

European Immunization Week 2025

Reducing Inequalities in Vaccine Uptake in the European Region – Engaging Underserved communities

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» **Why do underserved communities need special attention when it comes to vaccination?**

- Vaccine hesitancy is not the only (or the main) cause for undervaccination
- Underserved community: a group that does not achieve high vaccine uptake in the current health system set-up
- Specific population groups may experience barriers to accessing immunization even where vaccines are free for everyone
- Not all population groups experience the same barriers
- High and equitable uptake will not be achieved by offering everyone exactly the same service: Some groups will need immunization services addressing their specific barriers

» What is RIVER-EU?

<https://river-eu.org/>

- Horizon2020 project (2021-2026)
- Implements evidence-based intervention to improve MMR and HPV uptake in selected groups
- Remove **health system** barriers to vaccination with HPV and MMR vaccines in underserved communities across Europe.
- Identify key elements of successful transfer of 'good practice' from one setting to another to increase vaccine uptake.



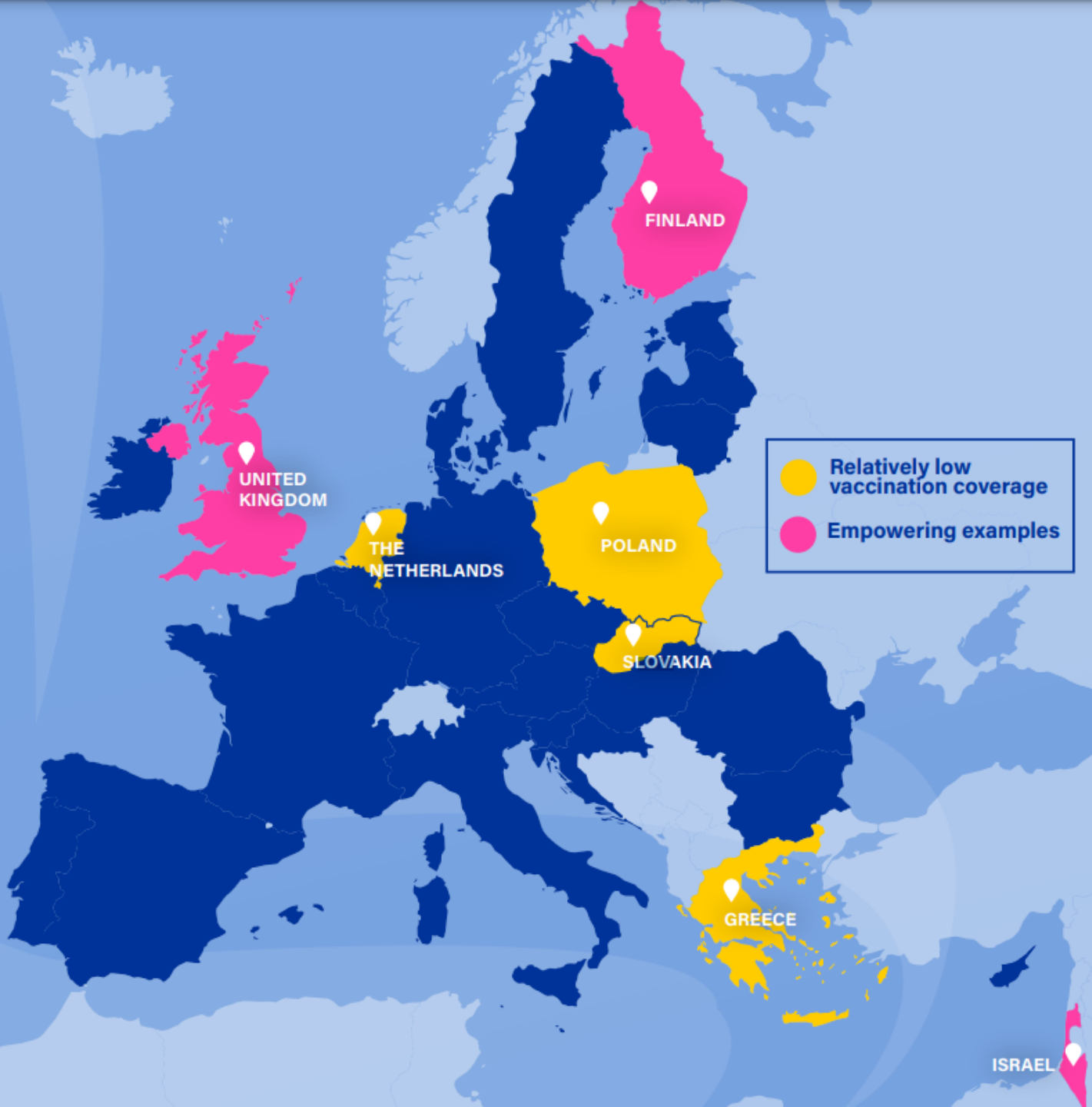
Where is RIVER-EU working?

Empowering examples

1. The Somali Community in Finland (MMR)
2. The Arab community in Israel (MMR and HPV)
3. The Bangladeshi community in the United Kingdom (MMR)

Underserved minority populations

1. The Ukrainian migrant community in Poland (MMR& HPV)
2. The marginalized Roma community in Slovakia (HPV)
3. The migrant and refugee community in Greece (MMR & HPV)
4. Turkish adolescent females in the Netherlands (HPV)
5. Moroccan adolescent females in the Netherlands (HPV)



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» RIVER-EU methodology

- Identifying Health system barriers and enablers to vaccination and interventions to overcome them
 - Systematic and realist reviews of relevant literature
 - Qualitative studies across all communities, using Participatory Action Research (PAR)
- Transferability analysis and intervention development: how can effective interventions be fitted to my own context?
- Implementation and evaluation of interventions: Did it work?



Barriers and enablers

| Barriers | Enablers |
|---|--|
| Language | Translation services |
| Low levels of knowledge and awareness | |
| Healthcare professionals (HCP) are not trained in providing tailored care and information | Culturally aware HCP/HCP from the same background |
| Vaccine hesitancy among HCP | Vaccination services are engaging, accessible and easy to navigate |
| Insufficient mechanisms to register migrants for vaccines and support them in navigating the system | Trust and respect from HCP |

» Transferability analysis methodology

- Needs-based pre-selection of promising interventions ('realist review')
- Needs-based identification of relevant transferability criteria (comparing primary and target contexts)
- Understanding 'fit' of pre-selected interventions to needs in target context and adaptation where needed
- **Population-Intervention-Environment-Transfer Model of Transferability (PIET-T)** (Schloemer & Schröder-Bäck, 2018): Co-creation with selected groups: 25 Workshops, 39 interviews and focus groups

Tailoring interventions to the target context

| Country (population) | Component 1 | Component 2 | Component 3 | Component 4 |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Netherlands (adolescents with a Turkish or Moroccan migration background) | Educational sessions given by health promotors+ Healthcare professionals | E-learning for healthcare professionals | | |
| Poland (Ukrainian migrants) | Training GPs with Ukrainian background on vaccination | Help navigating the system (scheduling, tracking & reminders) from Ukrainian-speaking Nurses & receptionists | Parental Educational sessions and community events (science festival) | Community-based vaccination sessions |
| Slovakia (Roma) | Training of primary care providers , Roma health mediators | Support in navigating the vaccination process using an existing network of Roma health mediators and coordinators | Educational activities for parents and children | Online content: FAQ answered by HC professional Motivational video with Roma woman/influencer |
| Greece (migrants) | Recruitment and training of culturally aware health professionals and promoters | Educational programmes in the community | | |

Preliminary results-work in progress

- 44% increase in knowledge post-intervention among Ukrainian parents in Poland
- Almost 100% increase in ability to talk about HPV and deal with refusal among Roma health mediators post-intervention
- 50% increase in intention to vaccinate among Roma parents across 16 marginalized communities in Slovakia
- 20% increase in intention to vaccinate among Ukrainian parents under 30 in Poland

Take home messages

- » Change is possible

Work WITH the people who it concerns:

- » needs sustained engagement and trust building: difficult to build, easy to lose
- » Requires engaging and keeping on many stakeholders holding different opinions

- » Show good intentions, set realistic expectations, be transparent and adapt the way you talk to the partner you're talking to
- » Nothing ever goes exactly as planned- seek to understand why- Be ready, be flexible, be transparent offer solutions and listen!

Thank you!

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