

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

## **National vaccine deployment**

**Cyprus**

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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.*

The national vaccination plan was presented on 15 December 2020, containing general information on the number of available doses of vaccines within certain periods, with a vague estimate as to the timeline for the vaccination of certain priority groups.<sup>1</sup> Since its first publication the vaccination plan has not been revised. According to the plan, a total of 168,159 vaccine doses would be available in the last quarter of 2020, 273,517 in the first quarter of 2021, 404,681 in the second quarter of 2021, 812,431 in the third quarter of 2021, 751,545 in the fourth quarter of 2021, 267,606 in the first quarter of 2022 and 312,409 in the second quarter of 2022. The order of vaccination priority announced was as follows:

1. Residents and staff of senior people's homes and institutions for chronic adult illnesses.
2. Health care professionals: Workers in hospitals with COVID19 patients, and in all ICU, Accident and Emergency Departments, Ambulance Departments (regardless of COVID hospitalization).
3. People >80 years old (priority in vulnerable groups).
4. People > 75 years old (priority in vulnerable groups).
5. Individuals  $\geq 16$  years of high risk for severe disease, i.e. Chronic Pulmonary Disease, Severe Chronic Renal Impairment, Cardiac failure (of any aetiology), Cardiovascular disease, Recent acute coronary syndrome or revascularisation surgery, active use of biological agents, patients with Class C haemoglobinopathy (based on the Thalassaemia International Federation classification), patients with diabetes mellitus, people with severe obesity BMI  $\geq 40$  or  $\geq 35$  with metabolic syndrome, patients with a history of transplantation of solid organs or stem cells, individuals with hereditary or acquired immunodeficiency

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<sup>1</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2020), '[National Vaccination Plan for COVID 19](#)', 15 December 2020.

6. People working in Primary Healthcare Centres, followed by other health care professionals/ personnel. Residents in other closed structures such as prisons and hosting centres for refugees and migrants.
7. The rest of the population according to age.

According to the vaccination plan, the planned administration of vaccines was as follows:<sup>2</sup>

<b>Specific groups identified in the national vaccine deployment plan</b>	<b>Date of plan</b>	<b>Date of new/revised plans</b>
Senior People's Homes/ Institutions for Chronic adult illnesses  2,294 staff 3,882 residents	January 2021	There were no revised plans. Vaccinations were administered as planned for those who wanted to be vaccinated.
Health Professionals (ICU, Accident and Emergency Departments, Ambulance Departments, Hospital Departments with Covid-19 chambers)  1 ,000 persons	January 2021	There were no revised plans. Vaccinations were administered as planned for those who wanted to be vaccinated.  By the beginning of April, 25% of doctors and 55% of nurses refused to take the vaccine. <sup>3</sup>
Persons > 80 years old 33,530 persons	Vaccination to begin in January 2021 and be completed within the 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter of 2021	There were no revised plans. Vaccinations were administered as planned for those who wanted to be vaccinated.  The portal for making vaccination appointments for persons aged 88+ opened on 27 January; <sup>4</sup> for persons aged 86+ on 29 January; <sup>5</sup> for persons aged 84+ on 1 <sup>st</sup> February, <sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2020), '[Answers to frequently asked questions about vaccines/vaccination against COVID-19 disease](#)', Press release, 15 December 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Politis (2021), '[«Ευθύνη της πολιτείας ο εμβολιασμός γιατρών και νοσηλευτών- Εντυπώσεις» του Ντίνου Θεοδότου](#)', 10 April 2021.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus/uploads/1122021\\_vaccinationsEN.pdf](https://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus/uploads/1122021_vaccinationsEN.pdf) '[Vaccination Portal to be made available to citizens over the age of 88 as of 27 January](#)', Press release, 26 January 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2021), '[Vaccination Portal to be made available to citizens over the age of 86 as of 29 January –New appointments as of 1<sup>st</sup> February](#)', Press release, 28 January 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2021), '[Vaccination appointments for citizens over the age of 84 –7,790 vaccine doses administered during the week of 23-29 January](#)', Press release, 30 January 2021.

		for persons aged 83+ on 3 February <sup>7</sup> and so on and so forth. A percentage in excess of 80% of persons aged 80+ were vaccinated. <sup>8</sup>
Persons >75 years old 27,667 persons	1st quarter of 2021	As above. Persons aged over 79 who wanted to be vaccinated, received the first dose between 9-20 February. <sup>9</sup> For persons aged 76+, the vaccination portal opened on 12 February 2021, with 9,264 available vaccination appointments. <sup>10</sup> For persons aged 74+ the vaccination portal opened on 17 February 2021, with 9,096 available appointments. <sup>11</sup> A percentage in excess of 80% of persons aged 75+ were vaccinated. <sup>12</sup>
Persons >= 16 years of high risk for severe disease	1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2021	As planned. On 10 April the governmental portal for booking vaccination appointments opened for persons belonging to specific vulnerable groups, making available 7,500 appointments for 11 and 12 April. The appointments were given as a matter of priority to 7,200 persons

<sup>7</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2021), [Vaccination Portal to be made available to citizens over the age of 83](#), Press release, 2 February 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Cyprus, Press and Information Office (2021), ['Εντατικοποιούμε ρυθμούς στο εμβολιαστικό πρόγραμμα με αύξηση της δυνατότητας εμβολιασμών, λέει ο Υπουργός Υγείας κ. Κωνσταντίνος Ιωάννου'](#), 1 May 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2021), [Third phase of the National Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 begins with appointments made available for people over the age of 79'](#), Press release, 9 February 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2021), ['9,264 Vaccination appointments made available for people over the age of 76'](#), Press release, 11 February 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2021), ['National Vaccination Plan for COVID-19: 9.096 appointments for persons aged 74 and over'](#), Press release, 16 February 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Cyprus, Press and Information Office (2021), ['Εντατικοποιούμε ρυθμούς στο εμβολιαστικό πρόγραμμα με αύξηση της δυνατότητας εμβολιασμών, λέει ο Υπουργός Υγείας κ. Κωνσταντίνος Ιωάννου'](#), 1 May 2021.

		<p>registered in the National Health System known as GESY, who were prioritised in accordance with criteria determined by the Advisory Scientific Committee and the ad hoc Committee for the prioritisation of the vulnerable groups. A database was created with the names of these patients, through the assistance of the Pancyprian Doctors' Association and the Federation of Patients' Associations. The priority list is as follows regardless of age:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Severe Chronic Respiratory Disease</li> <li>- Severe Chronic Renal Disease</li> <li>- Severe Cardiac failure</li> <li>- Severe Cardiovascular Disease</li> <li>- Congenital heart disease following surgical correction with significant residual damage or uncorrected congenital heart disease with significant residual damage.</li> <li>- Patients with hemoglobinopathy.</li> <li>- Patients with a history of transplantation</li> <li>- Patients with immunodeficiencies, oncological cases and haematological malignancies</li> <li>- Patients with quadriplegia – neurological diseases with pulmonary problems</li> <li>- Individuals with Down Syndrome</li> <li>- Patients receiving biological agents, who have been approved upon a request to the Pharmaceutical Services</li> </ul> <p>Persons falling under one of the above categories but not registered in the National Health System (GESY) could also be vaccinated as a matter of priority subject to confirmation by their doctors and</p>
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		<p>after sending an email to a special address of the Ministry of Health.<sup>13</sup></p> <p>By 9 April, the first dose was administered to 10,318 people belonging to vulnerable groups and to 654 bed-ridden persons.</p> <p>For persons with Diabetes Mellitus and Severe Obesity irrespective of age., the vaccination portal opened on 29 March. Between 29 March and 1 April, 19,246 appointments were made available to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Type I Diabetes Mellitus and Type II Diabetes Mellitus, who take insulin;</li> <li>- Diabetes Mellitus and macrovascular and/or microvascular complications (Coronary Artery Disease, Peripheral Angiopathy, Chronic Renal Disease, Vascular Stroke, Carotid Artery Disease, Retinopathy), and</li> <li>- Severe Obesity (individuals with BMI&gt;40, or BMI&gt;= 35 and metabolic syndrome).<sup>14</sup></li> </ul>
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### *Persons with disabilities*

Persons with disabilities were not deemed to be a vulnerable category unless they were institutionalised or they met any of the criteria set by the Ministry of Health. Persons with tetraplegia were the only category of persons with a condition meeting the legal definition of disability, which were included in the vulnerable groups and therefore prioritised for vaccination.<sup>15</sup> The Committee for Persons with Mental Disabilities sent a letter to the authorities requesting that persons with

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<sup>13</sup> Cyprus Ministry of Health (2021), '[The vaccination portal opens on Sunday for individuals belonging to specific vulnerable groups](#)', Press release, 10 April 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Cyprus Ministry of Health (2021), '[Over 19,000 appointments for individuals with Diabetes Mellitus and Severe Obesity –Simplified appointment procedure for vaccination against COVID-19](#)', Press release, 28 March 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Cyprus, Press and Information Office (2021), '[Ανοίγει αύριο η Πύλη Εμβολιασμού κατά της COVID-19 για άτομα που εμπίπτουν σε συγκεκριμένες ευπαθείς ομάδες](#)', Press release, 10 April 2021.

mental disabilities be prioritised alongside the other vulnerable groups, but there was no response.<sup>16</sup> The Cyprus Confederation of Disability Organisations did not request prioritisation of persons with disabilities, as the Board did not reach a decision on whether they should encourage their members to be vaccinated.<sup>17</sup>

Other than persons with tetraplegia, who were prioritised as vulnerable group, the vaccination appointments for persons with disabilities are made when their age group is called, like all other persons. The portal is not accessible to blind persons, due to the extensive use of the mouse which is needed in order to insert data; blind persons can only make an appointment assisted by another person with digital skills.<sup>18</sup>

### *Bedridden persons*

Bedridden persons were vaccinated in April 2021 through a special program of home visits around the country. By 12 April 2021, 695 bedridden persons received the first dose of the vaccine. On 13 April 2021, the government announced that all requests for home vaccinations of bedridden patients must be submitted by 16 April, upon which the program would terminate.<sup>19</sup>

### *Other groups in vulnerable situations*

Persons belonging to minorities, experiencing homelessness, with a drug addiction or low literacy were not prioritised or supported in making a vaccination appointment; they have to register for a vaccination appointment with their age group like other population groups.

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

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

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<sup>16</sup> Consultation with officer of the Committee for Persons with Mental Disabilities, 4 May 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Consultation with the Confederation of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (KYSOA), 4 May 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Consultation with the Confederation of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (KYSOA), 4 May 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Cyprus Ministry of Health (2021), '[Requests for the COVID-19 home vaccination of bedridden individuals end on 16 April](#)', Press release, 13 April 2021.



- *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).*

There were no changes in the priority groups since the vaccination plan was announced.

The categories of vulnerable individuals were compiled in order to prioritise identified individuals with diseases who have an increased risk of serious illness.<sup>20</sup> Priority for vaccination was given to 7,200 patients, registered with the General Health System who were identified as vulnerable on the basis of scientific criteria set by the Scientific Advisory Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee for the prioritization of vulnerable groups. For the preparation of the registers of vulnerable individuals, the government sought and secured the collaboration of scientific companies, the Cyprus Medical Association and the Cypriot Federation of Patients Associations. The register also included persons for whom requests by their specialized doctors were submitted before and after the deadline. Those who did not meet the deadline set by the government could be vaccinated outside the priority program, based on their age.<sup>21</sup> No priority was given to persons with social vulnerabilities.

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

*For each of the subsequent questions (2.1 and 2.2) 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?*

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<sup>20</sup> Cyprus Ministry of Health (2021), '[Over 19,000 appointments for individuals with Diabetes Mellitus and Severe Obesity –Simplified appointment procedure for vaccination against COVID-19](#)', Press release, 28 March 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Cyprus Press and Information Office (2021), '[The vaccination portal opens on Sunday for individuals belonging to specific vulnerable groups](#)', Press release 10 April 2021.

## 2.1 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.?

A government portal was set up by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, the Department of Information Technology Services, the Health Insurance Organisation and the digital systems company NCR.<sup>22</sup> The portal opens at specific days and times announced in the daily press, usually with two to three days' notice, enabling the registration of specified population groups for a vaccination personal appointment. Once inside the portal, the person can choose the city, venue, date and time for the vaccination, as well as the type of vaccine, provided the preferred choice is available.<sup>23</sup> Often, there is an overload of persons trying to book a vaccination appointment when the portal opens, that the system collapses within minutes and cannot be restored for the remainder of the day. This has caused several people to miss their chance to register because the portal remained closed during the day(s) set for their age group and had to wait until the next government announcement for their age group, which could be days or weeks later. The software can allow or block the programming of an appointment if an appointment is sought for a person whose age group is not under the plan at the specific time. People can make appointments for themselves or for their parents or for other persons who do not use the internet.<sup>24</sup> People who register on the portal for a vaccination appointment will in most cases receive a text message via SMS or an email. It sometimes happens that neither is received, in which case the individuals concerned are urged to call the help centre of the National Health System for oral confirmation of their appointment. At the end of March, the vaccination portal was upgraded, rendering the procedure of booking a vaccination appointment simpler and more user-friendly.<sup>25</sup> In response to several problems which continued to be encountered by members of the public in their efforts to book a vaccination appointment, the vaccination portal will be further upgraded on 5 May, by enabling the booking for the appointment through a representative, who will be deemed as

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<sup>22</sup> For more details, see the portal [here](#).

<sup>23</sup> The manual for use of the vaccination portal is available [here](#).

<sup>24</sup> Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2020), '[The National Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 was presented](#)', Press release, 15 December 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Cyprus Ministry of Health (2021), '[Over 19,000 appointments for individuals with Diabetes Mellitus and Severe Obesity –Simplified appointment procedure for vaccination against COVID-19](#)', Press release, 28 March 2021.

duly appointed if he or she is in possession of the personal details of the person who seeks a vaccination appointment.<sup>26</sup>

The portal and the process of booking a vaccination appointment is available only in Greek and English.<sup>27</sup> Information about the vaccination plan, the application process for registration on the vaccination portal and the document for registration of persons who are not registered on the national health system is also available in French, Arabic and Somali,<sup>28</sup> however one would need to read English to be able to locate it in the portal. Translation and assistance for asylum seekers and persons with international protection is provided by UNHCR<sup>29</sup> and its implementing partner, the Cyprus Refugee Council.<sup>30</sup>

No special arrangements were made to enable persons with disabilities to book their vaccination appointment. There is no easy to read material and the portal is not accessible to persons with mental disabilities<sup>31</sup> or with visual disabilities, as extensive use of the mouse is needed in order to make an appointment.<sup>32</sup> To book a vaccination appointment, they have to be either by friends or relatives or by their representative organisations. No government service was set up to provide support, other than a helpline which can only guide the person navigate the portal.

- 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 no alternatives to digital access to vaccine registration or any support to those who need it. Persons without access to the internet or without digital skills must have their appointment booked by someone else, like a family member or a health professional who might volunteer to book the on-line appointment on their behalf.

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<sup>26</sup> Cyprus Press and Information Office (2021), '[Changes in the process of arranging appointments through the COVID-19 Vaccination Portal as of Thursday 6/5/2021](#)', Press release, 4 May 2021.

<sup>27</sup> For more details, see the portal [here](#).

<sup>28</sup> The announcements in French, Arabic and Somali are listed [here](#).

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR (2021), '[COVID-19 Vaccinations in Cyprus](#)'.

<sup>30</sup> Cyprus Refugee Council (2021), '[Information on COVID-19 National Vaccination Plan Cyprus](#)', 3 March 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Consultation with officer of the Committee for Persons with Mental Disabilities, 4 May 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Consultation with the Confederation of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (KYSOA), 4 May 2021.

In late April the Ministry of Health invited doctors enlisted in the General Health System GESY to perform vaccinations of persons aged 30+ at their premises by appointment with the AstraZeneca vaccine.<sup>33</sup> The measure was also intended to utilise the undisposed surplus of the AstraZeneca vaccine before its expiration date, as many persons were reluctant to receive it due to the risk of blood clots. About 200 doctors responded to the invitation and immediately commenced vaccinations at their premises. Appointments for these vaccinations can be made by contacting the interested person's personal doctor at the doctor's clinic, without using the on-line portal.<sup>34</sup>

Groups who are not registered in the General Healthcare System GESY can fill out a form with their personal details and send it to the Ministry of Health by email or by post or deliver it by hand. Following a validity check, the Ministry of Health will activate the applicant's possibility to register on the on-line Vaccinations Portal and book their vaccination appointment on-line.<sup>35</sup> They will not be entitled to book an appointment off line.

## 2.2 How are the vaccinations administered?

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

As a rule, vaccinations are administered in vaccinations centres operating in several venues throughout the country, following a personal appointment made on-line on the government's vaccination portal. Since late April, 200 doctors are vaccinating their patients aged 30+ with the AstraZeneca vaccine in their own clinics following appointment.<sup>36</sup> Mobile units are used in special circumstances, like bedridden persons and persons deprived of their liberty like in the Central Prisons.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cyprus Press and information office (2021), '[Χορήγηση από τους Προσωπικούς Ιατρούς του εμβολίου της AstraZeneca σε δικαιούχους ηλικίας 30 ετών και άνω](#)', 22 April 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Panayi, M. (2021), '[Εμβολιασμοί και το απόγευμα από ιδιώτες γιατρούς](#)', *Phileleftheros*, 30 April 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Health (2021), '[Application process for the registration to Covid-19 Vaccinations' Portal of citizens who are not GHS beneficiaries](#)', Press release, 4 January 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Panayi, M. (2021), '[Εμβολιασμοί και το απόγευμα από ιδιώτες γιατρούς](#)', *Phileleftheros*, 30 April 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Cyprus Press and Information Office (2021), '[Συνέντευξη Τύπου για το θέμα του εμβολιασμού](#)', Press release, 16 April 2021.

The manager of the Kofinou reception camp for asylum seekers and refugees had proposed that a mobile vaccination unit be stationed in the camp, however there was no information campaign targeting the camp residents and very little interest was expressed for vaccination, which led to the mobile unit proposal to be dropped.<sup>38</sup> No vaccination plan was put into place regarding the residents of the overcrowded Pournara camp in Kokkinotrimithia for asylum seekers or for the third country detainees of the Menoyia prison who are awaiting deportation.<sup>39</sup>

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

There are frequent announcements posted on the special coronavirus portal of the government's Press and Information office in both Greek and English, although one would have to check on line regularly all the announcements in order to spot those concerning the vaccination process.<sup>40</sup> The vaccination portal provides information about the process and potential side effects, however people would need to enter the portal with their user name and code in order to access such information; it is not readily available on the home page.<sup>41</sup> On the date of the vaccination appointment, persons to be vaccinated are handed a leaflet at the vaccination centre with information on potential side effects and instructions on how to address them.

- 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 were charged for vaccination. The 200 doctors who agreed to administer the AstraZeneka vaccine to their patients aged 30+ are compensated by the state. Doctors who join this scheme are doing so voluntarily and are compensated by the state with the fee of €10 per vaccination. The association of private doctors enlisted in the National Health System GESY expressed its objection to the Health Ministry's decision, which was taken without consultation and which places additional burdens on the doctors for a negligible fee, on top of the burden of having to make vaccination appointments for their patients on the governmental on-line vaccination portal. The doctors' association

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<sup>38</sup> Consultation with the Cyprus Refugee Council, 4 May 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Consultation with the Cyprus Refugee Council, 4 May 2021.

<sup>40</sup> The Press and Information Office portal on coronavirus is available in English [here](#). The Greek portal is available here

<sup>41</sup> The vaccination portal is available [here](#).

stated that this move was an indirect admission of the government for the failure of the on-line portal which often becomes overloaded and collapses.<sup>42</sup>

## 3 Challenges and promising practices

### 3.1 Challenges

#### *Persons not registered on the general health scheme (Gesy)*

Persons not registered on the national health system reported difficulties while trying to book vaccination appointments, despite procedures in place, complaining of lengthy application procedures and the lack of choice over vaccines: they were forced to choose between AstraZeneca or nothing. Persons registered on the national health system can access the vaccination portal online on the days corresponding to their age group, where they are normally given a choice between available vaccines, with AstraZeneca remaining the most unpopular choice, as thousands of appointment slots remained unclaimed every time the portal opened. Despite official announcements from January that vaccinations would be available for those not registered on the national health system, the process of securing an appointment involves the filling out of a form and waiting for a call to arrange their appointment, where they are only given the AstraZeneca option, even if they have a special condition putting them at risk of blood clot. People reported delays of nearly three months from submitting their form until they get a vaccination appointment, which left vulnerable individuals exposed to the virus for longer. EU and British nationals residing in Cyprus called the practice “a blatant discrimination and injustice”, stating that it is “creating a two-class system in order to force more AstraZeneca vaccinations onto the population”.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Migrant, refugees and asylum seekers*

Although the Ministry of Health is making vaccinations against Covid-19 available for everyone in the country regardless of status, this policy could not be implemented widely due to challenges in locating and communicating with migrant populations. The Reception Centre in Kofinou reported that the Ministry of Health offered to provide vaccinations to residents on spot but the interest was so low

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<sup>42</sup> Dialogos (2021), [‘Δίνουν €10 «κίνητρο» στους ΠΙ ανά εμβολιασμό – «Αποφασίζουν και διατάζουν» λένε οι γιατροί](#)’, 23 April 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Pitta, A. (2021), [‘We’re second-class citizens, say non-Gesy members’](#), Cyprus Mail, 25 April 2021.

that the plan was abandoned. The restrictions relating to COVID-19 and the closure of the two reception camps by the authorities has left the camp population without access to NGOs and cultural mediators who could inform the camp residents of the vaccine and assure them of the safety of the process. No information campaign was carried out targeting these groups, who are essentially left to their own devices in collecting information of questionable scientific validity from the internet and from each other.<sup>44</sup>

### *Vaccinations to Turkish Cypriots and the continued prohibition of movement across the country*

In January, the government delivered 1,080 1,080 Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine doses to the Turkish controlled north of the country for the vaccination of Turkish Cypriots residing there. The second doses would be stored and delivered next month as there is no vehicle available to transport the vaccines at the very low temperature they need to be stored. By April, the government had supplied the Turkish controlled north with 20,000 AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines.<sup>45</sup> The Turkish Cypriot authorities announced that they had requested 400,000 doses but there has no clear response as to the final number that will be delivered, adding that they were also expecting another 500,000 vaccines from Turkey. The north is primarily using the Chinese vaccine Sinovac supplied through Turkey which has not as yet been approved by the EU.<sup>46</sup> This development puts under question the re-opening of the checkpoints along the Green Line, separating north from south, which remained shut since the beginning of the pandemic, amongst fears that the government might seek to justify the continued prohibition of movement across the Green Line on the basis that the vaccine used is not EU approved.<sup>47</sup>

### *Persons with disabilities*

The lack of accessibility features of the on-line appointment process has prevented several persons with disabilities from booking their appointment for vaccination on the dates that their age group is called. This is especially the case for blind persons who are unable to make an appointment for themselves unless they find a person to perform the on-line process for them. This means that they lose their

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<sup>44</sup> Consultation with the Cyprus Refugee Council, 4 April 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Offsite (2021), '[Παίρνει και από ΚΑ και από Τουρκία εμβόλια ο Τατάρ](#)', 04 April 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Financial Mirror (2021), '[COVID19: Republic delivers first 1,000 vaccines to Turkish Cypriots](#)', 18 January 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Consultation with Coordinator of the Bi-communal Peace Initiative United Cyprus, 4 May 2021.

turn and have to wait for days or weeks until their age group is called again to register for an appointment, in which the same process of exclusion may possibly be repeated.<sup>48</sup>

No accessible information material was made available for persons with mental or physical disabilities about vaccination. Seminars were offered by the government to the staff of institutions accommodating persons with disabilities but not to the persons with disabilities themselves. The seminars were described as low quality.<sup>49</sup> In light of this lack of information about the safety of vaccines to persons with health conditions, the board of the confederation of disability organisations could not agree on promoting and recommending vaccination to its members.<sup>50</sup>

The Confederation of disability organisations reported issues with the accessibility of vaccination centres, whilst only one vaccination centre can administer the vaccine outside its building, in order to facilitate persons with disabilities who are encountering barriers in leaving their cars. The particular vaccination centre is only administering the AstraZeneca vaccine which many persons with disabilities are reluctant to take due to the blood clot risks. At the same time, the AstraZeneca is the only vaccine that can be administered to persons with disabilities without leaving their cars, as it is the only vaccine that does not require freezing in -70 degrees temperatures.<sup>51</sup>

### **3.2 Promising practices**

UNHCR and the Cyprus Refugee Council have been translating information provided by the Ministry of Health as well as other credible sources and sharing on social media.<sup>52</sup> UNHCR has also provided their Refugee Outreach Volunteers with information on the above procedures as well as WHO advice and asked them to disseminate among their contacts encouraging them to advise on the safety and efficacy of the vaccines, citing WHO sources. The Cyprus Refugee Council, Caritas Cyprus and the Dignity Centre have been contacting persons in the migrant communities informing them of ways to access vaccinations and to inform others. Photographs of community leaders, volunteers and influencers taking the vaccine

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<sup>48</sup> Consultation with Confederation of Disability Organisations KYSOA, 4 May 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Consultation with Confederation of Disability Organisations KYSOA, 4 May 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Consultation with Confederation of Disability Organisations KYSOA, 4 May 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Consultation with Confederation of Disability Organisations KYSOA, 4 May 2021.

<sup>52</sup> See the UNHCR webpage [here](#).



are posted on social media to encourage vaccinations and disperse fears from misinformation regarding the safety of the vaccinations.<sup>53</sup>

UNHCR and the Cyprus Refugee Council are also providing logistical support to migrant populations in registering for their vaccination appointment. International protection holders and migrants that have access to medical care via the national health system GESY can access vaccinations by registering on the online GESY portal, alternatively they can book a vaccination appointment through their Personal Doctor. A very low number has shown interest in getting vaccinated, but for those who have shown an interest and have raised obstacles in registering online due to language barriers (the portal is available in English and Greek) as well as lack of computer skills to navigate the portal, the Cyprus Refugee Council Caritas Cyprus, Dignity Centre are offering support. In communication with the Ministry of Health, the NGOs are offering to fill and submit the application and to act as intermediates between Ministry of Health and applicants. The Ministry of Health responded positively and recommended, instead of completing individual applications for each applicant, to draft a list of all persons with the required details (name/surname, date of birth, alien registration number and telephone number) and submit the list to the Ministry who will then contact the individuals listed for their appointment.<sup>54</sup>

For asylum seekers, victims of trafficking and undocumented who do not have access to the national health system the Ministry of Health has provided a procedure which requires completing a single-page application, available in English and Greek and submitting to the Ministry of Health which then provides appointments for the vaccinations. In the absence of a targeted information campaign, however, interest on behalf of these groups remains low.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Consultation with the Cyprus Refugee Council, 4 April 2021.

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