



Introduction

Good afternoon and welcome to this online training session focused on the value of vaccination for adult population. This initiative is realized by the Italian NGO Cittadinanzattiva through our EU branch Active Citizenship Network in the framework of the “VaccinAction”2023 project. Now in its third edition, VaccinAction remains committed to reinforcing adult vaccination across Europe, safeguarding the benefits of regular immunization, and mobilizing stakeholders to actively engage with EU institutions.

In particular, regarding vaccination policy, we are dedicated to contributing to the improvement of vaccination rates in line with the health priorities outlined in the Commission’s EU4Health program. Our role involves expanding the constituency of civil society organizations and patient advocacy groups engaged in this important issue.

By providing opportunities for leaders and members of these associations to stay informed, such as today's event, we aim to create a multiplier effect, essentially fostering a positive ripple effect by connecting professionals with those involved in advocacy. Furthermore, they are eager to actively participate in their respective contexts in shaping vaccination policies, offering their support to institutions and contributing to the implementation of national immunization plans.

As we are well aware, the pandemic has underscored the importance of considering vaccination as a fundamental pillar of any modern and resilient healthcare system within the EU. Vaccinations prove to be effective and significant at all stages of life, providing protection not only to individuals but also to families, communities, and the healthcare system as a whole.

Diseases such as meningitis, diphtheria, herpes zoster, pneumococcal disease, influenza, pertussis, and other vaccine-preventable diseases can potentially lead to severe and long-lasting consequences at various points in a person's life.

In the European Union, implementing routine lifelong immunization could safeguard the population against a total of 20 life-threatening infectious diseases. However, there exists a substantial disparity in the number of publicly funded vaccines offered to European citizens, with offerings ranging from 8 to 17 vaccines depending on the specific country.¹

In 2022, approximately 84% of the EU adult population agreed that vaccines are important, safe, and effective. Yet, vaccine confidence rates continue to decline, posing a threat to achieving the optimal coverage target. In most countries, for instance, COVID-19 booster uptake rates remain well below levels of primary vaccination and below targets set by the World Health Organization². For older adults, ensuring COVID-19 coverage rates reach target levels is paramount to avoid the social exclusion and loneliness experienced during the emergency phase of the pandemic³.

Today, we are here to emphasize that vaccinations are not limited to children and teenagers, as recently reiterated in the Council Conclusions on Vaccination from December 2022.

As the European Union's population continues to age, there is a growing need to prioritize adult vaccination on par with pediatric ONE. Older adults face a higher risk of vaccine-preventable diseases due to age-related declines in their immune systems and the presence of chronic conditions.

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 pandemic⁴.

In line with this guidance, we have chosen to change our approach this year compared to previous training sessions. For once, we have prioritized also what is currently emerging among those who are involved in and leading European projects focused on this topic.

In this regard, we have invited representatives from the Vaccine Safety Initiative,

¹ Ethgen O, Rémy V and Wargo K (2018). Vaccination budget in Europe: an update, *Hum Vaccin Immunother*. Vol. 14(12): 2911–2915. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30060702/>

² COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Published August 2023. Accessed August 2023. <https://vaccinetracker.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/vaccine-tracker.html#uptake-tab>.

³ Su Y, Rao W, Li M, Caron G, D'Arcy C, Meng X. Prevalence of loneliness and social isolation among older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Int Psychogeriatr*. 2023;35(5):229-241. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35357280/>

⁴ 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

an international scientific think tank and non-profit research organization with a mission to promote science-informed research and communication on infectious diseases and vaccine safety and a Medical Anthropologist. Allow me to introduce Barbara Rath and Ruth Kutalek, who will take turns speaking over the next hour.

Barbara is a board-certified pediatrician and infectious disease specialist. She is Research Director at the University of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté and, among the many assignments, co-founder and chair of the Vaccine Safety Initiative (VIVI) an international scientific think tank and non-profit-organization focused on new avenues for the treatment, monitoring, communication and prevention of infectious diseases.

Ruth is is a Medical Anthropologist and Associate Professor at the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, Medical University of Vienna, Austria. Her research currently focuses on anthropological perspectives of infectious diseases and vaccine hesitancy. She will speak about the contribution of social sciences to the debate of vaccine hesitancy with some concrete experiences.

Following their presentation, as always, please feel free to ask questions to the experts using the chat box.

In the last part of today's meeting, I will also introduce Jake Harrison: Senior Account Manager - Health & Life Sciences Stripe Communications to present the #VaccinAction 2023 communication campaign.

So please Barbara and ruth the floor is yours, thank you