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icon presenting comprehensive approaches to identify and support children and applicants with special
Several countries took a more comprehensive approach to identify and address specific needs of asylum applicants. In 2021, they developed national strategies and coordination mechanisms, improved vulnerability assessment processes and continued to provide a wide range of specialised training.

For example, the French Ministry of the Interior published in May 2021 an action plan to strengthen support for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection with vulnerabilities.[1347]The plan lists ten action points for improved identification and support for special needs, in particular for female victims of all types of violence (past or present) *(see Section 5.2)*, persons with health or mental issues, those with reduced mobility *(see Section 5.3)* , LGBTIQ applicants *(see Section 5.4),* victims of human trafficking *(see Section 5.5)*, and unaccompanied children *(see Section 5.6)*. The action points include establishing adapted reception places, launching dedicated information campaigns and organising specialised training for all stakeholders involved in detection and support – especially for OFII's vulnerability coordinators and employees at the single registration desks (SPADA), as well as social workers in housing facilities.

A working group was established in Italy to better coordinate mechanisms for the identification of and support to applicants with special needs and vulnerabilities. The group, which includes representatives of ministries, the European Commission, the EUAA, Frontex, Europol, UNHCR, the IOM, UNICEF, Médecins sans Frontières, the Red Cross and the SAI network, will develop targeted guidelines.
In Ireland, the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) piloted a vulnerability assessment process throughout 2021. The pilot finished at the end of 2021, and the results are being assessed to develop long-term procedures.[1348]

Amendments to the Maltese Reception Regulations provided a more comprehensive transposition of the provisions in the recast Reception Directive on material reception conditions for vulnerable applicants.1349 In addition, the Special Needs and Vulnerability Assessment (SNVA) Adult Referral Assessment Procedure was updated by AWAS. This procedure ensures the early identification of people with special needs (vulnerable adults) in initial reception centres. The overall objective is to identify vulnerable applicants and their special needs at any stage of the asylum procedure and to ensure timely access to appropriate services in terms of special reception needs, as well as special procedural guarantees.

The AIDA report for Cyprus welcomed that the identification system was improved in the first half of 2021 but noted that challenges started to resurface when the number of applicants increased later in the year. In addition, the report observed that the system primarily focuses on special reception needs, and less attention is paid to special procedural needs. Another weakness identified was the timing of the vulnerability assessment process, which is typically done 2 months after an applicant's arrival to the country, potentially leaving time-sensitive special needs unattended.1350
The Slovak Ministry of the Interior's Migration Office updated its internal instrument which is used for the identification of special needs and vulnerabilities, by finetuning the procedures for completing an applicant's social file and by strengthening cooperation among the various actors involved. Similarly, new standard operating procedures were developed in Romania on the identification, needs assessment, assistance and referral of vulnerable persons.
The Swedish Migration Agency updated its legal position on assessing the asylum applications of persons claiming to belong to a particularly vulnerable group in their country of origin.1351

The Finnish Non-Discrimination Ombudsperson published the first observations on an AMIF-funded project which was launched in 2020. The project sought to improve the identification of and support to former applicants with special needs who were being returned to their country of origin and to enhance monitoring of the implementation of a return. The Ombudsperson suggested to extend the time limits to allow for a thorough vulnerability assessment.1352

In cooperation with UNHCR and the IOM, the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum (BFA) organised regularly training sessions for its staff on identifying special needs and vulnerabilities, interviewing applicants with special needs, and tailoring approaches to specific groups, such as women, children, LGBTIQ applicants and survivors of trafficking in the asylum procedure.

Training continued for the staff of the State Agency for Refugees in Bulgaria, which was organised by civil society organisations and the IOM on identifying and supporting survivors of human trafficking, working with children accommodated in safe zones and preventing gender-based violence.

In Italy, training focused on interviewing children, applicants with special needs and cases based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

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