Access to COVID-19 vaccines by undocumented migrants: National strategies and approaches

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To be effective, CBD-19 vaccination plans must include migrants. As the world prepares for one of the largest vaccination efforts in history, we’re confronted with a critical challenge. The need to include approaches in our COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination plan for migrants and refugees is not just a moral imperative, but also crucial for achieving herd immunity. It’s essential that all countries prioritize the inclusion of migrants in their vaccination strategies, ensuring equal access to vaccines for all, regardless of immigration status.
Where are undocumented people mentioned in the vaccination strategies?

Explicitly **include** undocumented people

Explicitly **exclude** undocumented people
European countries that include undocumented people in their COVID-19 vaccine strategy*

- Belgium
- France
- Ireland
- Italy
- The Netherlands
- Portugal
- Spain
- United Kingdom

*Not a comprehensive list. Based on PICUM media monitoring and reports from national-level NGOs.
Ireland

“The HSE does not report undocumented migrants to immigration authorities. It is important that undocumented migrants are encouraged and facilitated to take-up the Covid-19 vaccine.”

- Stephen Donnelly, Minister of Health, 20 January 2021-
France

France announced it will not be making a distinction based on citizenship regarding access to the vaccines.

« À compter du 28 janvier 2020, toute personne n’ayant pas la nationalité française et quelque soit sa situation pourra se faire vacciner en centre de vaccination, même si elle ne dispose pas d’une carte vitale. »

- Official FAQ page from the French government -
Regional health minister Alain Maron said:

"A lot of undocumented people live in Brussels. It's out of question to exclude them from the COVID-19 vaccination process. It's a matter of public health."
The Netherlands

The Dutch strategy explicitly mentions undocumented people as a group to be vaccinated.

But Dutch civil society says that so far, no concrete steps have been taken to practically implement this decision.
Italy

*Under the Vaccines Plan, everyone present in Italy, with or without residence permit, will be vaccinated.*

Previously, Italian commissioner for the COVID-19 crisis said in a TV program that undocumented people would be excluded.
Spain

Under the national vaccine plan, undocumented people residing in Spain should have access to COVID-19 vaccines in the same way and according to the same criteria foreseen for the whole population – most likely as “people in a vulnerable socioeconomic situation” or as essential workers.

There are concerns about discrepancies among regions, which are responsible for implementation, and vaccination of people in detention centres, where there are no unified COVID-19 protocols.
Poland has explicitly limited the access to the COVID-19 vaccinations to every person who resides regularly in the country. Only foreigners with an official right to stay will be given access to a vaccine, not undocumented people.
Highlights: Promising practices

- Undocumented migrants explicitly or implicitly included in vaccine strategies

- Instructions from governments and health authorities about how to ensure undocumented people get COVID-related care

- Commitment that personal data will not be shared with immigration authorities or otherwise used for purposes not related to public health

- Limited documentation required

- NGOs actively involved by governments in the definition of strategies

- Multi-lingual communication and outreach and campaigns to inform migrant communities about their right to get vaccine and how to do so
Highlights: Main challenges

• Administrative barriers (registration process, need for social security number or health card)

• Lack of guarantees about the safeguarding of data protection and privacy, and related fears about immigration consequences of data sharing

• Lack of accessible and reliable information about rights and how to get vaccinated

• Unclear policies and procedures

• Lack of consistent implementation between regions

• Necessity of two doses for most vaccines
If you want to be smart on public health, you do not exclude anyone. Public health knows no borders and viruses don’t carry passports.

— Michele LeVoy
PICUM
Thank you

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