

Seminar 2 – Wednesday, March 4, 2026 (2-5 pm)

Discretion, Accommodation, and Uncertainty: Navigating Vulnerability in Refugee Determination – Lessons from the Canadian Experience

Drawing on findings from the VULNER project, an international research initiative funded by a European Union Horizon 2020 grant (2020-2024) involving several countries including Canada, this seminar uses the Canadian case to explore challenges that are common to many asylum systems: How should migrant vulnerability be defined, assessed, and what role should it play in protection decisions? The Canadian component of the project involved extensive desk research and over 100 interviews with government officials, legal practitioners, and migrants across multiple provinces. The seminar highlights key inconsistencies in how vulnerability is operationalized in the Canadian protection system and examines two recurring challenges: the difficulty of accessing and relying on psychological assessments, and the wide margin of discretion left to decision-makers. These findings offer valuable points of comparison for European asylum systems grappling with similar questions.