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# **EQUITABLE ACCESS TO COVID-19 VACCINATIONS FOR UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS**

## **Our Mission**

[Regularise](#) seeks to improve the quality of life of undocumented migrants who already have established lives in the UK by attaining them basic rights & a safer and more equitable path to settlement and citizenship.

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## Background

In the United Kingdom to date, 9,468,382 Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine doses<sup>1</sup> have been administered according to priority groups most at risk.

In England, NHS advice states that you must be registered with a GP surgery in order to receive the vaccine<sup>2</sup>. Whilst proof of identity or immigration status is not required to register with GP surgeries, in practice, undocumented migrants and those with insecure status may struggle to access healthcare<sup>3</sup> and have been deterred from seeking support due to charging practices<sup>4</sup> and other spurious reasons, as exemplified below.

*"I went to my local GP to try & register to get the vaccine when available. The receptionist told me if you don't have visa/valid documents she can't register me for the vaccination program. She said I have to leave the premises immediately. I [have] been living here over 12 years."*

*Male, London, January 2021*

There is also the aspect of fear when interacting with public bodies:

*"One of my friends is very sick. He can't breathe properly. He has bad flu symptoms but he can't go out to see the doctor because he is afraid. It's very hard to survive these days. I also have health problems. I have bad allergies on my legs. If I scratch my legs, blood comes out of the skin. I have a red spot on my legs. I can't go to the doctors because they are asking us to bring documents. I have been living here for almost 10 years. I know other people as well who have health problems."*

*Male, London, January 2021*

Pressing questions have arisen as to whether undocumented migrants and migrants with insecure status will be pro-actively included in the COVID-19 vaccination programme and, if so, how this would be implemented in practice. As far as we know, there has not been any official communication that lays out a plan or guidance regarding vaccine access for this population of people, leaving an estimated 800,000 - 1.2 million undocumented migrants<sup>5</sup> in limbo, many of whom will be part of a vaccine priority group due to age, ethnicity or having underlying

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<sup>1</sup> Total first and second doses, 16:00, 31/01/21 <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/vaccinations>

<sup>2</sup> NHS guidance on booking coronavirus vaccination, January 2021  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/>

<sup>3</sup> Report on a mini-survey: Access to primary healthcare – GP surgeries, May 2020  
<https://haringeywelcome.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Haringey-Welcome-Survey-of-GP-Surgeries-May-2020.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Liberty's Briefing on the Health Protection Restrictions, 2020  
<https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/20201104-Liberty's-briefing-on-the-Health-Protection-Coronavirus-Restrictions-England-No.4-Regulations-2020.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Report estimating undocumented migrants from Pew Research Centre, 2007  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/fact-sheet/unauthorized-immigrants-in-the-united-kingdom/>

health conditions that are often left untreated due to barriers in accessing healthcare.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) highlighted<sup>6</sup> the importance of mitigating ethnic disparities in COVID-19, sometimes exacerbated by social and societal factors, through ensuring good vaccine coverage amongst Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. As many undocumented migrants and those with insecure status are from these communities, it is key that they are included in such rollout and additionally, granted access to healthcare services without being fearful of data sharing that can lead to immigration enforcement or the accrual of costs.

## Recommendations

Vulnerable undocumented migrants<sup>7</sup> require urgent assurance that they will be given equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, as a matter of protecting themselves and the wider society. One way of ensuring such assurance would be for GP surgeries to actively engage local community groups.

In order to guarantee the vaccination programme will be effective, the JCVI has advised that those most at risk of morbidity and mortality should be prioritised<sup>8</sup> in order to reduce their susceptibility to the virus and the overall risk of the UK population.

In order to uphold human rights and secure public health efforts:

- **the Government must guarantee that no person will be denied a COVID-19 vaccine as a result of their immigration status**
- **the Government and public health bodies must explicitly state, through a public information campaign, that undocumented/irregularised migrants are included in the vaccine rollout in order to build confidence amongst this population of people**
- **the Department for Health and Social Care must clearly instruct all GP surgeries that immigration status is not required for registration and that nobody, including undocumented migrants,**

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<sup>6</sup> JCVI advice , December 2020

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/950113/jcvi-advice-on-priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-30-dec-2020-revised.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950113/jcvi-advice-on-priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-30-dec-2020-revised.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Vincent, D., 2020. *Undocumented workers could be 'the most vulnerable in society'*, June 2020  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-52919418>

<sup>8</sup> List of vaccine priority groups

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation-advice-on-priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-30-december-2020>

**should be turned away from registering as a result of their immigration status;**

- **the Government must provide assurances that NHS data is firewalled from the Home Office.<sup>9</sup>**

## Summary

A successful COVID-19 vaccination programme relies on those at risk of morbidity and mortality to be prioritised. Due to insecure immigration status, up to 1.2 million undocumented migrants face uncertainty about how they might access a vaccine, leaving them without the right to healthcare and potentially jeopardising the wider public health effort to combat COVID-19 in the United Kingdom.

The government are advised to guarantee COVID-19 vaccines free of charge to all undocumented migrants whilst providing urgent and clear assurance that local GP services will allow them to register and receive vaccines without being reported to the Home Office.

## About Regularise

Regularise are a grassroots collective of migrants, British citizens and allies campaigning for the UK government to implement a regularisation scheme for all undocumented migrants and migrants with insecure status in the UK.

The regularisation scheme must allow undocumented migrants who have lived in the UK for at least 5 years to be able to apply for settlement (Indefinite Leave To Remain) and those who have lived here for less than 5 years to be given a 'right to remain' similar to the pre-settled status in the EU Settlement Scheme that will allow them to apply for settlement after they reach the same period of 'continuous residence' (5 Years).

Regularising undocumented migrants will grant these marginalised members of British society some fundamental rights including being able to work and access housing safely, and access health services without fear. This will mean that they can live with dignity and participate in society fully. Regularising undocumented migrants will ensure that they gain a safe, lawful and defined route to settlement in the UK.

You can read more on our FAQs: <https://regularise.org/about/#faqs>

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<sup>9</sup> A similar suggestion was made to Minister of Future Borders and Immigration Kevin Foster by David Davis MP, giving the example of Ireland:  
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-03-23/debates/85919174-3726-42C1-A751-93788ADB2045/TopicalQuestions#contribution-7567243B-71D9-4373-8BC6-8DD39E517307>