

Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights implications

National vaccine deployment

Latvia

5 May 2021

Contractor: Latvian Centre for Human Rights

DISCLAIMER: This document was commissioned under contract as background material for comparative analysis by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) for the project 'Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights implications'. The information and views contained in the document do not necessarily reflect the views or the official position of the FRA. The document is made publicly available for transparency and information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or legal opinion.

Table of contents

1	National vaccine deployment – planning and overview of priority groups	3
2	Vaccination rollout – communication, targeted outreach, registration, and administration of vaccinations	5
2.1	Channels, means and measures to inform about the national vaccination plan.....	6
2.2	What are the (pre-) registration channels for vaccination put in place? ..	7
2.3	How are the vaccinations administered?	7
3	Challenges and promising practices.....	8
3.1	Challenges.....	8
3.2	Promising practices	10

1 National vaccine deployment – planning and overview of priority groups

Please provide the title and hyperlink of the national vaccine deployment plan/s in EN and the national language/s and indicate the date of publication of the plan/s including any updates.

Preliminary [Vaccination plan](#) (*Vakcinācijas plāns*) elaborated by the Ministry of Health (*Veselības ministrija*) was published on 5 January 2021 together with the Informative report on vaccination. [Updated Vaccination plan](#) was published on 8 February 2021.

Please provide information on the planned phases of vaccination with respect to the groups to be prioritised for vaccination.

Specific groups identified in the national vaccine deployment plan	Date of plan 5 January 2021	Date of new/revised plans 8 February 2021
<i>older persons; indicate age groups specified</i>	Starting with February ¹ – persons aged over 90, 80-89, 70-79 Starting with March – persons aged over 65 Starting with April – persons aged 60-64	First quarter of 2021 ² – 3 rd priority group: persons aged over 70, 4 th priority group: persons aged 60-70
<i>persons with underlying health problems</i>	Starting with March	First quarter of 2021 - 1st priority group: persons requiring serious medical manipulation 3 rd priority group: Persons with chronic diseases; Persons living with children with chronic and immunosuppressive diseases; Persons caring for seriously ill persons at home
<i>persons with disabilities</i>	Starting with February	3 rd priority group
<i>key workers (on the basis of their job not their personal characteristics) – e.g. health workers; persons working in care homes; teachers</i>	Starting with January	First quarter of 2021 - 1st priority group: health workers, 2nd priority group - employees of long-term social care centres, officials who ensure the security and continuity of state operations

¹ There were no specific dates indicated.

² No specific dates.

		Second quarter of 2021 – 5th priority group: Employees of educational institutions, operational services, national armed forces, employees of critically important institutions
<i>persons belonging to ethnic/national minorities</i>	Not specified	Not specified
<i>persons experiencing homelessness</i>	Starting with May - persons living in shelters	Second quarter of 2021 – 6th priority group: clients of shelters
<i>persons with drug addiction dependencies</i>	Not specified	Not specified
<i>persons with low literacy levels</i>	Not specified	Not specified
<i>persons deprived of their liberty</i>	Not specified	Second quarter of 2021 – 6 th priority group: persons in prisons
<i>persons without residence or with insecure legal status (such as refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants)</i>	Not specified	Not specified
<i>OTHER</i> – not specified above; e.g. ‘Persons living in crowded accommodation’; etc. Please insert . . .		

Please briefly indicate:

- the reasons behind major changes with regard to priority groups– as announced by the government.

The vaccination plans defined a preliminary list of priority groups and timeline for vaccination. Initially it was defined that the plan can be changed depending on the supply of vaccines, the willingness of the priority groups to vaccinate and updated information about the characteristics and effects of the vaccines. The priority groups and principles for vaccination order were defined also in the [Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 360 Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection](#) on 18 February 2021.

Since 3 May 2021 the vaccination is open to all residents from the age of 18.

- *the overall approach behind the definition of priority groups: please identify the main ground for identifying groups as priority group (vulnerability to infection; social vulnerability; multiple criteria).*

The priority groups are identified according to: 1) the highest risk of infection and regular presence inside the institutions with the highest risk of Covid-19 spread; 2) persons who are subjected to the highest risk of severe health implications or death; 3) persons who are subjected to high risk of infection in place where it is impossible to observe social distancing and who are in contact with a large number of people.

2 Vaccination rollout – communication, targeted outreach, registration, and administration of vaccinations

For each of the subsequent questions (2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) please indicate:

Languages: If information in different languages is available. Please list those languages in which information is available (e.g. languages of recognised national or ethnic minorities and immigrant communities; as well as English and other dominant international languages).

The website for vaccination registration www.manavakcina.lv and the main national information website about Covid-19 www.covid19.gov.lv which also includes information about vaccines and the vaccination process are available in Latvian, Russian, English.

Information about vaccination in Russian is also available on the website of [Disease Control and Prevention Centre](#) (*Slimību kontroles un profilakses centrs*) and the [State Agency of Medicines](#) (*Valsts Zāļu aģentūra*).

The NGO “I want to help refugees” (*Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem*) has [translated basic information](#) about vaccination into Arabic, Dari, Turkish, and Tigrinya.

Accessibility for persons with disabilities: If information is provided in accessible formats to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities (including easy read, in braille, sign language etc); are physical venues made accessible for persons with disabilities?

Settings of the website www.covid19.gov.lv is adjustable to persons with visual impairment (adjustable fonts and contrast). One of the requirements for the venue of the vaccination centre is its accessibility for persons with movement

impairments and wheelchair access.³ Person with severe physical impairment and who cannot reach vaccination venues can apply for vaccination at home.⁴ In order to apply for vaccination at home one has to contact the family doctor or call 8989. Family doctors forward the list of persons to the National Health Service.⁵

2.1 Channels, means and measures to inform about the national vaccination plan

Please provide information on channels, means and measures taken by the government or public authorities to inform the public about the national vaccination plan, its rollout strategy and vaccination awareness raising campaigns; e.g. traditional postal letters; online information; telephone calls; public information campaigns etc.

On 25 January the Vaccination project office was established with an aim to implement the vaccination strategy. Its functions also include communication with society and popularisation of vaccination.⁶ The Vaccination project office provides informative materials to family doctors, info pages, booklets, posters for distribution in municipalities and pharmacies, advertisement on radio, video animation, information in public transport in different municipalities, post offices, informative webinars for different target groups.⁷ As of 1 April an informative campaign “Two million⁸ reasons to vaccinate” was launched. Well known public figures call upon residents to vaccinate during the campaign.⁹

³ Ministry of Health (Veselības ministrija), [Par informatīvo ziņojumu par telpu nomu vakcinācijas nodrošināšanai](#), 18 March 2021

⁴ National Health Service (Nacionālais veselības dienests), [Izbraukuma vakcinācija mājās](#), 1 April 2021

⁵ [Tiek pakāpeniski uzsākta vakcinācija mājās iedzīvotājiem ar smagiem kustību traucējumiem](#), press release, 20 April 2021

⁶ Ministry of Health (Veselības ministrija), [Rules of the Vaccination project office \(Vakcinācijas projekta biroja reglaments\)](#)

⁷ Ministry of Health (Veselības ministrija), [Covid-19 Vakcinācijas projekta gaitas ziņojums](#), 9 March 2021

⁸ Latvia has a population of around 2 million.

⁹ [Divi miljoni iemeslu vakcinēties](#), Press release, 1 April 2021

2.2 What are the (pre-) registration channels for vaccination put in place?

- a) What registration channels for vaccination are in place e.g. websites, apps, hotlines/call centres, letters, via family doctors, etc.?

The main registration channel is website www.manavakcina.lv and phone line 8989. In addition, persons can apply for vaccination through family doctors, while employers can apply for collective vaccination of their employees..¹⁰

The list of persons who have applied for vaccination is coordinated through a common information technology system "ViVaT" launched on 19 April. The system allows persons to choose the exact date, time and place of vaccination..¹¹

- a) Are any alternatives to digital access to vaccine registration in place e.g. appropriate support for those who need it (such as the elderly; those without access to the internet); physical locations for registration etc?

Persons without access to Internet or e-identification tools can register by phone or through family doctors.

2.3 How are the vaccinations administered?

- a) Where are the vaccinations administered e.g. vaccination centres, via mobile units, via family doctors, etc.?

Vaccination is coordinated by the National Health Service (*Nacionālais veselības dienests*) and performed by vaccination centres, health care institutions who have agreement with the National Health Service about vaccination against Covid-19, health care departments/units in the National Armed Forces and prison administration. Since April, 16 centres have been opened throughout Latvia. "A" level vaccination centres are over 5000 m² wide and both are located in Riga. "B" level vaccination centres are at least 1500 m² wide and are located in 10 biggest cities. "C" level vaccination centres can be opened in smaller municipalities in accordance with the demand for vaccination..¹² [A mobile vaccination tent](#) operated

¹⁰ Ministry of Health (Veselības ministrija), [Veselības ministra rīkojums Nr. 54 Par vakcinācijas procesa organizēšanas kārtību ārstniecības iestādēs](#), 23 February 2021

¹¹ [Vietnē manavakcina.lv tagad varēs izvēlēties arī vakcinācijas vietu un laiku, darbu pakāpeniski uzsāk vienotais vakcinācijas tīkls ViVaT](#), Press release, 19 April 2021

¹² [Liela mēroga vakcinācijas centri gatavi darbam](#), Press release, 29 March 2021

by the National Guard was opened in a parish in eastern part of Latvia on 30 April and will be made available upon demand in smaller localities.

- b) For those being vaccinated - how is information about the actual vaccination process, the vaccine and any potential side effects provided?

Information about vaccination is provided by medical personnel before vaccination. Before vaccination each person has to fill-in a questionnaire about health conditions. Vaccinated persons can report side effects after vaccination to State Agency of Medicines (Zāļu valsts aģentūra). All information about available vaccines and possible side-effects is available at the websites of the [Disease prevention and control centre](#), State Agency Of Medicine, and www.covid19.gov.lv

- c) Are there any circumstances where fees are applicable for receiving the vaccine – e.g. for third country nationals?

Vaccination is free of charge for all Latvian residents, including asylum seekers, persons with temporary residence permits, foreign students enrolled in full-time study programme, employees of EU institutions and agencies and their family members.¹³

3 Challenges and promising practices

3.1 Challenges

The tempo of vaccination is among the lowest among the EU Member States. This is connected with the lack of a clear initial vaccination plan and insufficient supply of vaccines in the beginning of vaccination process. On 5 January, the Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš dismissed the Minister of Health Ilze Viņķele for this reason. Insufficient supply of vaccines was connected with the delay by "AstraZeneca" and the refusal of the Ministry of Health to purchase of additional 1,3 million doses of vaccines by "Pfizer/Biotech" offered to Latvia in November 2020.¹⁴

Another factor is related to the distrust for "AstraZeneca" vaccine among priority groups due to information about possible serious side-effects and deaths of

¹³ Latvia, Saeima (2020), [Law on the Management of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection \(Covid-19 infekcijas izplatības pārvaldības likums\)](#), Section 49⁴

¹⁴ Weekly magazine "IR", [Liela stratēģiska kļūda ar smagām sekām](#), 11 February 2021

vaccinated persons. Thus, the Minister of Health Daniels Pavļuts reported that 2/3 of persons from the vaccination list who were initially proposed to be vaccinated during the Easter holidays refused to get vaccinated with "AstraZeneca."¹⁵ Even though initially the Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš stated that the option to choose the vaccine will not be available,¹⁶ later the Minister of Health stated that the main solution to facilitate the vaccination of older people is to use vaccines of other manufacturers.¹⁷

Another factor is related to the unwillingness to vaccinate and doubts about vaccination by a large part of population. A public opinion poll conducted in January 2021 showed that only 50% of residents wanted to get vaccinated as soon as they have such a possibility. 37% stated that they would refuse to vaccinate and 12% did not provide an answer. The proportion of those who want to get vaccinated was considerably lower among residents whose native language is Russian – 37% compared with 58% of Latvian speakers.¹⁸ In April the number of those who want to get vaccinated increased. 68% of Latvian speakers and 61% of Russian speakers said they want to get vaccinated. However, the opinion poll also showed that a large number of Russian speakers would prefer to get vaccinated with Russian vaccine "Sputnik-V".. The number of those not willing to vaccinate is slightly higher among Russian speakers – 33% as compared with 30% among Latvian speakers. 6% of Russian speakers and 2% of Latvian speakers are in doubt about vaccination.¹⁹

In order to promote vaccination and provide residents with information about the vaccination process, the Vaccination project office announced plans to publish a newspaper to be distributed by post. Initially it was planned to distribute the newspaper in Latvian and Russian. However, due to restrictive language legislation, the State Language Centre (*Valsts valodas centrs*) stressed that such a newspaper can be distributed by post in Latvian language only arguing that even during the pandemic legal provisions forbid to disseminate printed materials in foreign languages. In order to make distribution of printed materials possible in other languages, especially Russian which is the native language for 36% of

¹⁵ News agency LETA, Pavļuts: Ļoti daudzi potēšanas rindās esošie atteicās vakcinēties brīvdienās vai to darīt ar "AstraZeneca" vakcīnām, 6 April 2021

¹⁶ News agency LETA, Latvijā joprojām neapsver iespēju ļaut cilvēkiem izvēlēties, kādu vakcīnu pret Covid-19 saņemt, atzīst Kariņš, 7 April 2021

¹⁷ News agency LETA, Skepses par "AstraZeneca" apstākļos kā galveno risinājumu senioru vakcinēšanas veicināšanai redz citu firmu vakcīnas, 12 April 2021

¹⁸ [SKDS aptauja: baidās gan no Covid-19, gan no vakcīnas; potēties gatava tikai puse](#), 25 January 2021

¹⁹ News agency LETA, Aptauja: Latvijā latvieši priekšroku dotu "Pfizer"/"BioNTech", bet cittautieši - "Sputnik V" vakcīnai pret Covid-19, 29 April 2021.

population, the Minister of Health proposed draft amendments stipulating that printed and digital materials providing essential health related information and are distributed during the pandemic can be sent to private and legal persons in foreign languages.²⁰ Thus far, the amendments have not been supported by the government.

According to the [research conducted by the Re: Baltica](#), The Baltic Centre for Investigative Journalism, vaccination outside priority groups works only in large cities. Of 1 392 family doctors who have agreements with the National Health Service, 55% perform vaccination, while 45% don't. Some lack resources (lack of premises, staff), others have refused as they "do not want a headache." Some have been deterred by the chaotic organisation of vaccination. According to the NHS, only 31% of family doctors perform vaccination in Latgale Region (Eastern Latvia), 34% in Riga²¹, 75% in Kurzeme (Western Latvia), 81% in Zemgale (Southern Latvia), 88% in Vidzeme (Northern Latvia). In early May, vaccination capacities were higher in several areas while access to vaccines was limited. Not all vaccination offices comply with the requirements necessary to perform vaccinations. There are also family doctors who do not recommend to be vaccinated as they allegedly have been influenced by anti-vaxers. Head of the Association of Rural Family Doctors (Latvijas Lauku ģimenes ārstu asociācija) cited insufficient pay for performing vaccination, although NHS. Doctors receive EUR 12,60 for vaccinating senior citizens and chronic patients, and EUR 7,70 for others. The association has calculated that the tariff should be EUR 15-16 as additional work is required.

Vaccination Bureau has received 1 600 applications from people who require vaccination at home. However, their vaccination seems to be slow. There has been a limited number of family doctors who have been prepared to perform vaccinations at home. Only in the end of April did the NHS provide a list of those persons to large vaccination centres.

3.2 Promising practices

Due to the refusal of representatives of priority groups to get vaccinated with "Astra Zeneca" vaccine, by way of an experiment, on 16, 17 and 18 April the government decided to open vaccination to a larger population through a live queue in the biggest vaccination centres. More than 8 600 persons were vaccinated with "Astra Zeneca" vaccine during three days. The interest towards

²⁰ Ministry of Health (*Veselības ministrija*), [Noteikumu projekts "Grozījums Ministru kabineta 2005.gada 15.februāra noteikumos Nr.130 "Noteikumi par valodas lietošanu informācijā"](#), 29 April 2021

²¹ In Riga mass vaccination centres provide for alternative vaccination possibilities.

vaccination grew with the availability of the vaccines. Head of the Vaccination project office stated that "live queue" helped speed-up the vaccination process.²²

Due to the larger supply of vaccines, the government announced that vaccination is open for all residents aged over 18 years since 3 May.

²² News agency LETA, Juhņēviča: Nedēļas nogalē organizētā "dzīvā rinda" palīdzēja kāpināt vakcinācijas pret Covid-19 tempus, 19 April 2020