

Undocumented Migrants: Their Access to Health Care in Europe, including in the Context of COVID-19

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What impact has the pandemic had on undocumented people?



Increased risk of infection and hardship due to existing disparities

- People with irregular status already had limited access to decent work, wages, living conditions
- During the pandemic, many:
 - Have **struggled to follow measures to protect themselves from the virus** (e.g., people living in camps, informal settlements, immigration detention, sleeping rough, living in over-crowded and cramped quarters)
 - **Continued to work because they need to survive/doing critical work**, with no option to work from home – often in sectors viewed as “essential”, often with limited protections
 - **Who could not work or who lost their job faced destitution** (no income support)



Obstacles to accessing health care and other services



- **Irregular status means extremely limited access to primary health care in most EU countries**
 - Most countries grant very limited access to health care for people who are undocumented, outside of emergency situations and other limited cases
 - Some countries have schemes in place for undocumented residents, though there are often challenges in practice (e.g., complex procedures, unclear rules)
- **Pervasive fear of authorities because of criminalisation of irregular status**
 - In some countries (e.g., Germany) there are direct immigration enforcement consequences of accessing mainstream health care
 - Fear of police controls and ID checks during confinement measures

International bodies urge inclusive vaccine deployment

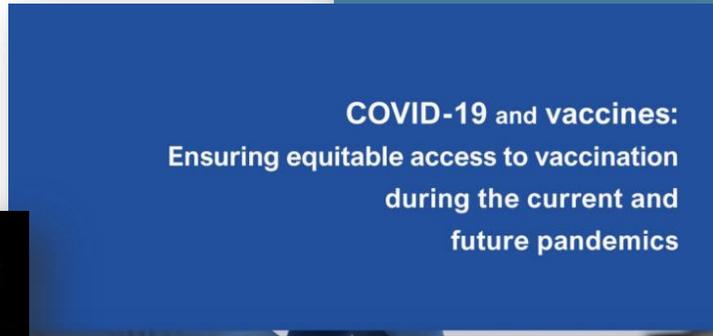
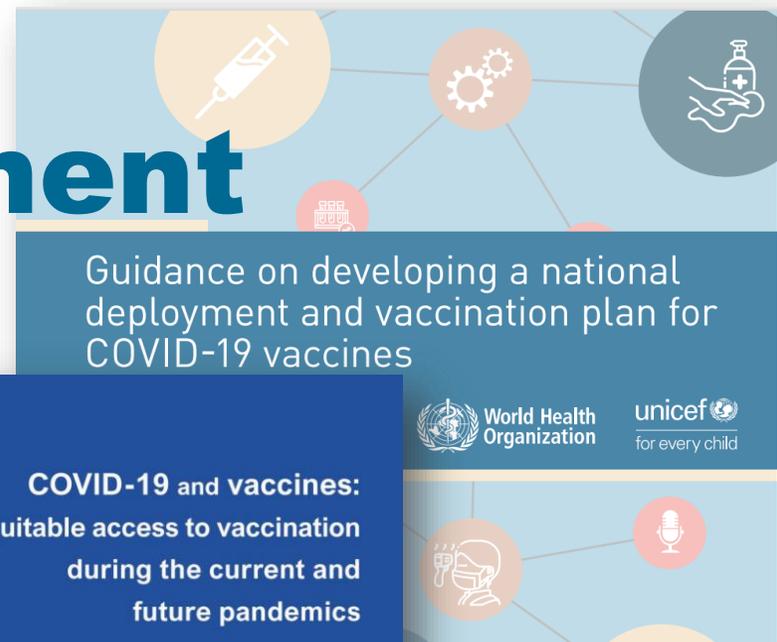
- Public health: “No one is safe until everyone is safe”
- Health equity
- Human rights



To be effective, COVID-19 vaccination plans must include migrants

As we prepare for one of the world’s largest vaccination efforts, and on the occasion of International Migrants Day, we are coming to a critical reckoning: the need for inclusive approaches in our health-related thinking and practices has never been more urgent.

18 December 2020 – by Jacqueline Weekers, International Organization for Migration (IOM)



World

COVID-19: Equitable vaccine access for all, including migrants, is crucial, say UN Special Rapporteurs

News and Press Release • Source: UN HRC • Posted: 23 Jan 2021 • Originally published: 22 Jan 2021 • Origin: [View original](#)

GENEVA (22 January 2021) – UN human rights experts today called on States to ensure migrants are included in national COVID-19 vaccination programmes, which must offer equitable access for all.

“The pandemic has highlighted how now, more than ever, none of us will be safe until everyone is safe. Global access to COVID-19 vaccines for everyone who needs them is the only solution,” the UN Special Rapporteurs said.

“The prioritisation of vaccines within countries should include all those who qualify under a priority group, regardless of who they are. Migrants should be granted access to vaccines on an equal basis with provisions for nationals.”

Primary country: World

Source: UN Human Rights Council

Format: News and Press Release

Theme:



Where are undocumented people mentioned in the vaccination strategies?

-  **Explicitly include** undocumented people
-  **Explicitly exclude** undocumented people



United Kingdom

The government announced 8 Feb 2021 that all UK residents will have access to the COVID19 vaccine, regardless of status, without immigration checks or charges

“Those registered with a GP are being contacted at the earliest opportunity and we are working closely with partners and external organisations to contact those who are not registered with a GP to ensure they are also offered the vaccine.”

– Government spokesperson

Doctors of the World  @DOTW_UK · Mar 27 ...

Lack of [#vaccine](#) confidence is closely linked with data sharing fears & mistrust.

If the govt is serious about beating [#COVID19](#) then it must remove the [#HostileEnvironment](#) from the NHS & ensure [#VaccinesForAll](#).

Find out what we're seeing in our clinic 



Clinics pop up in London to help low vaccine take-up
Community and faith leaders work with NHS to try to build trust and encourage the reluctant to take jab

theguardian.com

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-

Belgium

- **National vaccine plan:** Inclusive all residents, no distinction based on status
 - Less strict procedures access health care (AMU)
 - Inclusive testing strategies

- **Brussels-Capital-Region:** Explicit inclusion of undocumented people
 - Proactive collaboration with MSF, MdM, Samusocial, Infirmiers de Rue, intercultural mediators
 - Inclusive testing (anonymous if needed)
 - Mobile outreach team – prioritizing groups facing specific vulnerabilities
 - Inclusive day care and emergency shelters
 - Eviction moratorium
 - “Firewall” in place

"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."

- Alain Maron, Brussel Regional Minister of Health

Norway

- Undocumented people have limited access to primary health care
 - Don't have to pay for care related to infections – unclear if this includes COVID-19 vaccines
- Expert Group recommended providing migrants access to COVID-19 testing and treatment



Oslo Health Centre for Undocumented Migrants (Church City Mission/Red Cross)

- Provides health care for undocumented people
- Advocating for better access to health care and more inclusive legislation with other NGOs
- Raised issues affecting undocumented people with national COVID-19 working group
- Working with media to raise attention to the issue

Promising practices in ensuring access

- **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, **simple registration process**
- **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

3 key take-aways

1. The pandemic has **made more visible inequalities that have existed for years** and shown what measures governments are capable of passing when there is sufficient need.
2. Ensuring **access to the vaccine** for undocumented people is a matter of public health, fairness and morality – and must not be seen as a one-off effort but as an **opportunity to improve their health outcomes and access to health care and social protection systems** more generally.
3. The pandemic has underlined the **importance of inter-sectoral collaboration and partnerships between authorities and community-based organisations** that can help to guide efforts to reach groups too often left behind.



***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

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