

# **Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights implications**

## **National vaccine deployment**

**Portugal**

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**Contractor: Centre for Social Studies**

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# 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.

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 03/12/2020 <a href="#">Vaccination Plan against COVID-19</a>	Date of new/revised plans 28/01/2021 01/03/2021 10/03/2021 21/04/2021 <a href="#">Vaccination Plan against COVID-19 - Update January 28</a> <a href="#">Update concerning persons with trisomy 21 (Mach 01)</a> <a href="#">Update concerning teachers and non-teaching staff of educational and school establishments (March 10)</a> <a href="#">Update of information on the vaccination process (April 21)</a>
<i>older persons; indicate age groups specified</i>	YES  (1) Residents of nursing homes and similar institutions  (2) Ages 65+ with or without pathologies	YES  (1) Ages 80+ with or without pathologies (introduced as priority 1 – update 28 January)
<i>persons with underlying health problems</i>	YES  (1) Inpatients in long-term care units  (1) Ages 50+ with at least one of the following pathologies: heart failure, coronary heart disease, kidney disease, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease or chronic respiratory disease  (2) Ages 50-64 with at least one of the following pathologies: diabetes, malignant neoplasms,	YES  (1) Ages 50-79 with at least one of the following pathologies: heart failure, coronary heart disease, kidney disease, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease or chronic respiratory disease (introduced as a new group for prioritisation – update 28 January)  (1) People with active cancers (who are undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy), people undergoing transplantation, immunosuppression (e.g. HIV)

	chronic kidney disease, liver failure, obesity, high blood pressure	and with some neurological diseases and refractory epilepsy, as well as mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, become a priority (introduced as a new group for prioritisation - update 21 April)  Persons with obesity or type II diabetes were deprioritised and will be vaccinated according to the age group (update April 21).
<i>persons with disabilities</i>	YES  (1) Residents of nursing homes and similar institutions, e.g. structures for people with disabilities (people with disabilities who are institutionalised)	YES  (1) People with trisomy 21 became part of the priority groups, following the results of studies on the impact of COVID-19 on hospitalisation and mortality within this group (introduced as a new group for prioritisation – update 01 March)
<i>key workers (on the basis of their job not their personal characteristics) – e.g. health workers; persons working in care homes; teachers</i>	YES  (1) Professionals of nursing homes and similar institutions  (1) Professionals of long-term care units  (1) Health professionals directly involved in the care of patients  (1) Professionals in the armed forces, security forces and critical services	YES  (1) Holders of high office (sovereign bodies); Senior positions with functions under the State of Emergency; Civil Protection Officers; Attorney General Office and Public Prosecutor's Office (now priority 1 – update 28 January)  (1) Teachers, non-teaching staff and social response professionals (such as day care centres) were introduced as a new group for prioritisation, starting with professionals from pre-school and 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle (attended by students up to 10 years old), who were already in face-to-face classes (introduced as a new group for prioritisation – update 10 March)
<i>persons belonging to ethnic/national minorities</i>	NO	No change
<i>persons experiencing homelessness</i>	NO	YES  (2) Homeless people were included in the priorities. The Directorate-General for Health stated that local strategies for vaccinating homeless people, regardless of age, should be implemented in places where

		they normally are. Given the difficulty in contacting these people, single dose vaccines should be administered (update April 21)
<i>persons with drug addiction dependencies</i>	NO	No change
<i>persons with low literacy levels</i>	NO	No change
<i>persons deprived of their liberty</i>	YES (1) Particularly vulnerable inmates, e.g. hospitalised inmates not subject to criminal penalties. Considering their special vulnerability, priority was given to those who are hospitalised at the São João de Deus Prison Hospital and at the Psychiatry and Mental Health Clinic of the Santa Cruz do Bispo Prison	No change
<i>persons without residence or with insecure legal status (such as refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants)</i>	NO	No change
<i><b>OTHER</b> – not specified above; e.g. ‘Persons living in crowded accommodation’; etc. Please insert . . .</i>		

Please briefly indicate here (not in the above table):

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

Ordinance No. 298-B/2020 of 23 December creates and defines the procedures for the implementation of the National Vaccination Plan against COVID-19 through the National Health Service<sup>1</sup>. According to the [first version of the plan](#), in the first

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<sup>1</sup> Portugal, [Portaria n.º 298-B/2020, que procede à criação e estabelece a implementação do Plano Nacional de Vacinação contra a COVID-19 através do Serviço Nacional de Saúde](#) (Ordinance No. 298-B/2020, that creates and establishes the implementation of the National Vaccination Plan against COVID-19 through the National Health Service), 23 December 2020.

phase, 400 000 people over 50 years of age with heart failure, coronary heart disease, kidney disease, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease or chronic respiratory disease were expected to be vaccinated. Also included in this initial phase were 250 000 professionals and residents of nursing homes and long-term care units, as well as 300 000 health professionals, professionals from the armed forces, security forces and critical services. In the second phase, 1.8 million people over 65 years of age (with or without pathologies) and 900 000 people, between 50 and 64 years of age, with diabetes, malignant neoplasms, chronic kidney disease, liver failure, obesity or high blood pressure would be vaccinated. The remaining population resident in Portugal was included in the third phase. Additionally, an expansion of vaccination centres was planned at this third stage.

In Portugal, vaccination against COVID-19 started on 27 December 2020 for the priority groups already identified. On 27 December 2020, 4 534 health professionals from university hospital centres in Porto, Coimbra, Lisbon North and Central Lisbon were vaccinated<sup>2</sup>. Vaccination against COVID-19 in nursing homes began on 4 January. The Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security was present and announced the goal of reaching 200 000 vaccines to cover all people in nursing homes (legal or illegal/without licence to function as a nursing home<sup>3</sup>), guaranteeing that priority will be given to all situations identified through the cross-checking of information between the Social Security and civil protection<sup>4</sup>. Administration of the vaccine to people over 50 years of age and associated pathologies began on 7 February, as part of the first phase of the vaccination plan<sup>5</sup>. Among the workers in the security forces and services, one of the priority groups was prison guards and other prison staff, since they work in confined areas with the prison population where the risk of contamination is extremely high. The vaccination process against COVID-19 started in Portuguese prisons on 20

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<sup>2</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2020), [“Início do Plano de Vacinação em dia histórico na luta contra a pandemia”](#) (“Beginning of the Vaccination Plan on a historic day in the fight against the pandemic”). 27 December 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Illegal nursing homes are those that do not comply with legal requirements in order to ensure and standardize procedures to guarantee the human dignity of users and are functioning without fulfilling with the regularisation and licencing process required by the State. According to the legal framework, the licensing of nursing homes aims to provide the applicant entities with licenses that allows them to develop their activities in accordance with legal conditions and requirements, namely an operating licence issued by Social Security (which legally validates its residential structure, assesses the adequacy of human resources, the internal regulation, the adequacy of equipment and facilities, etc.). Despite the inspection carried out by the State, there are still many illegal nursing homes in Portugal. According to the media, in 2020, Social Security identified 788 illegal nursing homes and forced the closure of 105. In some situations, if the nursing homes have the required conditions, such as human and material resources, an additional period for obtaining the licencing is given by the Social Security, remaining with a provisional operating authorisation.

<sup>4</sup> Portugal, XXII Governo (XXII Government) (2021), [“Portugal inicia vacinação de 200 mil pessoas nos lares”](#) (“Portugal starts vaccination of 200 000 persons in nursing homes”). 04 January 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Portugal, XXII Governo (XXII Government) (2021), [“Começa a vacinação de 900 mil idosos e doentes”](#) (“Vaccination of 900,000 older persons and people over 50 years of age and associated pathologies”). 03 February 2021.

January<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, given the special vulnerability of the prison population not subject to criminal penalties admitted to prison health facilities, particularly vulnerable inmates/patients who were hospitalised at the São João de Deus Prison Hospital and at the Clinic of Psychiatry and Mental Health of Santa Cruz do Bispo Prison were also vaccinated<sup>7</sup>. On 13 February the process of vaccinating members of the security forces started: the National Republican Guard and the Public Security Police. The planning of this vaccination process was coordinated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The order of the personnel to be vaccinated was based on operational criteria – prioritising agents on the front line and most exposed to the risks of the Coronavirus – and also health criteria – with priority given to staff suffering from the pathologies listed by the General Health Directorate<sup>8</sup>.

The COVID-19 Vaccination Plan Task Force presented [an update of the vaccination plan](#) on 28 January, and a review [of the plan's implementation by the end of January](#). With this update, the vaccination plan against COVID-19 started to include, in the first phase, people aged over 80 with or without pathologies (not residents of nursing homes and long-term care units, as these had already been included in the first version of the plan). This change was justified by the worsening of the pandemic in Portugal and the increased incidence of the disease caused by the new coronavirus. This was the group with the highest number of deaths.

During the presentation session, the coordinator of the task force highlighted the significance of including the over 80s age group, according to the evolution of the pandemic and the severity level reached<sup>9</sup>. According to this update, vaccination was expected to reach 170 000 people within this group with complete vaccination and another 170 000 with only the first vaccine by the end of March. The overall goal during the first phase – which extends until April – was to vaccinate 670 000 people aged 80 or over. This objective has not yet been completely reached. According to the vaccination report of the General Directorate of Health of 02 May, 557 022 people in this age group have already the complete vaccination and 632

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<sup>6</sup> Portugal, XXII Governo (XXII Government) (2021), ["Começa vacinação das forças de segurança, armadas e de trabalhadores de serviços essenciais"](#) ("Vaccination of security, armed forces and essential service workers begins"). 04 February 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Portugal, TSF (2021), ["Prisões já administraram 3600 vacinas. Reclusos inimputáveis internados estão entre os que tiveram prioridade"](#) ("Prisons have already administered 3,600 vaccines. Inimputable inmates are among those who had priority"). 19 February 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Portugal, XXII Governo (XXII Government) (2021), ["Processo de vacinação dos elementos das Forças de Segurança arranca a 13 de fevereiro"](#) ("Vaccination process for members of the Security Forces kicks off on 13 February"). 12 February 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2021), ["Apresentação da atualização do Plano de Vacinação contra a COVID-19"](#) ("Presentation of the update of the Vaccination Plan against COVID-19"). 28 January 2021.

941 people have been vaccinated with the first dose<sup>10</sup>. The plan maintained, at this stage, vaccination for people aged 50 to 79 with specific pathologies.

The inclusion of people with trisomy 21 in the priority groups for vaccination against COVID-19 was announced by the Director-General of Health on 01 March. This change occurred because the analyses and studies carried out confirmed the real impact of COVID-19 on hospitalisation and mortality of this population. This amendment to the vaccination plan covers includes about 3 500 people over the age of 16<sup>11</sup>.

Since schools are an essential service and considering the relevance of students restarting face-to-face classes, the Government included teachers in the priority groups for vaccination against COVID-19, according to concerns with the functioning of schools at the time of restarting classroom activities<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the vaccination of teachers and non-teaching workers in pre-school and 1<sup>st</sup> cycle (attended by students up to 10 years old) started on 27 March across the country. This first phase (from 27 to 28 March) reached about 78 700 teachers and non-teaching workers (covering the public and private sectors), who had been teaching in person since the previous week. Vaccination of teachers and non-teaching staff at all levels of education except higher education continued during the month of April and is still ongoing. For example, on 17 and 18 April, the first dose of the vaccine against COVID-19 was administered to almost 170,000 people in these professional groups<sup>13</sup>. The vaccination process took place in three different types of locations: in health centres, in the municipalities where the group of professionals to be vaccinated was less than 250 people; in schools in those municipalities where vaccination was expected to reach between 250 and 500 people; at vaccination centres in municipalities with more than 500 people.

On 21 April, an information update on the vaccination plan against COVID-19 in Portugal<sup>14</sup> was announced. At the press conference to update information, the Minister of Health stated that, by the end of May, all people over 60 years of age will have received at least one dose of the vaccine against COVID-19. The Director-General of Health stated that age remains at the top of vaccination criteria, but

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<sup>10</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2021), ["Relatório de vacinação até 02 de Maio"](#) ("Vaccination report until 2 May"). 02 May 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Portugal, Direção-Geral da Saúde (Directorate-General for Health) (2021), ["Pessoas com trissomia 21 passam a estar nos grupos prioritários para a vacinação"](#) ("People with trisomy 21 become priority groups for vaccination"). 01 March 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2021), ["Arrancou hoje a vacinação de professores e funcionários do pré-escolar e 1.º ciclo"](#) ("Today the vaccination of teachers and staff of pre-school and 1st cycle started"). 27 March 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Portugal, Expresso (2021), ["Já foram vacinados 25 mil professores e não docentes este sábado"](#) ("25 000 teachers and non-teachers have already been vaccinated this Saturday"). 17 April 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Portugal, XXII Governo (XXII Government) (2021), ["Conferência de imprensa de atualização de informação relativa ao plano de vacinação contra a COVID-19"](#) ("Press conference to update information on the vaccination plan against COVID-19"). 21 April 2021.



priority diseases change. So, vaccination will have two branches: one per age group, intensive and easy to vaccinate, and the other includes people with serious diseases, regardless of age. In terms of serious diseases, priority will be given to active cancer patients (who are undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy), people undergoing transplantation, people with immunosuppression (e.g. HIV), neurological diseases and refractory epilepsy, as well as mental illnesses like schizophrenia. This updated also defined homeless people, regardless of age, as a priority group to be vaccinated, and vaccination with single-dose vaccines is recommended, whenever possible, due to the difficulty of locating some of these people<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, people with obesity (above 35% of the body mass index) or type II diabetes will be vaccinated according to age group. In this new phase of vaccination against COVID-19, with greater availability of vaccines, the speed of the process will be the next challenge and the self-scheduling process for taking the vaccine will be decisive for its success, as well as the response capacity of vaccination centres, cooperation with the governmental departments of National Defence, Internal Administration, Education, Modernisation of the State and Public Administration and the work of the local authorities.

## **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).*

*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?*

### **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*

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<sup>15</sup> Portugal, Público (2021), ["Plano de vacinação mudou e há novas doenças nas prioridades. Quando vou ser vacinado?"](#) ("Vaccination plan has changed and there are new diseases on the agenda. When will I be vaccinated?"). 21 April 2021.

*strategy and vaccination awareness raising campaigns; e.g. traditional postal letters; online information; telephone calls; public information campaigns etc.*

The [Vaccination Plan against COVID-19](#) comprised a communication plan aiming to promote the communication about the importance of vaccination and based on constant updating of information. According to the communication plan, the messages to be transmitted must occur before, during and after the vaccination campaigns, in order to explain, whenever possible, the entire process associated with the campaign, distribution, safety and efficacy of the vaccines, associated risks and adverse reactions. The general objectives of the communication plan are: to generate confidence in the population, ensuring acceptance of the vaccine; increase health literacy in the field of vaccination, through regular, transparent and reliable information; combat disinformation, fake news, response to anti-vaccination groups; encourage internal and interinstitutional communication in the field of vaccination; ensure a timely communication flow with health professionals; evaluate and monitor public perception of the vaccine and barriers to vaccination. The target audience is made up of health professionals and entities involved in the vaccination process, the media, risk groups, influencers, policy makers and the general population. The plan is structured around three communication axes: appeal and information on vaccination, communication with health professionals and stakeholder involvement.

The main communication instruments foreseen by the [Vaccination Plan against COVID-19](#) are: (a) digital campaigns on the social media to call for vaccination; (b) helpline for public information; (c) public relations, through interviews, presence in information and daytime TV and radio programmes, opinion articles, press releases and meetings with media to clarify specialised information. The government and public authorities have been performing some awareness raising campaigns to inform the public about the national vaccination plan. Additionally, the government through press conferences has explained the priorities and how people would be contacted for vaccination. The Directorate-General for Health<sup>16</sup> provides information on the website, as well as a simulator that indicates when the person would be contacted for vaccination. There are also the videos on the advantages of vaccination against COVID-19 of the Directorate-General for Health<sup>17</sup> and of the João Lobo Antunes Institute of Molecular Medicine<sup>18</sup>. The Regional Section of the Centre of the Portuguese Medical Association developed the awareness campaign on vaccination against COVID-19 “Protect the Future”, to convey a message of tranquility and security. This campaign takes place on social networks and includes the dissemination of a practical guide with

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<sup>16</sup> For more information, see the [Directorate-General for Health website](#).

<sup>17</sup> For more information, see [the video from the Directorate-General for Health on the advantages of vaccination against COVID-19](#).

<sup>18</sup> For more information, see the [video promoted by the João Lobo Antunes Institute of Molecular Medicine](#).

information on vaccination against COVID-19 and answers to the main doubts presented by the general public<sup>19</sup>. A group of Portuguese scientists of the Champalimaud Foundation launched the initiative “Decades of Science for Research Days”, aiming to clarify about vaccines against COVID-19 through online conversations with the public. It was implemented between 20 and 30 April. According to its coordinators, this initiative arose in the context of insecurity and misinformation associated with vaccines developed against COVID-19<sup>20</sup>.

The Vaccination Plan against COVID-19 and the related information are available only in Portuguese. Nonetheless, the High Commissioner for Migrations has sent an email to immigrant associations, in Portuguese and in English, with information that immigrants in an irregular or illegal situation, without a National Health Service registration number, can apply to receive a vaccine against COVID-19. These immigrants can register for vaccination on the website of the National Health Service, indicating their full name, date of birth, gender, telephone number, the country of nationality and place of birth, as well as the full address<sup>21</sup>. This website is available in Portuguese and in English<sup>22</sup>.

## **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 registration channels for vaccination have been of two types: people are contacted by health authorities and/or via family doctors through SMS messages, phone calls and letters and a self-scheduling procedure is also ongoing, through a digital platform, where people can directly schedule their vaccination. During the first stage of the vaccination process, health authorities identified and contacted people in the priority groups<sup>23</sup>. People included in the priority groups for the first

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<sup>19</sup> For more information, see the [Regional Section of the Centre of the Portuguese Medical Association website](#).

<sup>20</sup> Portugal, Público (2020), “Cientistas portuguesas esclarecem dúvidas sobre vacinas online” (“Portuguese scientists clarify doubts about vaccines online”). 20 April 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Portugal, JN (2021), [“Imigrantes irregulares podem inscrever-se para vacina”](#) (“Irregular immigrants can apply for vaccine”). 03 March 2021.

<sup>22</sup> For more information, see the [website for citizens without a user number of the National Health Service](#) to register for access to the vaccine against COVID-19.

<sup>23</sup> Portugal, Público (2020), [“Quem, onde, como? Leia na íntegra o plano de vacinação da COVID-19 em Portugal”](#) (“Who, where, how? Read the full COVID-19 vaccination plan in Portugal”). 03 December 2020.

phase of vaccination against COVID-19<sup>24</sup> (excluding residents of nursing homes or similar institutions) was contacted by SMS to say whether or not they want to be vaccinated. If they answer in the affirmative, they receive a new SMS for scheduling with the date, time and place. Persons who do not have a family doctor should contact the health centres themselves, presenting a medical statement from a private or insurance doctor attesting to the need for vaccination<sup>25</sup>. The self-scheduling portal for vaccination against COVID-19 is now available for people to schedule the vaccine. This schedule is stunted by age. Since 23 April, scheduling is open for people over 65. Since this date, this procedure has been particularly useful for mass vaccination against COVID-19, because it is the people to be vaccinated themselves who schedule the taking of the vaccine with their registration on the digital platform<sup>26</sup>. The self-scheduling functionality is accessible from the COVID-19 website and allows users in the age group whose vaccination is in progress to schedule and choose the vaccination point at which they want to be vaccinated. If there are no vacancies available, users can choose to stay on the waiting list at that vaccination point or choose a date at another vaccination point. Then, the user who made the registration receives an SMS with the precise time when he or she will be vaccinated on the day and at the chosen vaccination point<sup>27</sup>. This information is available only in Portuguese language.

Also immigrants in an irregular or illegal situation, without a registration number at the National Health Service, can apply to receive a vaccine against COVID-19. Since they are “outside the radar of health authorities”, they can register for vaccination on the website of the National Health Service. This information was sent, by email, by the High Commissioner for Migrations to immigrant associations, in Portuguese and in English<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Portugal, Público (2020), [“COVID-19. Vacinação arranca mais cedo e profissionais de saúde são os primeiros a ser vacinados já em Dezembro”](#) (“COVID-19. Vaccination starts early and health professionals are the first to be vaccinated as early as December”). 17 December 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Portugal, Público (2020), [“Quem, como, quando? O que precisa de saber sobre a vacinação da COVID-19”](#) (“Who, how, when? What you need to know about COVID-19 vaccination”). 03 December 2020 (updated on 12 February 2021).

<sup>26</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2021), [“Vacinação em massa prevê autoagendamento de forma digital”](#) (“Mass vaccination provides self-scheduling digitally”). 31 March 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2021), [“Autoagendamento da vacina. Mais de 156 mil pessoas realizaram o agendamento online da vacina”](#) (“Vaccine self-scheduling. More than 156,000 people booked the vaccine online”). 30 April 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Portugal, JN (2021), [“Imigrantes irregulares podem inscrever-se para vacina”](#) (“Irregular immigrants can apply for vaccine”). 03 March 2021.

- b) 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?

There are alternatives to digital access to vaccine registration, for example, older people and people without access to the internet can request support from authorities and institutions such as family doctors and parish councils<sup>29</sup>. There was also a public appeal to people with more technological skills to get involved in the registration of people who may not have access to the internet<sup>30</sup>. People who have a chronic disease covered in the current vaccination phase and are not on the vaccination lists should contact the health unit (public or private) where they are assisted and request to be included in the vaccination lists<sup>31</sup>.

### 2.3 How are the vaccinations administered?

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

For the first phase of the vaccination plan (from December 2020 to March 2021), the vaccination points were defined considering the priority groups in accessing the vaccine. For this reason, the vaccine was administered in the approximately 1 200 vaccination points of three types: in health centres, in nursing homes and long-term care units and within the scope of occupational medicine for professionals in essential services<sup>32</sup>. Vaccination started in the five main hospital centres on 27 December. To the next priority groups, vaccines were provided at health centres, with a total of 733 vaccination points across the country<sup>33</sup>. For people in nursing homes or long-term care units, vaccines were administered in these places.

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<sup>29</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2021), ["Autoagendamento da vacina. Mais de 156 mil pessoas realizaram o agendamento online da vacina"](#) ("Vaccine self-scheduling. More than 156,000 people booked the vaccine online"). 30 April 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Portugal, XXII Governo (XXII Government) (2021), ["Ritmo de vacinação vai acelerar no País"](#) ("Vaccination pace will accelerate in the country"). 28 April 2021.

<sup>31</sup> For more information, see the [National Health Service website](#).

<sup>32</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2020), ["Vacina contra a COVID-19. Vacinação vai assentar em 20% dos enfermeiros dos centros de saúde"](#) ("Vaccine against COVID-19. Vaccination will be based on 20% of nurses in health centres"). 16 December 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Portugal, Público (2020), ["Quem, como, quando? O que precisa de saber sobre a vacinação da COVID-19"](#) ("Who, how, when? What you need to know about COVID-19 vaccination"). 03 December 2020 and updated on 12 February 2021.

After the vaccination of these risk groups, the expansion of vaccination points was extended<sup>34</sup>. Since April, there are around 120 COVID-19 vaccination centres in operation<sup>35</sup>. Their locations have been defined through the coordination between regional health administrations and health centre groups, aiming to ensure easier access to people to be vaccinated<sup>36</sup>.

Additionally, from 12 March to 11 April, it was implemented the pilot phase of the mobile vaccination units against COVID-19 through a partnership between the Ministry of Health and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The 5 mobile units operating in this pilot phase supported the Northern Regional Health Administration, focusing mainly on five areas: Gerês Cabreira, Alto Tâmega and Barroso, Marão and Douro Norte, Douro Sul and Feira Arouca. These vans ensured access, for example, to bedridden people, in the most remote areas of the country, allowing either vaccination at home or inside the van itself. After this first pilot phase, in May, 15 vans will be made available to the rest of the country<sup>37</sup>.

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

Before getting the vaccine, people are informed that if they have symptoms such as fever, cough, difficulty in breathing or changes in taste and smell, they should not be vaccinated and they should call the National Health Service. After being vaccinated, people must wait at least 30 minutes on the vaccination centre, since serious allergic reactions to the vaccine usually appear shortly after administration even though they are very rare. People are also informed that most of the time adverse reactions are mild and disappear a few days later and that they may experience pain or swelling at the injection location, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, joint pain or fever. If symptoms persist or if a reaction occurs that worries them, they should contact their family doctor or call the National Health Service helpline<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Portugal, Público (2021), ["Partidos preocupados com incapacidade dos centros de saúde para vacinação ampla"](#) ("Political parties concerned about health centers' inability to vaccinate widely"). 12 January 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Portugal, Público (2021), ["Centros de vacinação em massa vão ser só 120 e já não serão necessários tantos enfermeiros"](#) ("Mass vaccination centers will be only 120 and so many nurses will no longer be needed"). 13 April 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2021), ["Vacinação em massa prevê autoagendamento de forma digital"](#) ("Mass vaccination provides self-scheduling digitally"). 31 March 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Portugal, Serviço Nacional de Saúde (National Health Service) (2021), ["Fundação Gulbenkian disponibiliza unidades móveis de vacinação contra a COVID-19"](#) ("Gulbenkian Foundation provides mobile vaccination units against COVID-19"). 10 March 2021.

<sup>38</sup> For more information, see the [Directorate-General for Health website](#) on the vaccination process and the potential side effects provided.

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

There are no circumstances where fees are applicable for receiving the vaccine. According to the national vaccination plan against COVID-19, the vaccine is optional, free and universal (it is intended for anyone resident/present in Portugal, as long as the vaccine is clinically indicated for that person), and is guaranteed by the National Health Service. The objective is to vaccinate the entire population residing in Portugal by the end of the year 2021, regardless of the regularisation of their permanence within the Portuguese territory<sup>39</sup>.

## **3 Challenges and promising practices**

### **3.1 Challenges**

The two main challenges in access to and uptake of the vaccine are of two types: it is difficult to contact some citizens, namely the elderly, due to outdated contact databases and some groups that have been excluded from the vaccination priority lists.

It is difficult to contact older persons because some of them do not use a mobile phone regularly or the contact databases are out of date and there is no way to contact them. This caused some constraints, especially during the first vaccination phase and demanded extra dedication from the administrative staff responsible for contacting people. In some cases, they were assisted by the local authorities and parish councils. For example, until the end of February, since vaccination against COVID-19 started for people over 80 and people between 50 and 79 with a high-risk disease, 30 500 SMS were sent for scheduling vaccination and only 16 799 replies were obtained, that is, 55,08%<sup>40</sup>.

There are two relevant examples of people excluded from the priority vaccination groups. University professors were left out of the early stages and have not yet been vaccinated. This an exception among, since the teachers of all other levels of education are included in the priority groups and most of them have already been vaccinated (with at least the first dose of the vaccine). University professors contested the fact that they were not included in the priority vaccination group

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<sup>39</sup> For more information, see the [Vaccination Plan against COVID-19 \(03 December 2020\) and the vaccination COVID-19 FAQ's website](#).

<sup>40</sup> Portugal, Público (2021), "[Apenas 55% dos convocados responderam ao SMS para serem vacinados contra a COVID-19](#)" ("Only 55% of those invited answered to the SMS to be vaccinated against COVID-19"). 26 February 2021.

like the other teachers and non-teaching staff, was claimed among university professors. Some are even refusing to teach in person until they are vaccinated<sup>41</sup>.

The second group are the judicial officers. The Union of Judicial Officers warned the Ombudsman that these professionals are being discriminated against under the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination plan, considering that only judges and public prosecutors are being vaccinated although these three professional groups work daily in the courts<sup>42</sup>. The Union states that these professionals are in contact with the public, either face-to-face in the courts, or while carrying out external services. Additionally, the Union also claims that most of the judges and public prosecutors are teleworking, thus not taking the same risks as judicial officers who work face-to-face with people.

### 3.2 Promising practices

There are two main promising practices: (a) efforts and partnerships to ensure contact is established with people who are to be vaccinated and that they get to the vaccination centres, namely older people who need support; (b) the solutions implemented to vaccinate all people in Portugal, including undocumented immigrants.

For example, some people in the region of Bragança were not registered in the database of the Directorate-General for Health because they had never used family health services or who had no contact information. There are also situations in which, despite having a mobile phone, some people are unable to read messages on the phone. The presidents of parish councils of the Bragança region implemented the necessary efforts to update the contacts of older persons on the health portal so that they can be called for vaccination against COVID-19<sup>43</sup>. In Lousã, the city council set up a support system to ensure that everyone was contacted, including when contacting by phone was not possible. The call centre is in the same place where the vaccination takes place.

Several municipalities also provide taxis to take people to the vaccination centres. This free service for citizens who live in the municipality, and whose vaccination takes place in the area of the municipality. People who have scheduled their vaccine, do not have their own vehicle, and meet these requirements should call the municipality, requesting a taxi to the vaccination centre and to take them back

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<sup>41</sup> Portugal, TSF (2021), ["Há professores universitários a recusar dar aulas por não estarem vacinados"](#) ("University professors refuse to teach because they are not vaccinated"). 23 April 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Portugal, Observador (2021), ["COVID-19. Oficiais de justiça queixam-se à Provedora por discriminação na vacinação"](#) ("COVID-19. Judicial officers complain to the Ombudsman for discrimination in vaccination"). 19 March 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Portugal, SIC Notícias (2021), ["COVID-19. Juntas de Freguesia atualizam contactos dos utentes para facilitar vacinação"](#) ("COVID-19. Parish Councils update users' contacts to facilitate vaccination"). 18 February 2021.



home. This service does not involve any expenses for the user, and they can be accompanied by a family member, in compliance with the health rules<sup>44</sup>. This practice has a territorial implementation throughout the country, resulting from the collaboration with local authorities foreseen in the national vaccination plan against COVID-19, according to which the involvement of local authorities is fundamental due to their proximity to the populations.

The Government created a website for immigrants not registered in the National Health Service to be vaccinated against COVID-19. So, people who are not registered in the National Health Service, including foreigners in an irregular situation, can be placed in the vaccination. Some civil society associations have helped immigrants to fill out forms<sup>45</sup>. According to the Ministry of the Presidency, the National Vaccination Plan against COVID-19 is universal, so it is for everyone, regardless of their legal status. The Government created a new platform/website for citizens without a user number<sup>46</sup>. Immigrants and refugees may submit their application to be vaccinated and they will be contacted later on by the local health units. The Government stated that the High Commission for Migration has been regularly releasing information on access to health care, on preventive measures against COVID-19 and has informed the civil society partners, including associations, about the creation of this platform/website. On April 21, this platform created by the government had already received more than 4 000 applications from foreign citizens to receive the vaccine against COVID-19<sup>47</sup>. After completing and submitting the digital form made available by the National Health Service, they are contacted by the Local Health Units, according to the priorities and criteria defined in the national vaccination plan against COVID-19, to assess their eligibility and schedule the procedure.

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<sup>44</sup> Portugal, JN (2021), "[Lisboa quer garantir transporte de táxi para centros de vacinação em todas as fases](#)" ("Lisbon wants to guarantee taxi transportation to vaccination centers at all stages"). 14 April 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Portugal, Público (2021), "[Governo cria plataforma para estrangeiros sem cartão de utente terem vacina contra a COVID-19](#)" ("Government creates platform for foreigners without a user card to have vaccine against COVID-19"). 17 March 2021.

<sup>46</sup> For more information, see the [website for citizens without a user number of the National Health Service](#) to register for access to the vaccine against COVID-19.

<sup>47</sup> Portugal, Observador (2021), "[Mais de quatro mil estrangeiros inscreveram-se na plataforma para vacinação](#)" ("More than four thousand foreigners have registered for the vaccination platform"). 21 April 2021.