

Individual and Group Vulnerability

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The term vulnerability describes both a universal aspect of the human condition, and a peculiar condition of individuals or groups.

On the one hand, human vulnerability arises from the vulnerability of the body, by which we are creatures exposed to environmental risks, illness and accidents. On the other hand, the vulnerability of the body also concerns the co-existential, social nature of human life, and the constant potential for dependency.

In this perspective, group identities may produce a particular form of group vulnerability. This is why the European Court of Human Rights introduced the concepts of particularly vulnerable groups: individuals who belong to them need specific forms of protection, because these groups are more vulnerable than others, due to societal, political and institutional circumstances. The main indicator of such a particular vulnerability is the harm produced by historical forms of prejudice, by misrecognition, and by patterns of cultural devaluation that produce specific forms of discrimination, social disadvantage, or material deprivation.

The purpose of the workshop is to analyse the meaning and the legal/institutional value of this concept, also with reference to the condition of ethno-cultural and religious minorities. Possible questions include:

- A clarification of the concept, its heuristic capacity and political and practical relevancy.
- The interplay between individual and group vulnerability.
- The relationship between vulnerability and other dimensions, such as victimization, insecurity, and risk.
- The role institutions can play in dealing with individual and group vulnerability, by providing goods, economic resources, and other material assets.
- The role of the broader society, in particular the networks of relationships people live in, and from which they receive support: families, associations, trade unions, religious groups, and so on.

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