

This report was compiled by Ela Guler, Erasmus+ trainee at the Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) from the University of East Anglia (UK). It is based on information gathered from CEV members and online searches. This is a preliminary study, to gather information about: what the volunteers are doing; how they have been encouraged to volunteer; who is volunteering; the roles of organisations; how many volunteers there are; and the supply and demand of them in different countries in Europe.

August 2021

Preliminary Study into Volunteering **in COVID 19 Vaccination Centres** **in Europe 2021**

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Introduction:

Volunteering has become a phenomenon within the COVID19 vaccination centres in Europe. Thousands have signed up to volunteer and support the vaccination programme. However, the amount and the organisation of these volunteers varies between different European countries. This increase and call for volunteering may positively influence the perception and appreciation of volunteering in Europe or could contribute to a confusing picture about the differences and complementarities between the roles and tasks of volunteers and those of paid employees in the health sector. Different factors of volunteering vary in each country. These factors include the number of volunteers, the amount of hours volunteers have contributed, the types of volunteers there are, what the volunteers have been assigned to do in the vaccination centres, the demand and means of a call for volunteers, how non-governmental organisations have been helping in the process and they've helped to meet the demand of volunteers.

Key Role for the Volunteers:

Due to the support of volunteers during the vaccination processes in Europe, the importance of volunteering has been a greater topic for discussion. Vaccination health care workers in Cardiff, Wales, have emphasised that they could not have done their job without them. The presence of volunteers in the vaccination centres has hugely speeded up the vaccination process in Europe, and the initial evidence gathered for this preliminary study shows that the majority of countries have made good use of the availability of volunteers.

Many volunteers in the European vaccination centres have applied through the Red Cross, who are vigorously working to support the vaccination process in Europe. The Lithuanian Red Cross volunteers have been key in facilitating vaccination centres, helping individuals register for their vaccines, escorting them to the vaccination centre, as well as monitoring them after their vaccination. This is the same for the majority of volunteers in vaccination centres in Europe. The Red Cross volunteers in Slovenia take on administrative tasks, maintain order in the vaccination centres, and offer information at the centre's entry.

Role of Volunteering organisations:

Non-governmental organisations have played a significant role in encouraging volunteers to help in vaccination centres, either indirectly or directly. In Germany, humanitarian aid and civil protection organisations have helped to coordinate the vaccination strategies. In Spain, organisations like Plataforma Andaluza De Voluntariado are indirectly involved in helping the vaccination process in vaccination centres. They help to advise the regional governments, when appropriate. For the most part, large organisations like the Red Cross, Civil Protection

organisations, and St John's Ambulance have taken charge in managing the volunteering process in vaccination centres.

The Fundação Eugénio de Almeida (FEA) in Portugal are giving online registrations and interviews to those that are interested in being volunteers in vaccination centres. Moreover, they provide training on Zoom and give out online documentation for the volunteering agreement and the declaration of volunteer. This strategy has made it simpler for volunteers to be active in volunteering centres. Another example of good communication between the volunteers and vaccination centres in Évora, Portugal, is that they've created a WhatsApp group in which 52 volunteers are regularly monitored and are provided with daily information. This WhatsApp group also encourages group interaction, and through this group, volunteers are able to indicate their volunteering availability online. The volunteer coordinator follows up with the volunteers online 74% of the time, and 25% of the time in the field. In Portugal, volunteers record their activities on a shift card and send selfies to the WhatsApp group so colleagues can follow their volunteering activities. This use of technology to manage volunteers and promote volunteering is quite unique, compared to other European countries.

However, in some parts of Europe, the governments have not been actively encouraging volunteering. This has led some organisations to take the slow vaccination process into their own hands, and are actively encouraging volunteering. For example, in the Czech Republic, Athletes created their own vaccination centre in which they rely on a mixture of volunteers; mothers on maternity leave, students, jobseekers, pensioners and those that have been left jobless because of the pandemic. As a result of this, volunteers have been able to participate more in the vaccination centres, and consequently improve the rate of vaccinations.

Role of the military:

In some European countries, the military have also been called into vaccination centres and have helped with the rollout of vaccines. In the Czech Republic, Active Reserve soldiers were also called to vaccination centres. Germany has been using the armed forces to coordinate the vaccinations. In Hungary, the Military Army Health Care members have been training volunteer Reserve Soldiers to carry out vaccinations, and they themselves have been administering it. Associations, like the Doctors on the Road, have been providing vaccination support to the army in Padova, Italy. In general, where the army and army reserves have been engaged there is a reduced reliance on volunteers from the general public.

Volunteer Profiles:

The types of volunteers in the vaccination centres vary. For example, in France, the volunteers are mainly retired nurses and doctors, like Finland, but also townhall civil servants who have applied as volunteers. On the Queen Mary University of London campus in Malta, trained students and staff have been helping to distribute the vaccine rollout. Belgium has been asking for volunteers that can vary from being doctors (active or retired), nurses, who are paid in some centres, midwives, third and fourth-year nursing students, or Masters students of Medicine. Moreover, adverts were put on social media in Belgium asking for more volunteers with no prior medical knowledge. Currently, there are more non-medical volunteers than medical ones. In Denmark, medical staff from different fields have been undergoing training and are being trained to oversee vaccinations. Padova has been strictly using professional nurses and doctors to administer vaccinations, some of which are engaging on a voluntary basis. In Romania, those that are volunteering in vaccination centres are doctors, nurses and students. Germany's volunteers include doctors, medical assistants and nurses. The Czech Republic now has doctors from private surgeries to help out as volunteers in vaccination centres.

Volunteer Tasks:

The types of tasks that volunteers are doing in vaccination centres are largely identical between European countries. The tasks that volunteers are taking up in vaccination centres in Europe are a mixture of both greeting tasks, health and safety checks, and admin tasks.

The volunteers in Portugal are helping with logistics, administrative and supportive tasks. This varies from welcoming, informing and assisting those getting vaccinated within the vaccination centre, as well as helping them to fill in the mandatory questionnaires, and offering them comfort. In France, young people on civic service may be called upon to welcome the public into the vaccination centres. The Red Cross volunteers in Lithuania are key to facilitating vaccination centres, helping those arriving for their vaccines to register, then escorting them to the vaccination centre, as well as monitoring them after their vaccination. In Estonia, volunteers are essential in helping to guide individuals around the vaccination centre and are also helping to operate the support service in the centres.

Volunteers in Germany have been helping to take over-80s from their homes to the vaccination centres and help to guide individuals into the vaccination centre. This has also been the case for Spanish volunteers, who have also escorted the elderly and pregnant women to the vaccination centres, prepared them for their vaccine and helped monitor the rest of those vaccinated. As well as this, Spanish volunteers provide wheelchairs if needed, and are available to answer any questions or concerns about the vaccination. Volunteers in Hungary have also had tasks of helping the elderly coming to the vaccination centres, including measuring the temperature of those getting vaccines, administering it, and helping to disinfect the centres. In Poland, volunteers have been providing information to people arriving in the vaccination centres, as well as directing them to the appropriate places within the vaccination centres, and helping them with filling in forms regarding the vaccination. They have also been collecting the contact details of those in need and assisting the more

vulnerable people that are receiving their vaccines. Volunteers in Finland have been providing guidance to those getting vaccinated, taking care of the health and safety of the public, and monitoring the well-being of those that have already been vaccinated. St John's Ambulance volunteers in Malta have been helping with the logistics and administrative tasks at the vaccination centres.

However, in the UK, non-healthcare volunteers are carrying out vaccinations. The Francis Crick Institute in London has had its ground-floor gallery space transformed into a vaccination centre and now has more than 300 volunteers. Their training consists of 10 hours of online modules plus one in-person day training, in which they learn vaccination techniques and how to wear personal protective equipment. How to identify signs of anaphylactic reactions to the vaccine are also taught. The organisers of this process are convinced that these easy and quick means of training allows for the vaccination programme to be more efficient and encourages more volunteers due to its simplicity. Nonetheless, the majority of European countries are relying on health care professionals in paid roles rather than volunteers as they are seen to be more equipped to carry out a vaccination. For example, in Spain, Slovenia and Portugal, it remains in the hands of healthcare professionals, and volunteers are not giving out the vaccinations if they do not have any prior medical knowledge. Sixth-year students in the Department of Medicine of AUTH are planning to assist in vaccinating the general population.

Supply and Demand:

The demand for volunteers varies within different European countries. Countries, such as Lithuania, have had to call for volunteers as there has been a shortage of them and a need for extra assistance at vaccination centres as, although there are a significant amount of volunteers helping, they cannot be available at times that are required in the vaccination centres. In Padova, there is a huge demand and a significant shortage of volunteers in vaccination centres, both for health and administrative tasks. In Croatia, the Red Cross is calling for more volunteers. Vaccination centres in Flanders are also asking for volunteers. When the call for volunteers was first established, there were too many candidates, yet some centres were afraid of a potential shortage in the summer. However, this has not seemed to be a problem for most of the vaccination centres in Flanders. The UK was looking for volunteers to fill in 2,000 shifts at COVID-19 vaccination centres. Due to the shortage of people that could administer the vaccine in Valencia in February, the officials were encouraged to call for volunteers to help with the vaccine rollout. Yet, in Estonia, there has been no call for volunteers, and the vaccination process has mostly been carried out by general practitioners and the private sector. In Slovakia too there has also been no use of volunteers to help with the vaccination process.

Within some European countries, governments have made the process to become a volunteer at vaccination centres very simple by showcasing it on their websites. This is the case for the government in Flanders, the UK, Estonia, Ireland, and others. By making the

process much easier, it encourages people of all ages to volunteer. Germany is offering tax relief for volunteers engaging in their vaccination centres as a form of appreciation for their hard work.

The number of volunteers in vaccination centres within European countries varies. Many countries haven't released official data regarding volunteering numbers, and often the volunteering numbers that have been recorded are by organisations that are helping with the vaccination process. For example, in Portugal, the FEA in partnership with the ACES-AC (Agrupamento de Centros de Saúde do Alentejo Central) have trained 92 volunteers through 6 training sessions on Volunteering in Vaccination Support for COVID-19. ACES-AC has 83 volunteers of whom have already reached 2000 hours of volunteering in vaccination centres. Padova has 580 volunteers who have engaged in at least one shift since the beginning of the campaign to have volunteers in vaccination centres. Malta has roughly 150 volunteers. By April,, and Brussels had 1,637 volunteer registrations from it's residents. In Flanders, a wide range of numbers of volunteers in the vaccination centres has been reported. In one centre for example there are 1000 or more volunteers, yet in others there are only 30 volunteers. Most vaccination centres are somewhere in the middle of those figures as an average number of volunteers. There are 94 vaccination centres in Flanders. In the UK, two million tasks have been completed through the NHS Volunteer Responders Programme by 436,000 volunteers. Two vaccination centres in Dublin had a total of 290 volunteers helping with the vaccination rollout. Aldo in Évora, Portugal, have had 95 volunteers since the 25th of February, and 133 people have enrolled to help in vaccination centres. Volunteers in vaccination centres based in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, have around 5,800 volunteers; which includes 1,700 doctors, 700 medical assistants, and 1,200 nurses. 600 Lithuanian Red Cross volunteers are engaged in vaccination centres across Lithuania.

In terms of hours spent volunteering, there also hasn't been that much data recorded so far from certain countries, and for the data that has been mentioned, it has often been in relation to volunteers from specific organisations, or from volunteers from various regions. Volunteers with the ACES-AC organisation have volunteered over 1,400 hours. St John Ambulance in the UK has predicted that volunteers have put in 330,000 hours in the vaccination centres. The 260 volunteers for the German organisation Malteser have volunteered for a total of 15,000 hours. In Portugal, 2,000 volunteer hours have been recorded.

Wider impact & Legacy:

As volunteering in vaccination centres becomes the norm in Europe, many are enthusiastic about the prospect of a rise in volunteering more generally. People are reaping the benefits of what volunteering has to offer individuals. This is particularly true for those many volunteers who have expressed that volunteering has made them feel less lonely and has given them an important task to do during these difficult times.

Moreover, the rise in volunteering can lead to a more international conversation around volunteering and a better understanding of how significant volunteering can be for our communities, and for ourselves. Many new volunteers that have been volunteering in vaccination centres in Europe have been emphasising how much they have personally benefited from volunteering. In terms of the volunteering sector, this increase in volunteering could lead to the development of the volunteering framework in Europe. For the general public, volunteers in vaccination centres have not always been easily identifiable as volunteers, as distinct from paid employees also present in the centres, e.g. through the use of different uniforms. This represents a missed opportunity in many cases to increase the profile of volunteering, and in others has caused blurred lines between volunteers and staff that can be unhelpful for the promotion of quality volunteering that doesn't replace paid jobs.

Volunteering Standards:

On the other hand, some have seen this phenomenon as something to be cautious about. This is particularly in relation to the fact that healthcare professionals are being paid for a job that volunteers are either conducting themselves or helping to support the process. For example, in France, the health care workers are working at vaccination centres and are being paid for their services. However, the volunteers with no health expertise, and who are volunteering as a civic service, like welcoming the public, are not getting paid. This for some people can be seen as unfair and a way to take advantage of volunteers. In Germany there has also been a discussion around the distribution of wages between those working in the vaccination centres, and discontentment around the disparities.

In Flanders, there are differences in cost reimbursement to volunteers between different vaccination centres. In the vaccination centres, the cost reimbursement is often inappropriately used as a performance payment or remuneration for volunteers. This goes against the definition of volunteering in Belgian law which stipulates that volunteering is unpaid.

This situation has also created the expectation that volunteers should receive a remuneration for their volunteering more generally. People are starting to ask about why volunteers in vaccination centres, who actually incur hardly any costs, get them and not others. Growing inequality between volunteers is being witnessed in Flanders which is of concern to the Flemish Volunteering Centre. Moreover, the Belgian Government has now decided that vaccination centre volunteers may receive a much higher maximum amount of reimbursement of expenses than other volunteers. This further institutionalises inequality in volunteering and both the Flemish and the Francophone volunteer support centres in Belgium have expressed displeasure with the situation. It gives the impression that this volunteering is more important than volunteering in other fields and sectors and concern is also being expressed about this.

On the whole, however, volunteering in Flanders has got a significant amount of recognition, particularly in the municipalities, but also from politicians. The process of having volunteers in vaccination centres has been a particularly smooth effort. Some volunteers in the vaccination centres have expressed interest in continuing to volunteer in the future, once again emphasising the positive effects that volunteering in vaccination centres has created.

Conclusions:

Despite these concerns expressed in Belgium, overall, volunteering within vaccination centres in Europe seems to have been valuable assistance to the distribution of vaccines. It has allowed health care professionals to focus on their job to vaccinated individuals. Without volunteers in vaccination centres, the vaccination rollout would be a more time-consuming process and would not have been able to run so smoothly.

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The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), established in 1992, is the European network of over 60 organisations dedicated to the promotion of, and support to, volunteers and volunteering in Europe at European, national or regional level. CEV channels the collective priorities and concerns of its member organisations to the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe. CEV's vision is a Europe in which volunteers are central in building a cohesive, sustainable and inclusive society based on solidarity and active citizenship. CEV is a European network of organizations dedicated to the promotion of and support to volunteers and volunteering. Our mission is to provide collaborative leadership to create an enabling environment for volunteering in Europe.