

COVID-19 vaccination for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection

Background

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, EASO made efforts to address information needs on the impact of the pandemic on international protection procedures. In this context, EASO published three reports on “COVID-19 emergency measures in asylum and reception systems” ([June](#), [July](#), [December](#) 2020), analysing the impact on relevant procedures in EU+ countries, the variations and similarities in national efforts to address the situation and the interim solutions which were put in place. Two “EASO Special Reports on Asylum Trends and COVID-19” ([May](#), [June](#) 2020) focused on data analysis.

EU+ countries have rolled out their strategies on the COVID-19 vaccination. The ECDC has proposed [key aspects](#) and conceptual approaches regarding the introduction and prioritisation of vaccinations.¹ In this context reference is made to socially vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees.

This Situational Update focuses on national strategies and policies in EU+ countries regarding the COVID-19 vaccination for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. Input was provided by Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland.

Highlights

- **Applicants for international protection may be prioritized due to the collective reception setting**
- **In all countries, vaccination is provided**
 - ✓ free of charge
 - ✓ on a voluntary basis
- **6 EU+ countries have launched targeted information campaigns for asylum seekers**
- **2 EU+ countries are realizing vaccinations in reception centers**
- **Beneficiaries for international protection fall within the general population priorities**

¹ ECDC, [Technical Report: Key aspects regarding the introduction and prioritisation of COVID-19 vaccination in the EU/EEA and the UK](#), 26 October 2020.

Main findings



Specific policy/strategy for the vaccination of applicants for international protection

In principle, the vaccination of asylum seekers follows the general priorities set for the population in EU+ countries (mainly by age groups, medical conditions, etc.) based on a risk-based strategy. In some countries, due to the collective nature of reception establishments, asylum seekers are considered as a prioritised group.

Indicatively, in Switzerland, asylum seekers in collective reception are defined as priority Group 4 (persons living and working in congregate facilities, such as psychiatric hospitals or reception centres), due to the increased risk of infection and outbreaks in congregate settings.

Following the [Regulation](#) on (3rd) amendment to Regulation No 221/2001, on vaccinations in Iceland, asylum seekers in collective settings may fall under the ninth priority group as “individuals who are in a vulnerable position due to social and economic circumstances and are at particular risk”.

Similarly, in Ireland, Latvia and Portugal, applicants residing in collective reception/accommodation centres are prioritised.

In the Netherlands, applicants for international protection are not prioritised. However, residents of collective accommodation centers may be vaccinated as a group for logistical purposes in order to avoid the scheduling of individual appointments.



Vaccinations ongoing in the reception centres

Switzerland and Portugal are the only countries providing vaccinations in reception centres. In the latter, upon arrival, applicants for international protection are registered in the National Health Service and contacted for the 'National vaccination plan'. Since 10 March 2021, those residing in the reception centre are vaccinated for COVID-19.

Greece [announced](#) that the National Public Health Organization (NPHO) will vaccinate residents in 34 reception centers, 6 Reception and Identification Centers and 8 pre-removal centers. However, currently, asylum seekers are expected to follow the priorities for the general population by registering with a health insurance number (AMKA–PAAYPA).

Relevant planning is yet to be determined in Belgium, Ireland and Netherlands. In the latter case, the implementation of vaccinations in asylum centers will depend on the type of the vaccine and relevant practical considerations (dose administered by a general practitioner).



Obligatory vaccination of applicants for international protection

All EU+ countries have confirmed that the vaccination of applicants for international protection is implemented on voluntary basis. No relevant obligation is envisaged.



Timeline

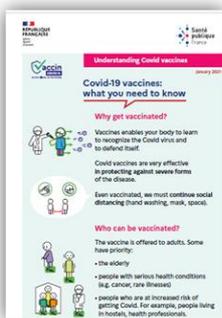
No concrete timeline is defined in the responding countries, except for Switzerland. In the latter, all applicants are offered a voluntary medical check-up, which includes standard vaccination counselling. If the applicant opts for vaccination (including COVID-19), an appointment for the first dose is scheduled at the earliest possible date, along with the follow-up appointment for the second dose four weeks later. If in doubt, applicants may schedule an appointment for additional counselling or vaccination at a later date.



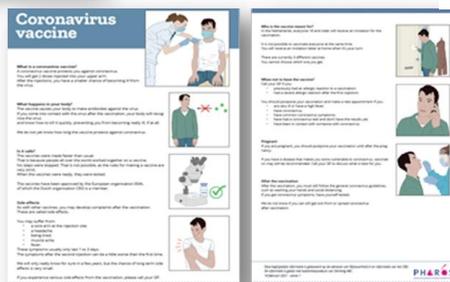
Information campaigns

Many EU+ countries have launched information campaigns for the vaccination of the general population. Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, and Switzerland have also translated the information material in various languages and/or developed specific communication tools for asylum seekers.

In this context, countries inform on the relevant process online through dedicated websites ([Belgium](#), [Finland](#), [Portugal](#) and [Switzerland](#)), and printed material such as posters and flyers (Belgium, France, Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland) in multiple languages.



Flyers in France



Information shared in the
Central Agency for the
Reception of Asylum Seekers
(Netherlands)



Office for Foreigners in Poland
launched an information campaign

Similarly, the Secretariat for Migration in Switzerland, in cooperation with the Federal Office of Public Health and the Conference of the Cantonal Directors of Social Affairs, published materials specifically designed for applicants residing in federal and cantonal reception centres (currently available in 12 languages). Materials are also accessible via QR codes.



In addition, a television campaign will be broadcasting in five instalments during the first half of the year to raise awareness. The first clip is [available in 16 languages](#).



YouTube video in Switzerland



YouTube video in Ireland

In Ireland, applicants residing in IPAS Reception/Accommodation Centres have been notified via the 'IPAS Residents Newsletter' that a separate vaccination programme will be implemented. Further, information was made available in accommodation centers through videos produced in 36 languages.

Denmark will share information to asylum seekers on the practical details on the vaccination roll out of the asylum seekers is confirmed.

Materials on Frequently asked questions are also made available in Ireland and the Netherlands.



Cost

Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland have confirmed that the vaccination of applicants for international protection will be offered free of charge as the cost is covered by state funds.



Beneficiaries of international protection as a special category

In all responding countries, no specific provision is made to beneficiaries of international protection. They are included in the general population priorities set by each country (age groups, vulnerabilities, medical situation etc.).

Methodological note

Information is based on input provided by the EASO Query System through the EASO Policy Survey (PCYS.2021.001) on COVID-19 Vaccination for applicants and beneficiaries of protection, launched in March 2021.

Out of the 22 EU+ countries that provided input, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland agreed to publicly share their contribution.

EASO expresses gratitude to asylum and reception authorities in EU+ countries for the continued cooperation and information exchange. The contributions of national asylum experts are invaluable in helping EASO maintain an accurate and up-to-date overview of asylum-related developments in Europe and beyond.