

21 March 2024 | European Parliament, Brussels

Mission Board on Vaccination in Europe. Consensus Report launch event

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Introduction

About Cittadinanzattiva-Active Citizenship Network role in the field of vaccination policies it is good to remember that we work to:

- broaden the front of civil society actors involved in vaccination policies;
- support the "Life-course immunization approach" for all the vaccine-preventable diseases both towards political interlocutors and towards citizenship;
- provide decision-makers and relevant stakeholders involved in the definition and implementation of vaccination policies, with a civic point of view that complements the perspective of other qualified actors committed to the issue.
- qualify the role of the civic society organizations in the field, producing data together with recommendations.

EU citizens & EU election

I don't know about you, but my impression is that, **in the pre-election debate, the health conditions of European citizens are not at all at the centre of the thoughts of current policy makers** nor of those who intend to run as candidates, with exceptions of course.

Some months ahead of the European elections and at a time when European citizens have high expectations of Europe's healthcare systems, the absence of any new health initiatives in the State of the Union speech has been widely commented on.

We strongly believe in the key role of the EU institutions for the well-being of all of us, and we thank MEPs Alessandra Moretti and Stelios Kypourouopoulos for the attention that - once again – they have shown to the health of European citizens, listening to the demands of civil society and patients' associations.

The civil society in support of the public policy

Recently there have also been very encouraging signs. In fact, on December 5, 2023, the European Commission adopted the [EU4Health 2024 work program](#) to implement key health policy priorities

within the European Health Union. As Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, said, "**Civil society has a crucial role to play in reaching out to our citizens**". This declaration is a great achievement to be proud of, because the active role of PAGs and citizens' organizations in advocating for public policies, is not recognized in all sectors and by all stakeholders. For instance, on vaccination policy, few years ago, on 2018, with the Coalition for Vaccination, opened only to the associations of HCPs and of students in medicine, the EU Institutions didn't identify officially the civil society role in support of the public policy. For this reason, I want to congratulate with the promoters of the "Mission Board on Vaccination in Europe", because since the beginning they recognized the role of the so-called intermediate bodies of the society, PAGs, citizens organization devote to the public health as our main common good to be safeguarded.

Probably, the situation that we have been living for the past years now only emphasizes every day the fundamental role that the behaviour of each individual plays, and how the same can have repercussions on public health. Hence the need to give voice to all those who identify health as a public and primary good that must be protected and for which it is worth committing.

Citizens' access to vaccines

Among the several recommendations hosted in the Consensus Report, please let me highlight the one focused to increase the citizens' access to vaccines. A broader issue (it includes the availability of the vaccines produced/the equity – for instance, between different population groups – the accessibility). In particular, the accessibility concerns the ease with which people are able to reach and benefit from vaccination services. About it, people may encounter barriers (e.g., related to the location and convenience of vaccination services) that reduce the accessibility of vaccination. For this reason, we ask to the Institution to **enhance the accessibility of vaccination services, in particular within schools, workplaces, and community pharmacies.**

For the ones, the majority of the population, that do not need to be convinced, the goal is to make easy/fast/friendly their experiences on vaccination. For instance, it is necessary to ensure that vaccination services are provided 'where people are' – that is to say, at or close to where people live, study, and work (e.g., schools, workplaces, and community pharmacies).

To do so, National health authorities should promote collaboration with other public policy areas (or sectors) to ensure that the administration of vaccines can happen in non-health care settings,

while safeguarding the safety and effectiveness of administration procedures. Workplace vaccination, in particular, should be seen as a key component of a broader intersectoral approach to health and wellbeing, in which employers offer a range of health promoting and preventative services. The same we can say for the schools.

Community pharmacies can also play an important role in strengthening the accessibility of vaccination services (particularly for adults) as they provide an additional setting for vaccine administration.

Civic monitoring on vaccination policy & concrete obstacles/tangible barriers to be removed

The ability of the civil society organization to collect data can support the decision-makers. For instance:

- According to our survey carried out in Italy with 2990 chronic patients interviewed, 34% of them have denounced difficulty to access routine vaccination during the first wave of the pandemic, and 19% of them also in the current situation.
- Data justified by the fact that in Italy between March 2020 and the end of 2021, over 40% of vaccination centers suffered a reduction in staff and opening hours; one in ten had even been closed.
- **At the end of 2021 all the centers were reopened, in 80% of cases the timetables were restored, while the staffing level returned to the level before the pandemic in only 47% of the Centers.**
- **Vaccination is also guaranteed in the afternoon in 79,5% of vaccination centres. BUT on Saturdays, vaccination is guaranteed in only 2% of vaccination centres.** Our survey involved 147 Centers in 13 Italian Regions¹.
- According our survey carried out in Italy along 2021 with 2990 chronic patients interviewed, 63% of them are in favor to confirm the SARS-CoV-2 vaccination service in the pharmacy beyond the pilot phase, and **65% of them agree about the opportunity to extend the involvement of the pharmacist also for routine vaccinations (flu, zoster and pneumococcal/pneumococcal vaccination).**

Data confirmed also in 2022:

¹ <https://www.cittadinanzattiva.it/comunicati/14689-vaccini-non-covid-una-babele-fra-regioni-ed-asl-tempi-di-attesa-allungati-a-causa-del-covid.html?highlight=WyJjZW50cmkiLCJ2YWNjaW5hbGkiXQ==>

- In terms of “routine” vaccinations, more than half of the 1,030 pharmacies interviewed are in favor of introducing in the community pharmacies vaccination against Herpes Zoster, Papillomavirus and Pneumococci.
- The comments of the 1,284 citizens interviewed are encouraging: 3 in 10 have participated in at least one of the prevention programs in pharmacies, and 7 in 10 would like to have other vaccinations in addition to the vaccines currently available in pharmacies.
- Citizens reaffirm their confidence in pharmacies as a point of access to information and services: there is widespread awareness of the pharmacy as the first proximity garrison and interest in its evolution in terms of territorial health.

The role played by the intangible goods to facilitate the citizen access to vaccination

Access to vaccination certainly depends on many variables. Above all, trust in the institutions and correct information.

It is crucial to cultivate and maintain an appropriate level of confidence in vaccines among all populations. The World Health Organization (WHO) has emphasized **the importance of rebuilding trust in institutions, leadership, and science, addressing the "trust crisis" that has emerged during the pandemic².**

Health literacy & a still pending issue

The protection of citizens' rights, not only patients, cannot be guaranteed without proper information, especially on the subject of vaccines, where it is essential to distinguish between reliable sources of information and fake news. We believe that **a well-informed citizen who is aware of his rights is a resource for the society.** For this reason, we ask a greater investment in the empowerment of citizens, in education, health literacy. About it, too much time it is not clear who, if any, is in charge to provide this kind of services to the citizens and their communities. I wish a concrete signal on that direction by the Institutions. Their commitment to implement the Recommendations presented in the Consensus Report can represent the right direction towards the European Health Union, starting from the vaccination policy.

² WHO: Strategic Preparedness, Readiness and Response Plan to end the global covid-19 emergency in 2022”. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who_sprp_2022_v1_dsc.pdf?sfvrsn=7350c44b_5