

Understanding “Vulnerable Cases” (“Urgent Cases” in UNHCR terminology)

According to the 2018 UNHCR Resettlement Handbook – Canada:

“Vulnerable Cases (“Urgent Cases” in UNHCR terminology) Canadian migration officers may determine a refugee to be vulnerable, meaning the person has a greater need of protection than other applicants because of particular circumstances that give rise to a heightened risk to their physical safety or well being. The vulnerability may result from circumstances such as lack of protection normally provided by a family or a medical condition. If the UNHCR flags a case as “urgent”, the migration office will give consideration to whether processing can be expedited due to the applicant’s vulnerability. If cases are assessed as vulnerable, they will be prioritized before regular refugee cases and will be eligible for expedited processing (from one to four months).”

Source: Section 7.1

<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/3c5e55594/unhcr-resettlement-handbook-country-chapter-canada.html>

According to the Government of Canada website (with contributions from IRCC):

“Vulnerable means, in respect of a Convention refugee or a person in similar circumstances, that the person has a greater need of protection than other applicants for protection abroad because of the person’s particular circumstances that give rise to a heightened risk to their physical safety or well-being (R138).

Source:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/refugee-protection/terms-definitions-related-refugee-protection.html#v>

According to the UNHCR-IDC’s Vulnerability Screening Tool Document:

“Refugees, asylum-seekers, trafficked persons, stateless persons, irregular migrants and other non-nationals without legal status, can experience a broad range of vulnerability factors. While vulnerability is best evaluated using a person-centred and holistic approach, certain vulnerability domains can be highlighted due to the widely recognised importance attached to them. While the tool draws attention to a series of domains and circumstances of particular concern, it is understood that these domains frequently overlap. While some people will be identified with several vulnerability factors, others will not be identified with pre-determined categories of vulnerability yet still be at serious risk of harm. Everyone’s circumstances are multifaceted and dynamic. Hence the following framework is offered as a guide and is not to be taken as a rigid or exhaustive measurement of vulnerability. Those conducting interviews need to be attentive to whatever individual circumstances may suggest a need for intervention and care.”

Vulnerability domains chart – Page 7 of the UNHCR-IDC Vulnerability Screening Tool Document

Vulnerability domains:

Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unaccompanied or separated child • Child accompanied by parent/s, other family members or guardians
Sex, Gender, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnant woman or girl, or nursing mother • Sole or primary carer/s (of dependant child, elderly person or person with a disability) • Woman at risk of sexual or gender-based violence, or adult or child experiencing family violence, exploitation or abuse • Person at risk of violence due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (LGBTI: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex persons)
Health and Welfare Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical and mental health • Risk of suicide • Disability • Elderly person • Substance addiction • Destitution
Protection Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugee and asylum-seeker • Survivor of torture and trauma • Survivor of sexual or gender-based violence or other violent crime • Victim of trafficking in persons • Stateless person
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The interviewer has an opportunity to identify vulnerability factors not captured by the previous domains

Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/detention/57fe30b14/unhcr-idc-vulnerability-screening-tool-identifying-addressing-vulnerability.html>