabilities throughout all stages of the migration and asylum processes, while the new EU five- year [Asylum and Migration Management Strategy](#) underlines the importance of responding effectively to special needs of migrants and refugees during screening and return procedures, as an intricate part of fundamental rights protection.

Nevertheless, the definition of vulnerability in legal instruments of the Council of Europe and the European Union is not exhaustive, as situational and individual elements should be taken into consideration. In this context, relevant human rights treaties overseen by the Council of Europe, including the European Convention on Human Rights, alongside tools of soft law and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), establish a comprehensive approach, recognising both status-based (e.g., refugees, minors, victims of trafficking) and situational vulnerability. Similarly, the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) provides for individualised identification and tailored responses to “special reception/procedural needs,” which offers flexibility allowing the Court of Justice of the EU to give a dynamic interpretation of vulnerability.

Despite relevant challenges, it should be underlined that national practice in Council of Europe member States has shown that there are in place certain promising policies protecting vulnerability in asylum and migration procedures.¹

Drawing on the 2025 Thematic Paper issued by the Division on Migration and Refugees on “Vulnerability of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees: Council of Europe and European Union standards”,² this webinar aims to facilitate a substantive exchange of views on this intricate topic with the support of experts from the academia, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the United Nations Office of the Commissioner of Human Rights.

¹ See DMR Thematic Paper, [Vulnerability of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees: Council of Europe and European Union standards](#), 2025, 41 ff.

² Idem.

AGENDA

Friday, 20 March 2026

Agora meeting room G05 (for CoE staff members)

Link on Zoom:

Meeting ID: 665 0678 4670 Code: 207146

<https://coe-int.zoom.us/j/66506784670?pwd=tTb7Bvb1iVhUBoCVadebeYLvj88alx.1>

13.00 – 13.05	Opening remarks
	Nikos SITAROPOULOS , Head of Division on Migration and Refugees
13.05 – 13.35	Interventions
	Lilian TSOURDI , Professor and Jean Monnet Chair in European Migration Law and Governance, Maastricht University
	Catherine WARIN , Lawyer (Luxembourg Bar) and Associate Professor, University of Lille
	Anne-Laure BAULIEU , Children's Rights Policies, Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe
	Petya NESTOROVA , Head of Division and Executive Secretary of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe
13.35-13.50	Q & A
13.50 – 14.00	Break
14.00 – 14.20	Isabela ATANASIU , Legal Officer, DG HOME, European Commission
	Carolina HERNANDEZ , OHCHR's Advisor on Migration and Human Rights and Coordinator of the Migration & People on the Move Unit, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
14.20 - 14.35	Q & A
14.35 - 14.45	Wrap up and conclusions
	Nikos Sitaropoulos , Head of Division on Migration and Refugees