



KEY THEME¹

Immigration

Health and immigration

(Last updated: 28/02/2026)

Introduction

Where healthcare needs have been invoked as a shield against expulsion, the Court has considered that this may, in certain circumstances, engage Article 3 of the Convention.

A violation of Article 14 of the Convention, taken in conjunction with Article 8, might also arise when a country refuses to deliver a residence permit on account of an applicant's medical condition (*Kiyutin v. Russia*, 2011).

Principles drawn from the current case-law

Expulsion of seriously ill persons:

- In *Paposhvili v. Belgium* [GC], 2016, the Court reviewed and clarified the applicable principles concerning the expulsion of seriously ill aliens under Article 3. Other than the imminent death situation in *D. v. the United Kingdom*, 1997, the later judgment *N. v. the United Kingdom* [GC], 2008, referred to “other very exceptional cases” which could give rise to an issue under Article 3 in such contexts.
- In *Paposhvili v. Belgium* [GC], 2016, the Court indicated how “other very exceptional cases” was to be understood, referring to situations involving the removal of a seriously ill person in which:
 - (i) substantial grounds have been shown for believing that he or she, although not at imminent risk of dying, would face a real risk;
 - (ii) on account of the absence of appropriate treatment in the receiving country or the lack of access to such treatment;
 - (iii) of being exposed to a serious, rapid and irreversible decline in his or her state of health resulting in intense suffering or to a significant reduction in life expectancy.

These situations correspond to a high threshold for the application of Article 3 in cases concerning the removal of aliens suffering from serious illness (*ibid.*, § 183).

- The obligation under Article 3 is fulfilled primarily through appropriate domestic procedures allowing for an examination of the applicants' fears to be carried out, as well as an assessment of the risks they would face if removed to the receiving country (*ibid.*, §§ 184-185). In the context of those procedures:
 - (i) it is for the applicants to adduce evidence capable of demonstrating that there are substantial grounds for believing that, if the measure complained of were to be implemented, they would be exposed to a real risk of being subjected to treatment contrary to Article 3 (*ibid.*, § 186);

¹ Prepared by the Registry. It does not bind the Court.

Others v. Germany (dec.), 2004; *Ovdienko v. Finland* (dec.), 2005; *Karim v. Sweden* (dec.), 2006; *Al-Zawatia v. Sweden* (dec.), 2010, § 57).

- The same conclusions apply regarding applicants who had a record of previous suicide attempts (*Goncharova and Alekseytsev v. Sweden* (dec.), 2007; *A.A. v. Sweden* (dec.), 2008, § 71).

Refusal to deliver a residence permit because of medical condition:

- Determining an application for a residence permit based on an applicant's health status and on a predetermined classification of an entire group of vulnerable individuals as a threat to public health, and not preceded by an individualised judicial assessment of all the relevant facts, is discriminatory and breaches Article 14 taken in conjunction with Article 8 (*Kiyutin v. Russia*, 2011, § 74; *Novruk and Others v. Russia*, 2016, §§ 108 and 111-112).
- Persons living with HIV/AIDS are a vulnerable group with a history of prejudice and stigmatisation, and the State's margin of appreciation is narrower when it opts for measures that single out this group for differential treatment (*Kiyutin v. Russia*, 2011, § 64; *Novruk and Others v. Russia*, 2016, § 100).
- In the light of the overwhelming European and international consensus geared towards abolishing the outstanding restrictions on the entry, stay and residence of HIV-positive non-nationals, constituting a particularly vulnerable group, the respondent State has to advance compelling reasons or an objective justification for their differential treatment (*Kiyutin v. Russia*, 2011, § 65; *Novruk and Others v. Russia*, 2016, §§ 101 and 111).
- Travel restrictions are instrumental for the protection of public health against highly contagious diseases with a short incubation period which can be transmitted through casual contact or airborne particles, such as cholera, yellow fever, SARS and H5N1. However, excluding HIV-positive non-nationals from entry and/or residence in order to prevent HIV transmission is based on the assumption that they will engage in specific unsafe behaviour and that the national will also fail to protect himself or herself. It amounts to a generalisation which is not founded in fact and fails to take into account the individual situation (*Kiyutin v. Russia*, 2011, § 68; *Novruk and Others v. Russia*, 2016, § 105).
- The refusal to renew a long-term migrant's residence permit on formal procedural grounds, for failing to submit a medical certificate confirming the absence of HIV and other infectious diseases, may also breach Article 8 (*Khachatryan and Konovalova v. Russia*, 2021, §§ 27-30).

Detention of vulnerable individuals:

- Under Article 5 § 1, vulnerable migrants should have access to an assessment of their vulnerability and be informed about respective procedures (*Abdi Mahamud v. Malta*, 2016, §§ 134-135).
- The detention of vulnerable migrants will not be in conformity with Article 5 § 1 (f) if the aim pursued by detention can be achieved by other less coercive measures, requiring the domestic authorities to consider alternatives to detention in the light of the specific circumstances of the individual case (*Rahimi v. Greece*, 2011, § 109, concerning an unaccompanied foreign minor; *Yoh-Ekale Mwanje v. Belgium*, 2011, § 124, concerning a migrant at advanced stage of HIV infection).
- Lack of active steps and delays in conducting the vulnerability assessment may be a factor in raising serious doubts as to the authorities' good faith (*Abdi Mahamud v. Malta*, 2016, §§ 130 and 134).
- Immigration detention of vulnerable individuals with specific health needs can raise issues under Article 3, with particular attention being paid to the conditions of detention, its

duration, the person's particular vulnerabilities and the impact of the detention on him or her (*Yoh-Ekale Mwanje v. Belgium*, 2011, §§ 91-99; *Mahmundi and Others v. Greece*, 2012, §§ 64-74; *Aden Ahmed v. Malta*, 2013, §§ 91-100; *Abdi Mahamud v. Malta*, 2016, § 89).

- The detention of immigrant minors raises particular issues as children, whether accompanied or not, are extremely vulnerable and have specific needs (*S.F. and Others v. Bulgaria*, 2017, § 79). The extreme vulnerability of a child is a paramount consideration and takes precedence over the status as an illegal immigrant (*Mubilanzila Mayeke and Kaniki Mitunga v. Belgium*, 2006, § 55; *Muskhadzhiyeva and Others v. Belgium*, 2010, § 56).
- Children have specific needs that are related in particular to their age and lack of independence, but also to their asylum-seeker status. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child encourages States to take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking to obtain refugee status enjoys protection and humanitarian assistance, whether the child is alone or accompanied by his or her parents (*Abdullahi Elmi and Aweys Abubakar v. Malta*, 2016, § 103).
- The measure of placing a person, in immigration detention pending deportation, for several weeks, with other persons who could have posed a risk to his health in the absence of any relevant consideration to this effect, cannot be considered as a measure complying with basic sanitary requirements (*Feilazoo v. Malta*, 2021, § 92).

Reception conditions for asylum-seekers, including children:

- The reception conditions for children seeking asylum must be adapted to their age, to ensure that those conditions do not “create ... for them a situation of stress and anxiety, with particularly traumatic consequences” (*Tarakhel v. Switzerland* [GC], 2014, § 119).

Noteworthy examples

Expulsion of seriously ill persons:

- *N. v. the United Kingdom* [GC], 2008: concerning the expulsion of an HIV patient, not critically ill, to Uganda, where her access to appropriate medical treatment was uncertain (§§ 46-51; no violation of Article 3);
- *Paposhvili v. Belgium* [GC], 2016: concerning the proposed deportation of a person suffering from a life-threatening illness, a chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, to Georgia in face of doubts as to the availability of appropriate medical treatment there. In the absence of any assessment by the domestic authorities of the risk facing the applicant in the light of the information concerning his state of health and the existence of appropriate treatment in Georgia, the information available to those authorities was insufficient for them to conclude that the applicant, if deported, would not run a real and concrete risk of treatment contrary to Article 3 (§§ 194-206; violation of Article 3);
- *Savran v. Denmark* [GC], 2021: concerning the expulsion of a person with schizophrenia to his country of origin, Türkiye. While the worsening of his psychotic symptoms was likely to result in “aggressive behaviour” and “a significantly higher risk of offences against the person of others”, these effects could not be described as “resulting in intense suffering” for the applicant himself. In particular, no risk had been shown of the applicant harming himself (§§ 140-148; no violation of Article 3);
- *D. v. the United Kingdom*, 1997: concerning the proposed removal of an alien dying of AIDS to his country of origin (St Kitts), where he had no accommodation, family, moral or financial support and no access to adequate medical treatment (§§ 46-54; violation of Article 3).

Risk of suicide in the event of removal:

- *Dragan and Others v. Germany* (dec.), 2004; *Al-Zawatia v. Sweden*, 2010: concerning the decision to deport aliens whose state of health is of concern and who had made credible threats to commit suicide (*Ibid.*, §§ 57-58 ; inadmissible).

Refusal to deliver a residence permit because of medical condition:

- *Kiyutin v. Russia*, 2011: concerning the difference in treatment of a HIV-positive alien regarding his application for residence permit. The applicant belonged to a particularly vulnerable group, his exclusion had not been shown to have a reasonable and objective justification, and the contested legislative provisions did not make room for an individualised evaluation (§§ 67-74; violation of Article 14 taken in conjunction with Article 8).

Detention of vulnerable persons:

- *Muskhadzhiyeva and Others v. Belgium*, 2010: concerning the conditions of detention in a closed transit centre of four young children (seven months to seven years) with health problems, accompanied by their mother, for more than one month pending their removal (§§ 55-63; violation of Article 3);
- *Yoh-Ekale Mwanje v. Belgium*, 2011: concerning the authorities' failure to take, at an earlier stage, all the measures that could reasonably have been expected of them to protect the health of the detainee at an advanced stage of HIV infection and prevent a worsening of her condition (§§ 91-99; violation of Article 3), and the absence of link between the detention and the aim of securing her removal from the country (§§ 121-125; violation of Article 5 § 1 (f));
- *Kanagaratnam and Others v. Belgium*, 2011: concerning the authorities' exposure of alien minors, accompanied by their mother in detention in a closed centre, to feelings of anxiety and inferiority and, in full knowledge of the facts, at the risk of compromising their development (§ 68; violation of Article 3) as well as the children's placement in a closed centre designed for adult illegal aliens, in conditions ill-suited to their extreme vulnerability as minors (§§ 87-88; violation of Article 5 § 1);
- *Popov v. France*, 2012: concerning the conditions of detention of accompanied children for fifteen days, in an adult environment with a strong police presence, with no activities to keep them occupied, combined with their parents' distress, clearly ill-suited to their age (§§ 102-103; violation of Article 3);
- *Mahmundi and Others v. Greece*, 2012: concerning the poor conditions of detention for thirteen days of an eight months pregnant woman, pending deportation (§§ 64-74; violation of Article 3);
- *Aden Ahmed v. Malta*, 2013: concerning the poor conditions of detention of an alien with fragile health, for a period of fourteen and a half months (§§ 91-100; violation of Article 3);
- *Abdi Mahamud v. Malta*, 2016: concerning the poor conditions of detention of an alien in a vulnerable position as a result of her health (§§ 89-90; violation of Article 3) and several months of detention in such conditions as a result of delays in her vulnerability assessment (§§ 134-135; violation of Article 5 § 1);
- *A.B. and Others v. France*, 2016: concerning the constraints inherent in detention, particularly arduous for young children, together with the centre's conditions of organisation, had necessarily produced anxiety in the applicant's child (accompanied). The permissible short duration had been exceeded concerning the detention of a four-year-old child lasting for eighteen days in such conditions (§§ 113-115; violation of Article 3);

- *S.F. and Others v. Bulgaria*, 2017: concerning the very poor conditions of detention of accompanied minors during thirty-two to forty-one hours which had considerably affected them, both physically and psychologically, and must have had particularly nefarious effects on the youngest applicant who was one and a half years old (§§ 84-93; violation of Article 3);
- *H.A. and Others v. Greece*, 2019: concerning the detention of unaccompanied minors in various police stations could have caused them to feel isolated from the outside world, with potentially negative consequences for their physical and moral well-being (§ 168; violation of Article 3);
- *Moustahi v. France*, 2020: concerning the same conditions of detention of unaccompanied minors, of three and five years old, as those of the adults apprehended at the same time, in a short-term detention facility, on the premises of a police station, the children being separated from any member of their family, and no adult having been designated to look after them (§§ 66-67; violation of Article 3);
- *R.R. and Others v. Hungary*, 2021: concerning the living conditions in a transit zone exceeding the threshold of severity for repeat asylum-seeker unable to obtain sufficient food, a vulnerable pregnant woman and children, in light of the extended duration of confinement for nearly four months (§§ 58-65; violation of Article 3);
- *Feilazoo v. Malta*, 2021: concerning the exposure of applicant to health-risk through unnecessary placement with new arrivals in Covid-19 quarantine (§ 92; violation of Article 3);
- *Nikoghosyan and Others v. Poland*, 2022: concerning the automatic placement of a family of adult and child asylum-seekers in six-month-long detention without thorough and individualised assessment of particular situation and needs. The fact that minors had been being detained had called for greater speed and diligence on the part of the authorities (§§ 66-89; violation of Article 5 § 1 (f));
- *N.B. and Others v. France*, 2022: concerning the fourteen days' administrative detention pending removal of an eight-year-old foreign national accompanied by his parents, in an unsuitable centre (§§ 47-53; violation of Article 3);
- *H.M. and Others v. Hungary*, 2022: concerning the living conditions for over four months of a vulnerable pregnant woman and her children exceeding threshold of severity (§§ 17-19; violation of Article 3);
- *Darboe and Camara v. Italy*, 2022: concerning the placement of minor in adult reception centre in inadequate conditions for more than four months and subjected to age-assessment procedure not benefitting from minimum procedural guarantees in breach of Article 8 (§§ 174-183; violation of Article 3);
- *Hafeez v. the United Kingdom* (dec.), 2023: concerning the risk of inadequate conditions of detention due to Covid-19 pandemic in case of extradition of a sixty-year-old man with health issues to the United States of America (§ 68; inadmissible).

Reception conditions for asylum-seekers with health issues following Dublin transfers:

- *A.S. v. Switzerland*, 2015 (§§ 35-38); *A.M. v. Switzerland* (dec.), 2015 (§§ 20-21); *Ali and Others v. Switzerland and Italy* (dec.), 2016 (§§ 36-37): concerning the transfer from Switzerland to Italy of adult asylum seekers, including those requiring medical treatment but who were not critically ill (no violation of Article 3 / inadmissible);
- *A.T.H. v. the Netherlands* (dec.), 2015: concerning the transfer from the Netherlands to Italy of an asylum-seeking single mother, HIV-positive, with a minor child (§§ 35-42; inadmissible);

- *Ojei v. the Netherlands* (dec.), 2017: concerning the transfer from the Netherlands to Malta of an asylum-seeking adult receiving psychiatric treatment (§§ 33-44; inadmissible).

Applicants in poor mental health:

- *Tehrani and Others v. Turkey*, 2010: concerning the doubts about the applicant's mental state, in a case where allegations concerned the possible risk of death or ill-treatment in case of deportation to Iran (§§ 53-57; request to withdraw application dismissed);
- *Azzaqui v. the Netherlands*, 2023: concerning the revocation of a residence permit of a long-term settled migrant with a mental illness and the imposition of ten-year entry ban on account of violent offences, despite his progress after years of confinement in a custodial clinic (§§ 42-63; violation of Article 8).

Recap of general principles

- For a recapitulation of general principles concerning the expulsion of seriously ill persons, see *Paposhvili v. Belgium* [GC], 2016 (§§ 172-193); and *Savran v. Denmark* [GC], 2021 (§§ 124-139).
- For a recapitulation of general principles concerning the refusal to deliver a residence permit because of a medical condition, see *Kiyutin v. Russia*, 2011 (§§ 64-74); and *Novruk and Others v. Russia*, 2016 (§§ 100-112).

Further references

Case-law guides:

- [Guide on Article 5 – Right to liberty and security](#)
- [Guide on Article 8 – Right to respect for private and family life](#)
- [Guide on Immigration](#)

Other:

Joint publications by the ECHR and FRA:

- [Handbook on European law relating to asylum, borders and immigration](#), 2020 edition

International sources:

United Nations

- [Article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child \(1989\)](#)

Council of Europe

- Article 11 of the [Recommendation Rec\(2003\)5](#) of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Measures of Detention of Asylum Seekers of 16 April 2003
- Articles 4 and 9.2.7. of the [Resolution 1707 \(2010\)](#) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the detention of asylum seekers and irregular migrants in Europe of 28 January 2010
- Articles 9.2., 10.1.2. and 12 of the [Recommendation 1985 \(2011\)](#) of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on undocumented migrant children in an irregular situation: a real cause for concern of 7 October 2011

European Union

- Article 29 of the [Council Directive 2004/83/EC](#) of 29 April 2004 on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted
- Articles 5, 11.1., 13, 17.2. to 17.4., 19, 20.5. and 23.4. of the [Directive 2013/33/EU](#) of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast)

KEY CASE-LAW REFERENCES

Leading case(s):

- *N. v. the United Kingdom* [GC], no. 26565/05, ECHR 2008 (no violation of Article 3);
- *Kiyutin v. Russia*, no. 2700/10, ECHR 2011 (violation of Article 14 in conjunction with Article 8);
- *Tarakhel v. Switzerland* [GC], no. 29217/12, ECHR 2014 (extracts) (violation of Article 3);
- *Novruk and Others v. Russia*, nos. 31039/11 and 4 others, 15 March 2016 (violation of Article 14 in conjunction with Article 8);
- *Paposhvili v. Belgium* [GC], no. 41738/10, ECHR 2016 (violation of Article 3; violation of Article 8);
- *Savran v. Denmark* [GC], no. 57467/15, 7 December 2021 (no violation of Article 3; violation of Article 8).

Other cases:

- *D. v. the United Kingdom*, no. 30240/96, Reports 1997-III (violation of Article 3);
- *Dragan and Others v. Germany* (dec.), no. 33743/03, 7 October 2004 (Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *Ovdienko v. Finland* (dec.), no. 1383/04, 31 May 2005 (Article 3 inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *Karim v. Sweden* (dec.), no. 24171/05, 4 July 2006 (Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *Mubilanzila Mayeke and Kaniki Mitunga v. Belgium*, no. 13178/03, ECHR 2006-XI (violation of Article 3);
- *Goncharova and Alekseytsev v. Sweden* (dec.), no. 31246/06, 3 May 2007 (Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *A.A. v. Sweden* (dec.), no. 8594/04, 2 September 2008 (Article 2; Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *Muskhadzhiyeva and Others v. Belgium*, no. 41442/07, 19 January 2010 (violation of Article 3);
- *Tehrani and Others v. Turkey*, nos. 32940/08, 41626/08 and 43616/08, 13 April 2010 (request to withdraw application dismissed);
- *Al-Zawatia v. Sweden* (dec.), no. 50068/08, 22 June 2010 (Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *Rahimi v. Greece*, no. 8687/08, 5 April 2011 (violation of Article 5 § 1 (f));
- *Kanagaratnam and Others v. Belgium*, no. 15297/09, 13 December 2011 (violation of Article 3; violation of Article 5 § 1);
- *Yoh-Ekale Mwanje v. Belgium*, no. 10486/10, 20 December 2011 (violation of Article 3; violation of Article 5 § 1 (f));
- *Popov v. France*, nos. 39472/07 and 39474/07, 19 January 2012 (violation of Article 3);
- *Mahmundi and Others v. Greece*, no. 14902/10, 31 July 2012 (violation of Article 3);
- *Aden Ahmed v. Malta*, no. 55352/12, 23 July 2013 (violation of Article 3);
- *A.S. v. Switzerland*, no. 39350/13, 30 June 2015 (no violation of Article 3);
- *A.M. v. Switzerland* (dec.), no. 37466/13, 3 November 2015 (Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);

- *A.T.H. v. the Netherlands* (dec.), no. 54000/11, 17 November 2015 (Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *Abdi Mahamud v. Malta*, no. 56796/13, 3 May 2016 (violation of Article 3; violation of Article 5 § 1 (f) in respect of the first period of the applicant’s detention; violation of Article 5 § 1 (f) in respect of the second period of the applicant’s detention);
- *A.B. and Others v. France*, no. 11593/12, 12 July 2016 (violation of Article 3);
- *Ali and Others v. Switzerland and Italy* (dec.), no. 30474/14, 4 October 2016 (Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *Abdullahi Elmi and Aweys Abubakar v. Malta*, nos. 25794/13 and 28151/13, 22 November 2016 (violation of Article 3);
- *Ojei v. the Netherlands* (dec.), no. 64724/10, 14 March 2017 (Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *S.F. and Others v. Bulgaria*, no. 8138/16, 7 December 2017 (violation of Article 3);
- *H.A. and Others v. Greece*, no. 19951/16, 28 February 2019 (violation of Article 3);
- *Moustahi v. France*, no. 9347/14, 25 June 2020 (violation of Article 3);
- *R.R. and Others v. Hungary*, no. 36037/17, 2 March 2021 (violation of Article 3);
- *Feilazoo v. Malta*, no. 6865/19, 11 March 2021 (violation of Article 3);
- *Khachatryan and Konovalova v. Russia*, no. 28895/14, 13 July 2021 (violation of Article 8);
- *Nikoghosyan and Others v. Poland*, no. 14743/17, 3 March 2022 (violation of Article 5 § 1 (f));
- *N.B. and Others v. France*, no. 49775/20, 31 March 2022 (violation of Article 3);
- *H.M. and Others v. Hungary*, no. 38967/17, 2 June 2022 (violation of Article 3);
- *Darboe and Camara v. Italy*, no. 5797/17, 21 July 2022 (violation of Article 3);
- *Hafeez v. the United Kingdom* (dec.), no. 14198/20, 28 March 2023 (Article 3: inadmissible – manifestly ill-founded);
- *Azzaqui v. the Netherlands*, no. 8757/20, 30 May 2023 (violation of Article 8).