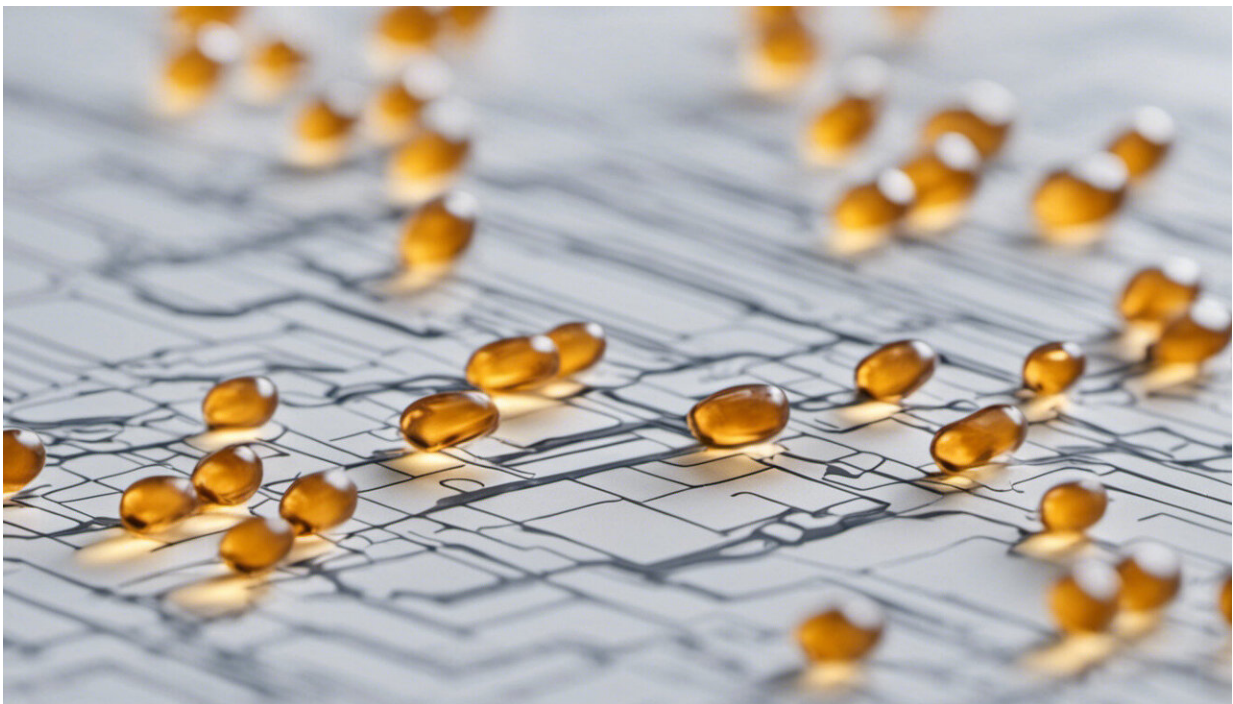


Study looks at vaccination prioritization in EU countries during the COVID-19 pandemic

November 30 2022



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

When COVID-19 vaccines were first rolled out in limited quantities in early 2021, each country had to decide the order in which its citizens would be vaccinated. How did decision-makers prioritize allocation of these vital preventive resources during the coronavirus outbreak?

A new study supported by the BIOUNCERTAINTY project now analyzes these value choices in the 27 EU Member States, Israel and the United Kingdom. The results have been published in the *Journal of Law and the Biosciences*.

In almost all the countries, two groups were found to have been vaccinated first—frontline [medical workers](#) and nursing home staff and residents. Beyond that, the analyzed countries prioritized senior citizens and those with coexisting health conditions over groups with occupations or housing conditions presenting a higher risk of infection. This is surprising, according to the study's authors, "since, in the context of treatment, it is common and justifiable to adopt different allocation principles," such as a saving more life-years approach or prioritizing younger patients.

Sidelined occupations

Beyond frontline health care professionals, specific occupations were only prioritized in certain cases. Home-based care workers were given priority in 10 countries (Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania, Finland and Sweden). Teachers were also prioritized in 10 countries (Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Austria, Poland and Romania), most likely because of the need to end remote teaching.

Grocery store workers were only prioritized in six countries (Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Austria, Romania and Slovenia), although no priority was given to waiters, [taxi drivers](#) and most other service sector workers facing a high risk of infection.

Disregarded housing conditions

The World Health Organization's recommendation that migrants, refugees and prisoners in crowded housing situations be taken into account once 20 % of a country's most vulnerable citizens had been vaccinated was largely disregarded. The only six countries to follow this recommendation were Germany, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia and Romania. As reported in the study, "Bulgaria prioritized 'vulnerable groups from the population due to high epidemiological risk of infection attributable to their way of life' as the last group before the general population."

According to a news item posted on the website of BIOUNCERTAINTY project host Jagiellonian University (JU), Poland, Ph.D. student and study lead author Karolina Wiśniowska states that there is no consensus among experts on the proper distribution of vaccines. Additionally, there is a lack of real-world data on the process.

One thing was made clear. Vaccination schedules for COVID-19 were markedly different from regulations on medical treatments such as transplants that focus on saving as many people as possible while also considering a patient's expected lifespan and quality of life.

"The [moral judgements](#) underlying vaccination schedules cannot be unequivocally interpreted within the light of dominant ethical frameworks. However, this ambiguity may be seen as their strong point," states study senior author Dr. habil. Wojciech Ciszewski of JU in the same news item.

"Since the [public opinion](#) and experts represent various ethical standpoints, and broad support is necessary for successful vaccination strategies, the ability to defend these strategies on various moral grounds may increase their social legitimacy."

BIOUNCERTAINTY (Deep uncertainties in bioethics: [genetic research](#),

[preventive medicine](#), reproductive decisions) is taking a fresh look at ethical discussions emerging from biomedical developments. The project ends in 2024.

More information: Karolina Wiśniowska et al, Value choices in European COVID-19 vaccination schedules: how vaccination prioritization differs from other forms of priority setting, *Journal of Law and the Biosciences* (2022). [DOI: 10.1093/jlb/ljac026](https://doi.org/10.1093/jlb/ljac026)

Provided by CORDIS

Citation: Study looks at vaccination prioritization in EU countries during the COVID-19 pandemic (2022, November 30) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-11-vaccination-prioritization-eu-countries-covid-.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.