Vulnerability
Conceptual brief

Vulnerability is defined by susceptibility, exposure and resilience. From many points of view, Vulnerability is better defined as a dynamic process, rather than a static condition.

Some are especially vulnerable. Children come first to mind but, from a public health perspective, one should be quick to add the elderly, the pregnant women, the disabled and the chronically ill at least.

More in general, in situations of distress, especially vulnerable are all those who haven't the means to cope with fast changes.

All institutions risk reducing reality to what is covered by their mandate, or to what they are able to deal with. In WHO's view, its mandate gives it a comparative advantage - as well as a responsibility - in looking at Vulnerability: health is for all, not only for selected groups.

It may be easier to formulate policies and strategies for determinate, well defined sections of a population, but one should not lose sight of at least two facts. First of all, sociological denominations risk to be self-fulfulling: defining someone as “vulnerable” - and thus giving him/her a position along a culturally-determined scale of value- can, in itself, engender or increase Vulnerability. Second, what we call Vulnerability can also be seen as a progressive "loss of well-being, i.e. health": first as psychological and economic insecurity then as increasing physical suffering. All along these processes there are points where public health action can complement the individual's and the community's caring and coping strategies.