

European healthcare professionals call for easy vaccine access for refugees

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a decrease in routine vaccination rates in several countries over the past two years. More recently, the war in Ukraine has led to millions of refugees, half of them children, fleeing especially to neighbouring European countries. In the current circumstances, the risks of infection from vaccine-preventable diseases are high both for the host and refugee populations. The situation is worrying as historical vaccination coverage for polio, measles, and recently for COVID-19 in Ukraine is low compared to the European Union, indicating the presence of vulnerable pockets of un- and under-vaccinated population groups.

The benefits of vaccines should be available to everyone and everywhere. It is vital for the control of vaccine-preventable diseases that no one be left behind, especially children. *“Children fleeing from Ukraine are facing many hardships. If they are un- or under-vaccinated, they are also vulnerable to infectious diseases”*, says Dr Siddhartha Datta, Regional Adviser of the Vaccine-preventable Diseases and Immunization Programme, WHO Regional Office for Europe. *“It is a shared responsibility to keep everyone safe by providing the benefits of vaccines to everyone everywhere.”*

Therefore, the Coalition for Vaccination calls on European countries to:

- consider routine vaccination a priority for all age groups, especially children;
- provide COVID-19 booster shots for adults, especially the vulnerable and elderly populations, and increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake of adolescents and children;
- ensure refugee populations, especially children, get easy access to vaccination services;
- help healthcare professionals to roll out vaccination campaigns and support them to increase uptake of routine immunisations both amongst host and refugee populations.

Healthcare professionals have a vital role in identifying and reminding people about their vaccinations across the life-course as they are their most trustworthy sources of information. The Coalition for Vaccination reminds that:

- vaccines are the best protection against serious, even deadly, preventable diseases;
- most vaccines provide life-long immunity, but some require booster doses during adolescence and adulthood;
- older people are more vulnerable to the consequences of infections than younger ones;
- healthcare professionals themselves should be vaccinated and continue encouraging their patients to do the same.

The annual WHO Immunization Week takes place on 24-30 April 2022. The theme this year is “Long Life for All”, and it aims to reinforce the importance of equitable and expanded access to vaccines, to contribute to a long and healthy life for everyone.

The [Coalition for Vaccination](#) brings together European associations of healthcare professionals and students. It was convened by the European Commission in 2019 with an aim to support delivering accurate information to the public, combating myths around vaccines and vaccination, and exchanging best practices on vaccination.