

Follow-up: COVID-19 vaccination for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection

Background

In March 2021, EASO issued a Situational Update on "[COVID-19 vaccination for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection](#)". The Situational Update highlighted that:

- In all responding countries,¹ COVID-19 vaccinations are provided free of charge and on a voluntary basis;
- Applicants for international protection may be prioritised due to the collective reception setting;
- Vaccinations will take place in the accommodation structures in 6 EU+ countries;
- 6 EU+ countries have launched targeted information campaigns for asylum seekers; and
- Beneficiaries for international protection fall within the general population.

The current Situational Update aims to provide an update on the policies and practices which were reported on in the first issue. A follow-up questionnaire was circulated to EU+ countries and input was received from Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland.

Highlights

- **International organisations call for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for asylum seekers and refugees.**
- **In all countries, vaccinations are provided to applicants/beneficiaries for international protection**
 - ✓ free of charge
 - ✓ on a voluntary basis.
- **More EU+ countries plan to provide vaccinations directly in reception centres.**
- **EU+ countries are managing the implications on Dublin transfers and secondary movements.**

¹ 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.

Main findings



International response on the vaccination of applicants for international protection

International organisations have called for equitable access to vaccines and the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees in national vaccination plans.

UNHCR has noted that 153 countries worldwide have adopted vaccination strategies that include refugees. On World Health Day (7 April 2021), UNHCR repeated the need for international action and solidarity to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccinations for all, including for refugees and other forcibly displaced and stateless people in line with the principles of the [COVAX initiative](#), which is a global effort to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines reach those with the greatest need.²

The IOM has also called on countries to include all migrants present in their territories in national COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans³ – regardless of their legal immigration status – as the success of the national strategy lies on the equitable distribution of vaccines to all people.^{4, 5}

Considering that the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic may endanger the international peace and security, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2565 (26 February 2021),⁶ stressing that equitable access to safe, efficacious and affordable COVID-19 vaccines is essential to end the pandemic. The Security Council urged governments to include in their national COVID-19 vaccination plans people who are at a higher risk of developing severe COVID-19 symptoms and the most vulnerable, including refugees, internally displaced people, stateless people, migrants, persons with disabilities and detained persons.

Similar concerns on equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for all migrants were raised by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly⁷ and human right bodies, such as the UN Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW), the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and regional human rights experts, including the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees of the Council of Europe (SRSR).⁸

² UNHCR, Press Release: [UNHCR calls for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for refugees](#), 7 April 2021

³ IOM, [Ensuring Migrants' Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccines](#).

⁴ 'The pandemic has shown us that nobody is safe till everyone is safe'. IOM Director General, Antonio Vitorino, 18 December 2020. IOM, [COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #67: Migrants' access to vaccines](#)

⁵ See also IOM, Press Release: [IOM and UNHCR Chiefs Stress that COVID-19 Underlines the Urgent Need for Universal Health Coverage](#), 11 December 2020

⁶ [S/RES/2565\(2021\)](#)

⁷ PACE, [Resolution 2340 \(2020\) on Humanitarian consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for migrants and refugees](#), 13 October 2020

⁸ [Joint Guidance Note on Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccines for All Migrants](#), 8 March 2021.



Vaccination strategies for asylum seekers

In the majority of countries, the vaccination of asylum seekers follows the priorities which have been defined for the general population, according to age groups, medical conditions, etc. As such, applicants of international protection may register for the vaccine under the same rules and conditions as the rest of the population.

Belgium has prioritised people residing in collective structures. Their vaccination is provisionally scheduled for May-June 2021 within the reception and accommodation centres under the direction of the centres' medical services. During this phase, asylum seekers in individual shelters will be able to receive the vaccine in the vaccination centres.

In Portugal, asylum seekers residing in collective accommodation facilities are also prioritised. In particular, applicants and beneficiaries of international protection accommodated in CPR shelters and minors in the Shelter Centre for Refugee Children (CACR) of the CPR are considered a priority group for vaccination purposes, based on the Directorate-General for Health Standard.

The vaccination procedures for applicants residing in IPAS reception/accommodation centres are still being developed in Ireland. Similarly, in Romania, people residing in accommodation centres for asylum seekers managed by the General Inspectorate for Immigration are prioritised under Stage III ([General population](#)).

In Portugal and Romania, vaccinations will be given in reception centres.



Information campaigns

EU+ countries, including Belgium, Portugal and Romania, have launched information campaigns on COVID-19 vaccinations and have developed specific communication tools for asylum seekers.⁹ Recently, Fedasil published information about the COVID-19 vaccine for asylum seekers on the website '[Fedasil info](#)', which is available (within Belgium) in 14 languages, 10 of which have an audio version. Similarly, Portugal shared information material on the vaccination [online](#).



Practical arrangements

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

⁹ See more on information and samples provided by EASO, [Situational Update on national strategies and policies in EU+ countries regarding the COVID-19 vaccination for applicants and beneficiaries of international protection](#), Issue No 1.



Implications for Dublin transfers

Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia reported that asylum seekers subject to a transfer to the responsible Member State under the Dublin III Regulation are currently not vaccinated prior to implementing the transfer. Accordingly, no delays in transfers are envisaged due to the administration of any vaccine to applicants under Dublin procedure.

Switzerland reported that no delays in Dublin transfers are anticipated as people who are expected to leave will be administered the first dose 4 weeks ahead of the expected or scheduled departure date. In addition, all incoming Dublin transferees arriving at a Federal Asylum Centre are routinely offered a voluntary medical check-up within 3 working days of entry, which includes counselling on vaccinations and the possibility to be vaccinated.



Implications for secondary movements

Applicants coming from another Member State and not yet vaccinated fall within the general eligibility rules and procedures. Romania and Switzerland reported that all applicants will be informed upon arrival about the possibility of receiving the vaccination.

In Switzerland, a strategy has been developed for applicants who received the first dose in another country but arrived in Switzerland before the administration of the second dose. In this case, the Swiss Federal Vaccination Commission (EKIF/CFV), in collaboration with the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH), issued recommendations calling for a maximum interval of 6 weeks between the first and second dose. As a result, if an applicant arrives:

- Within 6 weeks of the administration of the first dose of a vaccine which is authorised and available in Switzerland, they can receive the second dose.
- After 6 weeks of receiving the first dose or having received a first dose of a vaccine which is not available in Switzerland, a benefit/risk analysis will be conducted by a medical professional and a new vaccination schedule can be proposed to the applicant.



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 schedule set by each country for the general population according to age groups, vulnerabilities, medical conditions, etc.

Methodological note

Information is based on input provided by the EASO Query System through the EASO Policy Survey (PCYS.2021.002) on “COVID-19 vaccination for applicants and beneficiaries of protection”, launched in April 2021. Out of the 14 EU+ countries that provided input, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland agreed to publicly share their contribution.

Additionally, Belgium and Portugal provided updated input to the first query on vaccinations, PCYS.2021.001.

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.

