

Country: Latvia

Comitee: World Health Organization

Agenda Item: Responding to Opposition to Vaccination

Vaccine hesitancy or opposition to vaccination is a delay in acceptance, or refusal of vaccines despite the availability of vaccine services. The term covers outright refusals to vaccinate, delaying vaccines, accepting vaccines but remaining uncertain about their use, or using certain vaccines but not others. It can be influenced by factors such as lack of proper scientifically-based knowledge and understanding about how vaccines are made or how vaccines work, complacency, convenience, or even fear of needles. Hesitancy primarily results from public debates around the medical, ethical, and legal issues related to vaccines. Vaccine hesitancy stems from multiple key factors including a person's lack of confidence (mistrust of the vaccine and/or healthcare provider), complacency (the person does not see a need for the vaccine or does not see the value of the vaccine), and convenience (access to vaccines). Nonetheless, people against vaccines or anti-vaxxers are right in some cases due to the reasons mentioned above, but this is not true in all the cases. Vaccines like Polio, Tetanos and Hepatit B are essential to human well being, while the recent Covid19 raised suspicions due to it being an experimenal vaccine and its use of messenger RNA and gene therapy.

Latvia took some precautions for anti-vaxx people such as banning them from voting, enabling bussinesses to fire unvaccinated and quit giving them salaries which is considered violation of human rights by many. Giving too much priviledge and cotntrol to Russian media caused suspicion, disbelief and disinformation in a lot of Latvians. About 60% of adults in Latvia are fully vaccinated, according to European Commission data, below the union average of 76%. In and around Daugavpils, the largely Russian-speaking region of Latvia, vaccination hesitancy is fuelled by Russian media, according to hospital chairman Grigorijs Sejmonovs. Vaccine hesitancy is a global phenomenon, but experts say central Europeans may be particularly sceptical, after decades of Communist rule that eroded public trust in state institutions and left underdeveloped healthcare systems struggling with poor funding.

As seen above the Latvian government's handling of the pandemic was considered unfair and as a violation of human rights as well.

Some solutions to the problem of the anti-vaxxers or opposers to vaccine would be gaining Latvians trust once again by giving out accurate information. Government's honesty and the accuracy of the scientific research is an important factor. Giving less control to foreign countries

-in this case Russian media- would give Latvia more control for the distribution of their own information intended for the citizens. Also, less manipulation of the domestic media and scientific research, explanation of the positive and negative sides and side-effects of the vaccines would decrease the disbelief and misinformation among the Latvians. Our solution would be also to raise awareness by organizing webinars between doctors and citizens in which the people could have an access to accurate informations as well as ask questions.

Latvians should not be discriminated for their choice of vaccination; the harsh restrictions in Austria and France for the unvaccinated would not be an answer either, so finding the balance while keeping the transparency is the key.

Sources:

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