

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

## **National vaccine deployment**

**Estonia**

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**Contractor: Estonian Human Rights Centre**

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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                                                                                                    | Date of new/revised plans                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>older persons; indicate age groups specified</i>                | <p>19 January 2021</p> <p><a href="#"><u>COVID-19 vaktsineerimise plaan</u></a> (COVID-19 vaccination plan)</p> | <p>20 April 2021</p> <p><a href="#"><u>COVID-19 vaktsineerimise plaan aprill – juuni 2021</u></a> (COVID-19 vaccination plan April – June 2021)</p> <p>No change</p> |

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
|                                                       | <p>high risk of severe case of COVID-19;</p> <p>6) People in the age group 16-49 who have a disease or condition that puts them at high risk of severe case of COVID-19.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                  |
| <p><i>persons with underlying health problems</i></p> | <p><b>YES</b></p> <p><b>The following diseases or conditions are considered to be very high risk:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organ or bone marrow transplantation (performed up to 2 years ago);</li> <li>• primary immunodeficiency;</li> <li>• malignancies of the lymphoid and haematopoietic tissues (diagnosed up to 5 years ago),<br/>or<br/>other tumors (diagnosed up to 1 year ago);</li> <li>• cystic fibrosis;</li> <li>• kidney failure;</li> <li>• demyelinating diseases of the central nervous system; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dementia;</li> <li>• Parkinson's disease;</li> </ul> </li> <li>• amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stroke in the last year and residual signs of the stroke;</li> </ul> </li> <li>• people with haematological, rheumatological, gastroenterological, neurological diseases who have received immunosuppressive therapy in the last 5 years.</li> </ul> <p><b>The following diseases or conditions are considered high risk:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diabetes;</li> <li>• cardiovascular diseases; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• chronic bronchitis;</li> <li>• emphysema;</li> <li>• COPD;</li> </ul> </li> <li>• severe asthma (oral corticosteroid treatment in the last 5 years, biological treatment);</li> </ul> | <p>No change</p> |

|                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bronchiectasis;</li> <li>• obesity (BMI <math>\geq</math>40).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                              |
| <i>persons with disabilities</i>                                                                                                                 | <b>NO</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | No change                                                                                                                    |
| <i>key workers (on the basis of their job not their personal characteristics) – e.g. health workers; persons working in care homes; teachers</i> | <b>YES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frontline workers with a higher risk of infection (health workers and persons working in social welfare institutions as the highest priority groups among them)</li> <li>• Providers of vital services (within the meaning of the Emergency Act)<sup>1</sup></li> </ul> | No change, but the principles for prioritising frontline workers and vital service providers were specified (outlined below) |
| <i>persons belonging to ethnic/national minorities</i>                                                                                           | <b>NO</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | No change                                                                                                                    |
| <i>persons experiencing homelessness</i>                                                                                                         | <b>NO</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | No change                                                                                                                    |
| <i>persons with drug addiction dependencies</i>                                                                                                  | <b>NO</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | No change                                                                                                                    |
| <i>persons with low literacy levels</i>                                                                                                          | <b>NO</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | No change                                                                                                                    |
| <i>persons deprived of their liberty</i>                                                                                                         | <b>NO</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | No change                                                                                                                    |
| <i>persons without residence or with insecure legal status (such as refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants)</i>                     | <b>NO</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | No change                                                                                                                    |
| <b><i>OTHER – not specified above; e.g. ‘Persons living in crowded accommodation’; etc. Please insert . . .</i></b>                              | <b>NO</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Caregivers or relatives of the risk groups (at the discretion of the family doctor)                                          |

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

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

No major changes with regard to priority groups were introduced, the main difference of the new plan is that it includes updates about the vaccination progress and the vaccinated population. However, one new group was added – caregivers or relatives of the risk groups – who may also be vaccinated at the discretion of the family doctor, especially if the person at risk cannot be vaccinated

<sup>1</sup> Estonia, Riigi Teataja, [Emergency Act \(Hädaolukorra seadus\)](#), § 36, 8 February 2017.

due to health condition.<sup>2</sup> This addition resulted from the suggestion of the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People (*Eesti Puuetega Inimeste Koda*).<sup>3</sup>

The new plan also clarifies the principles for prioritising frontline workers and vital service providers. According to the plan, the following aspects are taken into account:

- continuity of services critical to the functioning of society;
- the service has no alternative;
- exposure to risk groups;
- high risk of infection and likelihood of developing large clusters;
- very frequent contact with many people;
- lack of remote work opportunities;
- study, traineeship or regular contract work in a health or social care institution.<sup>4</sup>

The Emergency Act (*Hädaolukorra seadus*) defines vital services which are critical to the functioning of society. The following services are listed in the act:

- electricity supply;
- natural gas supply;
- liquid fuel supply;
- ensuring the operability of roads;
- phone service;
- mobile phone service;
- data transmission service;
- digital identification and digital signing;
- emergency care;
- payment services;
- cash circulation;
- district heating;

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<sup>2</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), [COVID-19 vaksineerimise plaan aprill – juuni 2021](#), p. 4, 20 April 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Estonian Chamber of Disabled People (*Eesti Puuetega Inimeste Koda*), Response to information request, 8 April 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), [COVID-19 vaksineerimise plaan aprill – juuni 2021](#), p. 4, 20 April 2021.

- water supply and sewerage.<sup>5</sup>

The plans are relatively general and do not reflect changes occurring on a more detailed level. For example, the vaccination schedule was changed due to the confusion around possible side effects of AstraZeneca vaccine., Initially the Estonian expert committee on immunoprophylaxis recommended that AstraZeneca only be used to vaccinate people under the age of 70. This decision changed the vaccination schedule so that more frontline workers, such as teachers and social workers, and vital service providers, such as energy and telecommunications workers, were vaccinated from mid-February.<sup>6</sup> After the initial reports on issues with blood clots, this recommendation was later reversed and the expert committee instead recommended to use AstraZeneca vaccine primarily for people over 60 years of age.<sup>7</sup>

- *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).*

According to the vaccination plan, the first objective of the vaccination deployment is to protect the most vulnerable Estonian residents, i.e. risk groups who are more likely to be infected than others (e.g. health care workers) or whose infection may take a more severe course (e.g. elderly people). After a critical part of these target groups have been given the opportunity to be vaccinated, then vaccination of the representatives of the most important areas for the functioning of society is also prioritised.<sup>8</sup>

The Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), in co-operation with other ministries, mapped the vaccination needs of frontline employees and providers of vital services critical to the functioning of society from December 2020 to February 2021, and submitted corresponding proposals to the government. By the decision of the government, the Government Office (*Riigikantselei*), in co-operation with the responsible ministries, took over the coordination and management of the lists. Detailed lists of the providers of vital services and frontline employees are

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<sup>5</sup> Estonia, Riigi Teataja, [Emergency Act \(Hädaolukorra seadus\)](#), § 36, 8 February 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Jaakson, T. (2021), [Veebruari keskpaigast alustatakse eesliinitöötajate vaktsineerimisega](#), ERR, 4 February 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), [Expert committee on immunoprophylaxis recommends reserving AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine primarily for people over 60 years of age in coming weeks](#), 19 March 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), [COVID-19 vaktsineerimise plaan](#), 19 January 2021.

not publicly available, however, for example, internal security (police and rescue workers) and school staff were among the priorities.<sup>9</sup>

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

In **Estonia**, communication regarding COVID-19 vaccination is coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs in cooperation with its government agencies, including the Health Board (*Terviseamet*) and the Estonian Health Insurance Fund (*Haigekassa*).<sup>10</sup> Official information related to COVID-19 vaccination is available on the [vaktsineeri.ee](http://vaktsineeri.ee) website in Estonian, Russian and English.<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Health Board also launched a social campaign “*Kohe julgem!*”, which calls the Estonian people to vaccinate against COVID-19 as soon as possible. In the campaign, vaccinated doctors, teachers, police and other frontline staff, as well as people in risk groups invite others to get vaccinated. The

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<sup>9</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), Response to information request, 7 May 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), [COVID-19 vaktsineerimise plaan aprill – juuni 2021](#), 20 April 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website [vaktsineeri.ee](http://vaktsineeri.ee).



campaign is in the form of posters and videos, published online, on TV and in public spaces. The campaign material is in Estonian and Russian.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, the Health Board and the Ministry of Social Affairs sent out leaflets with COVID-19 vaccination information to all private residences in Estonia, printed in Estonian and Russian languages. The leaflets contain information about the process of vaccinating against COVID-19, as well as details about the various vaccines. The leaflets also include contact details for obtaining additional information.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the public awareness raising, risk groups are informed of the vaccination opportunities by their family doctors, and other target groups by their employers, in accordance with the vaccination plan.<sup>14</sup>

According to the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People (*Eesti Puuetega Inimeste Koda*), when it comes to access to information related to COVID-19 vaccination for persons with disabilities, sign language translation has mostly been ensured, but subtitles are lacking for vaccination information on TV and online. People with intellectual disabilities are in a particularly difficult situation because clear information in simple language about COVID-19 vaccines has not been available. The same problem is faced by some people with mental disorders, such as people with autism spectrum disorders who need predictability, clear information and a sense of security for daily coping. According to the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People, Russian-speaking people with disabilities are especially vulnerable and confused.<sup>15</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.?

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<sup>12</sup> Delfi (2021), [Riik alustas COVID-19 vaktsineerimise ja ohutu käitumise kampaaniat](#), 16 March 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [A total of 670,000 homes will receive leaflets which cover vaccination against COVID-19](#), 30 March 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), [COVID-19 vaktsineerimise plaan](#), 20 April 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Estonian Chamber of Disabled People (*Eesti Puuetega Inimeste Koda*), Response to information request, 8 April 2021.

In **Estonia**, people in risk groups are notified by their family doctor of an opportunity to get vaccinated. As of 22 March 2020, risk groups also receive a notification about vaccination upon logging into the online Patient Portal ([digilugu.ee](http://digilugu.ee)), where they can also register for vaccination. Relevant information is also shared through general media channels and the official vaccination website [vaktsineeri.ee](http://vaktsineeri.ee), in which case registration is also possible by phone, at the number indicated in the notification information. Frontline workers and providers of vital services are notified of an opportunity to get vaccinated by their employer.<sup>16</sup>

People who do not have a family doctor can contact the Health Board for information about vaccination opportunities, the exact contact details (phone numbers and email addresses) are outlined under Frequently Asked Questions section of the government's official COVID-19 crisis website.<sup>17</sup> It is also possible to receive information from the state helpline 1247, created especially for COVID-19 related questions.<sup>18</sup>

- 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?

Registration for vaccination of risk groups takes place primarily through their family doctors.<sup>19</sup> In case of mass vaccinations, the notifications published in general information channels have included phone numbers for registration, in Estonian and in Russian.<sup>20</sup> Some vaccination locations also accept people without pre-registration.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [Getting a vaccination](#).

<sup>17</sup> Estonia, Government of the Republic (*Vabariigi Valitsus*), COVID-19 vaccination, [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

<sup>18</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website [vaktsineeri.ee](http://vaktsineeri.ee).

<sup>19</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [Getting a vaccination](#).

<sup>20</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [Two vaccination centres will be opened in Tallinn for the weekend](#), 31 March 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [Lääne-Harju valla elanikke oodatakse Paldiskisse vaktsineerima](#), 30 April 2020

## 2.3 How are the vaccinations administered?

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

In **Estonia**, vaccination for risk groups is generally available at their family doctor's practice. In addition, the Estonian Health Insurance Fund has entered into agreements with specific health care providers, which carry out vaccinations at the workplaces of frontline workers and providers of vital services, or at places temporarily adapted for vaccination, in case of large-scale vaccinations.<sup>22</sup> Different hospitals also offer vaccination appointments, which are published on the official vaccination website [vaktsineeri.ee](http://vaktsineeri.ee).<sup>23</sup>

For the weekend of 2-4 April 2021, two vaccination centres were opened in Tallinn for mass vaccination of people over the age of 65.<sup>24</sup> On 27 April 2021, a vaccination centre opened in Tartu.<sup>25</sup> According to the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People (*Eesti Puuetega Inimeste Koda*), these venues have been made accessible for persons with disabilities.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, vaccination days are organised in areas with lower vaccination coverage. For example, on 7 May 2021, vaccination takes place at Paldiski Russian Basic School, where all people aged 50 and over living in Lääne-Harju municipality are expected. The local government also offers the possibility of transport, which can be ordered by phone.<sup>27</sup>

As of April 2021, it is possible to vaccinate people in their own homes, if they are unable to leave the house for health reasons. These vaccinations are carried out

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<sup>22</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), [COVID-19 vaktsineerimise plaan](#), p. 8, 20 April 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [West Tallinn Central Hospital is inviting people to get vaccinated](#), 23 April 2020; Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [Viljandi Hospital is inviting all people who belong to a risk group to get vaccinated](#), 23 April 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [Two vaccination centres will be opened in Tallinn for the weekend](#), 31 March 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [Tartu vaccination centre will open its doors on April 27](#), 23 April 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Estonian Chamber of Disabled People (*Eesti Puuetega Inimeste Koda*), Response to information request, 8 April 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [Lääne-Harju valla elanikke oodatakse Paldiskisse vaktsineerima](#), 30 April 2020

by home nurses, who can also vaccinate the carers and household members of the risk group person.<sup>28</sup>

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

According to the national vaccination plan, before starting vaccination, the doctor performing the vaccination will identify any contraindications to immunisation, explain the need for vaccination, inform about any side effects that may occur with immunisation and what to do if they occur, and help to find answers to other questions that the person to be vaccinated may have.<sup>29</sup> According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, each person to be vaccinated is also provided with a leaflet about the used vaccine, issued to the vaccinators by the Health Board.<sup>30</sup>

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

According to the decision of the Government of the Republic, COVID-19 vaccinations will be free for all Estonian residents, including persons not covered by health insurance, and foreign nationals living and/or working in Estonia, until the end of 2021.<sup>31</sup>

## 3 Challenges and promising practices

### 3.1 Challenges

- 1) Disproportionately low coverage among Russian-speaking population

In **Estonia**, significantly lower level of vaccination has been recorded among the Russian-speaking population. In case of both doctors and police officers, the majority of those who refuse the vaccine are Russian-speaking workers.<sup>32</sup> According to a survey conducted in the beginning of February 2021, non-Estonians

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<sup>28</sup> Estonia, Government of the Republic (*Vabariigi Valitsus*), [Vaccination plan and risk groups](#).

<sup>29</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), [COVID-19 vaktsineerimise plaan](#), p. 12, 20 April 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Estonia, Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), Response to information request, 7 May 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Estonia, Government of the Republic (*Vabariigi Valitsus*), [Vaccination plan and risk groups](#).

<sup>32</sup> Õhtuleht (2021), [Jevgeni Ossinovski: Sputnik ei ole venekeelsete jaoks teema](#), 7 April 2021.

were less willing to vaccinate themselves than Estonians – 69% of Estonians and 47% of non-Estonians stated that they would definitely or more likely plan to vaccinate themselves.<sup>33</sup>

According to one of the most common explanations, the reason for the difference is that the Russian-speaking population would prefer to be vaccinated with the Russian Sputnik vaccine, which is not used in Estonia. However, there is no reliable data to confirm this speculation.<sup>34</sup>

## 2) Vaccinating persons outside the target groups

In **Estonia**, MP Jevgeni Ossinovski has criticised the implementation of national COVID-19 vaccination plan for the failure to protect the most vulnerable. Although Estonia ranks high in the EU in terms of the overall vaccination rate, it was among the last in terms of vaccinating elderly people in the age group 80+ in March.<sup>35</sup>

During the mass vaccination in Tallinn in the beginning of April, there were many reports of people under the age of 65 who do not belong to any risk group also receiving COVID-19 vaccine. According to the responsible health care provider, their staff did indeed vaccinate younger people who were interested, because of the opportunity to get extra doses from each vial of vaccine, and since not enough interested older people showed up.<sup>36</sup>

The same has been confirmed by family doctors – if a risk group patient has not shown up to an appointment, but the vaccine has already been prepared, the dose can be offered to another person who has volunteered to show up on a short notice and may not be in the risk group. The Minister of Health and Labour Tanel Kiik commented that vaccinating persons outside the risk groups is not right, but at the same time, the extent of the problem cannot be considered significant based on statistics.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Starapopov, R., Parksepp, A. (2021), [Eesti venelastel on süsteemse ebavõrdsuse tõttu suurem koroonaoht](#), *Eesti Päevaleht*, 4 March 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Õhtuleht (2021), [Jevgeni Ossinovski: Sputnik ei ole venekeelsete jaoks teema](#), 7 April 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Ossinovski, J. (2021), [Jevgeni Ossinovski: miks oleme jätnud kõige nõrgemad piisava kaitseta?](#) *ERR*, 30 March 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Lind, M. A., Hussar, K. (2021), [Tormijooks Tallinna vaktsineerimiskeskustele: teade nooremaealiste kaitsepookimisest tõi kohale hordid, personal hädas](#), *Delfi*, 3 April 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Sarv, H. (2021), ["AK. Nädal" uuris riskirühmade välist vaktsineerimist](#), *ERR*, 4 April 2021.

## 3.2 Promising practices

In **Estonia**, the government is offering the opportunity to get vaccinated as an incentive for younger people who help elderly people get to the vaccination locations in areas with lower vaccination coverage. In Ida-Virumaa, where the vaccination coverage is the lowest in the country, people aged 18 and over who accompany a person in the age group 70+ to get vaccinated will also have the opportunity to be vaccinated against COVID-19, as of 29 April 2021. The young person does not need to be related to the person in the risk group, but they both have to be registered to reside in Ida-Virumaa according to the population register. It is hoped that this will motivate younger people to provide assistance to older people who might otherwise have difficulty reaching the vaccination locations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Estonia, Official COVID-19 vaccination website, [Ida-Virumaal saab vaktsineerida ka eakaga kaasa tulnud inimene](#), 28 April 2020.