

Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights implications

National vaccine deployment

Malta

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Contractor: People For Change Foundation

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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
	<p>Update: 06/05/21</p> <p>COVID-19 vaccine frequently asked questions</p> <p>22/12/20</p> <p>Statement by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Ministry of Health on the beginning of the vaccination campaign in Malta (STQARRIJA MILL-UFFIČĠJU TAD-DEPUTAT PRIM MINISTRU U MINISTERU GHAS-SAHHA L-EMA)</p> <p>15/12/20</p> <p>National Vaccine Program for COVID-19, Health Committee of the Parliament of Malta, transcription of the meeting (KUMITAT PERMANENTI DWAR IS-SAHHA (Rapport Uffiċjali u Rivedut))</p>	<p>24/02/21</p> <p>Statement by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Energy, Enterprise and Sustainable Development on the vaccination of workers in the energy and water supply sector (STQARRIJA MILL-UFFIČĠJU TAD-DEPUTAT PRIM MINISTRU U MINISTERU GHAS-SAHHA U MILL-MINISTERU GHALL-ENERĠIJA, L-INTRAPRIŻA U L-IŻVILUPP SOSTENIBBLI)</p>

<p><i>older persons; indicate age groups specified</i></p>	<p>YES</p> <p>In order of priority by oldest age group</p> <p>Ages 85+ (1)</p> <p>Ages 80 – 85 (2)</p> <p>Ages 70 – 80 (3)</p> <p>Ages 55+ (4)</p> <p>Rest of population by age groups</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>Ages 60+ (4)</p>
<p><i>persons with underlying health problems</i></p>	<p>YES</p> <p>Persons with a chronic illness whose state of health makes them particularly at risk – elevated risk of severe disease or death (3)</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p><i>persons with disabilities</i></p>	<p>YES</p> <p>Persons living in long-term care facilities – elderly and mental health (1)</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p><i>key workers (on the basis of their job, not their personal characteristics) –</i> <i>e.g. health workers; persons working in care homes; teachers</i></p>	<p>YES</p> <p>specific job profiles including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Healthcare workers (1) – Long-term care facility workers (public and private sector) (1) – Law enforcement members, in particular police, soldiers, fire 	<p>YES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Medical students (2) – Teachers moved up in priority groups (2) – Persons working in the energy and water supply (2)

	<p>service, judiciary and persons working in the immigration sector (2)</p> <p>– Staff in other functions critical to society (2)</p> <p>– Staff at schools and child-care centers (3)</p>	
<i>persons belonging to ethnic/national minorities</i>	NO	No change
<i>persons experiencing homelessness</i>	NO	No change
<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>	NO	No change
<i>persons without residence or with insecure legal status (such as refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants)</i>	NO	No change
<i>OTHER</i> – not specified above; e.g. ‘Persons living in crowded accommodation’; etc. <i>Please insert . . .</i>	NO	No change

Please briefly indicate here:

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

In **Malta**, major changes to the vaccine deployment plan were made to incorporate groups considered more exposed to the virus - like teachers and medical students.

In January 2021, following discussions with the Health Authorities, medical and pharmacy students were informed by a letter from the Faculty of Medicine and

Surgery of the University of Malta that they had been placed on the vaccination priority list.¹

In February, the Government included employees working in the water and energy sector in the group of persons to be vaccinated with high priority, as they were considered as "essential workers, delivering a crucial service to the Maltese families and businesses".²

On 24th February 2021, the Maltese government decided to move up educators on the priority list, stating that they would be vaccinated right after the vulnerable and elderly groups. This decision was part of an agreement with the Malta Union of teachers to end the teachers' strike due to concerns over the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 mitigation strategies in place at schools.³

- *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).*

In Malta, the criteria used to identify the priority groups was outlined during the Meeting n. 015 of the Health Committee on 15th December 2020. The Superintendent of Public Health Charmaine Gauci explained that the definition of priority groups aims to minimise the virus transmission among the people who have a significantly increased risk of a severe or fatal course of the disease as well as the most vulnerable ones, the elderly. This approach allows the maintenance of the healthcare system functioning by reducing the number of people hospitalised to be treated for COVID-19.⁴

In an interview with the Media, Superintendent for Public Health Charmaine Gauci further explains the approach behind the definition of the priority groups and stresses the importance for people with specific health conditions to be vaccinated. She states that the strategy for vaccine delivery first targets those who are most in need of protection, such as the elderly aged over 85, healthcare workers and

¹ Malta, Letter of the KSU – Kunsill Studenti Universitarji (2021), '[Notice re: Priority List for COVID-19 Vaccination](#)', 13 January 2021.

² Malta, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Energy, Enterprise and Sustainable Development (Stqarrija Mill-Uffiċċju Tad-Deputat Prim Ministru U Ministeru Ghas-Sahha U Mill-Ministeru Għall-Energija, L-Intrapriża U L-Izvilupp Sostenibbli) (2021), '[Jitlaqqmu 'l fuq minn 1,700 ħaddiem tal-Enemalta, il-Korporazzjoni għas-Servizzi tal-Ilma u l-ARMS Ltdi](#)', press release, 24 February 2021.

³ Malta, Times of Malta (2021), '[Teachers bumped up COVID-19 vaccine list](#)', 10 January 2021.

⁴ Malta, Health Committee of the Parliament of Malta (2020) '[KUMITAT PERMANENTI DWAR IS-SAĦĦA \(Rapport Uffiċjali u Rivedut\)](#)', transcript of the meeting on the National Vaccine Program for COVID-19, 15 December 2020.

staff working in clinical settings, the elderly residents and staff in homes for the elderly. Further, she explained the importance for individuals with certain underlying health conditions like diabetes mellitus or chronic cardiovascular diseases to receive the vaccine. These individuals have a higher mortality rate compared to healthy people when infected with COVID-19, therefore she stresses that the government shall make sure that people with these conditions are prioritised in the vaccination roll-out.⁵

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 **Malta**, information about the vaccination plan is mainly provided by the website of the Malta Health Ministry.⁶ This website covers the national rollout strategy, advice about the individual vaccines, the stages of vaccine development, how the

⁵ Malta, Times of Malta (2020), '[Ask Charmaine: Vaccination delivery priority](#)', 30 December 2020.

⁶ Malta, Ministry of Health (2021), '[COVID-19 vaccines](#)', 22 April 2021.

COVID-19 vaccines work, as well as answers to other frequently asked questions. The information is available in English and Maltese.⁷

For further queries, people can call the COVID-19 helpline 145 or send an email to the address covid-vaccine@gov.mt, both set up by the Maltese Ministry of Health.

Malta's Superintendent for Health, Charmaine Gauci, also takes on questions by readers of the Times of Malta and answers them every two weeks in the segment 'Ask Charmaine'. Readers can submit their questions via email.⁸

Moreover, the UNHCR Malta has set up a website for Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Malta, offering information on COVID-19 and specifically on the vaccine. This website provides information concerning the safety and the effectiveness of the vaccine, how it is distributed and administered, as well as who should not take it. The source of the information are the Maltese health authorities. Information is made available in the languages English, Arabic, French, Somali, Tigrinya and Bengali and it is disseminated via WhatsApp and other channels including through NGOs and migrant community organisations.⁹

Furthermore, the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) website provides information concerning COVID-19 and the vaccine in an easy-to-read Maltese version that includes symbols and graphics. There are also videos regarding COVID-19 with sign language translation.¹⁰ During the weekly COVID-19 briefings with Superintendent for Public Health Charmaine Gauci, there is also a sign language interpreter present.¹¹

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.?

⁷ Malta, Ministry of Health (2021), [COVID-19 vaccines](#), 22 April 2021.

⁸ Malta, Times of Malta (2021), '[Ask Charmaine: Is it safe to visit the vulnerable if they have been vaccinated?](#)', 21 April 2021.

⁹ Malta, UNHCR Malta (2021), '[Information on COVID-19 for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Malta](#)'.

¹⁰ Malta, Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (2021), [Resources COVID-19](#).

¹¹ Malta, Malta Independent (2021), '[Watch: 103 cases and four more deaths; Charmaine Gauci delivers weekly Covid-19 briefing](#)', 26 March 2021.

In **Malta**, the government set up a wide range of registration channels for vaccination in relation to the groups targeted. The registration channels used include letters, the 145 hotline, the Government website, and text messages.

During the first phase of the vaccination campaign, people over 85 received a letter with an appointment through their healthcare provider or other health entities. The letter was sent to the address indicated on the elderly's identity card, and therefore the place chosen for the vaccination was in the vicinity of this address.¹² Letters are the main registration channel for vaccination used in this phase.

In general, all the priority groups receive a letter with the details of their vaccine appointment. This letter contains the information about the dates, the time and the location of their appointments for the first and second dose. Those eligible receive the letter without prior registration.¹³ Health Minister Chris Fearne announced that any person over 60 who has not been contacted or received an appointment for vaccination due to changes in residence addresses or statuses, could contact the vaccine hotline 145.¹⁴

As of the 30th of April 2021, all people over the age of 30 can either register online or send a text message to receive an appointment. People choosing to register online can do so using the system available at <http://vaccin.gov.mt/>. This portal allows Maltese ID card holders to register their interest with public health authorities to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. They are also able to choose in which region they wish to be vaccinated. The website is available in either Maltese or English.¹⁵

¹² Malta, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministry of Health (Stqarrija Mill-Uffiċċju Tad-Deputat Prim Ministru U Ministeru Għas-Saħħa) (2021), '[Jibdew jitqassmu l-ittri ta' stedina għall-vaċċin tal-COVID-19 lill-anzjani ta' l fuq minn 85 sena](#)', press release, 7 January 2021.

¹³ Malta, Ministry of Health (2021), [COVID-19 vaccines](#), 22 April 2021; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministry of Health (Starrija Mill-Uffiċċju Tad-Deputat Prim Ministru u Ministeru Għas-Saħħa) (2021), '[Jibdew jitqassmu l-ittri ta' stedina għall-vaċċin tal-COVID-19 lill-anzjani ta' bejn 80 u 84 sena](#)', press release, 29 January 2021.

¹⁴ Malta, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, The Ministry of Health and The Ministry for The Elderly and Active Aging (Stqarrija Mill-Uffiċċju Tad-Deputat Prim Ministru U Ministeru Għas-Saħħa u Mill-Ministeru Għall-Anzjani U L-Anzjanità Attiva) (2021), '[Miexi tajjeb il-proċess fil-vaccination hub f'Santa Venera](#)', press release, 16 April 2021.

¹⁵ Malta, [Malta Covid-19 Vaccination Registration](#) (2021).

Those choosing to register via text message can send a SMS to the number 99180045 when in Malta, or to the number 99180044 when residing in Gozo.¹⁶

As the vaccination campaign rolls out and the elderly groups are vaccinated, digital channels are progressively introduced. Nevertheless, alternatives to digital access - like SMS and the 145 hotlines - are kept in place. With the introduction of the new registration system either over the online registration platform or per SMS, the old system of sending out letters is being phased out.¹⁷

- 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?

Letters for appointments, the creation of the 145 hotlines, and the possibility to use text messages to schedule an appointment are the alternatives to digital access to vaccine registration in place in Malta.

People over 60 are contacted through letters, and in the case, they have not received an appointment, they can contact the vaccine hotline 145 to schedule an appointment for vaccination. Therefore, people such as the elderly or those without access to the internet can receive vaccine appointments without the need of having digital access.¹⁸

To date, there are no physical locations for registration in place.

2.3 How are the vaccinations administered?

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

¹⁶ Malta, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, The Ministry of Health and The Ministry for The Elderly and Active Aging (2021) (Stqarrija Mill-Uffiċċju Tad-Deputat Prim Ministru U Ministeru Għas-Saħħa u Mill-Ministeru Għall-Anzjani U L-Anzjanità Attiva), '[Miexi tajjeb il-proċess fil-vaccination hub f'Santa Venera](#)', press release, 16 April 2021.

¹⁷ Malta, Times of Malta (2021), '[Vaccine system changes as minister pledges jab for all by August 15](#)', 10 April 2021.

¹⁸ Malta, Ministry of Health (2021), '[COVID-19 vaccines](#)', 22 April 2021.

In **Malta**, vaccines are delivered to people in a wide array of settings, which includes vaccination centres, private general practitioners, and mobile teams.¹⁹

Apart from using existing vaccination structures, Malta administers vaccines at dedicated vaccination centres that have been set up all over the country by health authorities in preparation for the extensive vaccination campaign.²⁰ Since the 6th of March 2021, Malta has over 40 vaccination centres. This includes all health centres, the Mater Dei Hospital, the University of Malta, the Armed Forces barracks in Luqa, as well as the Water Service Corporation head office in Luqa.²¹

Starting from late April, people will also be able to receive a vaccine through 90 private general practitioners (GPs) that have signed up to administer COVID-19 vaccines and have followed an online course on the inoculation process.²²

For further accessibility, Malta delivers vaccines via mobile teams, for instance to homebound persons and to residents of long-term care facilities. Moreover, health care workers and staff at long-term care facilities can be vaccinated at their workplace.²³

The ECDC also reported that Malta administers COVID-19 vaccines at prisons.²⁴ As outlined by the media, the vaccination roll-out in the prisons started in February.²⁵ The first phase of the vaccination was quickly completed as in early March, Corradino Correctional Facility resident surgeon Christopher Cremona announced that all prisoners had received the first jab. Cremona also added that

¹⁹ Malta, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) (2021), '[Overview of the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment plans in the EU/EEA](#)', 1 February 2021.

²⁰ Malta, Times of Malta (2021), '[21 new COVID-19 vaccination centres opened](#)', 8 February 2021.

²¹ Malta, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministry of Health (Stqarrija Mill-Uffiċċju Tad-Deputat Prim Ministru U Ministeru Għas-Saħħa) (2021), '[Jibdew jintbagħtu l-ittri għall-vaċċin tal-Covid-19 lil dawk kollha 'l fuq minn 60 sena](#)', press release, 6 March 2021.

²² Malta, Malta College of Family Doctors (2021), '[Administration of Covid-19 vaccines by private family doctors](#)', 11 April 2021.

²³ Malta, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) (2021), '[Overview of the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment plans in the EU/EEA](#)', 1 February 2021.

²⁴ Malta, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2021), '[Overview of the implementation of COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment plans in the EU/EEA](#)', 1 February 2021.

²⁵ Malta, Newsbook (2021), '[Inmates to receive second Covid vaccine dose shortly](#)', 18 March 2021.

the number of vaccine doses administered within the prison surpassed 1,000, including officials.²⁶

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

The Maltese Health Ministry has set up a website that contains all the relevant information concerning the COVID-19 vaccines, including the types of vaccines available and potential side effects. It also includes links directing visitors of the website to the European Commission and the World Health Organization websites on COVID-19 vaccines. Additionally, the site clears up myths and misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine. The website is available in Maltese and English.²⁷

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

According to the Malta Health Ministry, the vaccine is given free of charge and is available only through government entities. Therefore, there are no circumstances where any fees are applicable for receiving the vaccine. Only Maltese citizens and residents with a valid residency card are eligible for the vaccine. To note, third country nationals without a residency card are not able to take the vaccine. Asylum seekers have access to the vaccine as long as they are in possession of a residency permit. Undocumented migrants do not have access to the vaccine.²⁸

3 Challenges and promising practices

3.1 Challenges

In **Malta**, the media reported incidents of queue-jumping and favoritism in obtaining the Covid-19 vaccine. Maltese citizens expressed concern about the exploitation of the so-called "standby lists". When a patient who was scheduled to receive a jab fails to show up for the appointment, people included in these lists can receive the vaccine at a short notice and earlier than when it was planned in the deployment vaccine programme. However, Malta does not have specific

²⁶ Malta, Malta Today (2021), '[Watch: New medical centre at Corradino Correctional Facility to offer onsite treatment for most ailments](#)', 3 March 2021.

²⁷ Malta, Ministry of Health (2021), '[COVID-19 vaccines](#)', 22 April 2021.

²⁸ Malta, Ministry of Health (2021), '[COVID-19 vaccines](#)', 22 April 2021.

criteria to administer the leftover vaccine doses, resulting in instances of favoritism and inequalities.²⁹

In April, a spokesperson for the Ministry for Health confirmed to the media that the government's online vaccination registration website had technical problems in registering foreign ID cards.³⁰

3.2 Promising practices

In **Malta**, the Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing organised tailored vaccination services for residents in old people's homes and for homebound persons living in private habitations. The Minister for the Elderly, in a press release explained that the vaccination process for residents in old people's homes was carried out in collaboration between the Social Welfare Standards Authority and Active Aging and Community Care, consisting of the collection of the vaccine, its transport to the houses, administration and record-keeping procedures. Elderly persons who are unable to leave their house due to a medical condition certified by a family doctor, can call helpline 145, free of charge, and ask for further assistance. By calling the 145 Covid19 Vaccination Helpline, homebound persons will receive the vaccine in their private habitation.³¹

²⁹ Malta, Malta Independent (2021), '[Queue-jumping remains a reality as vaccine programme intensifies](#)', 28 March 2021; Malta Today (2021), '[There's always something new which is ripe for abuse](#)', 22 March 2021.

³⁰ Malta, Times of Malta (2021), '[Health ministry confirms that ID card number glitch will be fixed](#)', 10 April 2021.

³¹ Malta, Ministry for the Elderly and Active Old Age (Mill-Ministeru Għall-Anjani U L-Anzjanità Attiva) (2021), '[Il-proċess tat-tilqim tal-Covid-19 fid-djar tal-anzjani tlesta fi żmien aħjar minn dak previst](#)', press release, 5 March 2021.