



Brussels, 27/07/2021

iCense reveals the reasons of vaccination hesitancy in the Belgian population

iCense assesses people's attitude towards Covid-19 vaccines in a research that is meant to support the Governments' effort to proceed with their vaccination plans.

The Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) commissioned the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and its spin-off iCense to conduct a survey to assess Belgian citizens' reasons for being or not being vaccinated.

The preliminary results of the study show that:

- Most Belgians have a positive attitude towards the vaccination or are willing to get vaccinated (around 85% in total);
- Almost 50% of the citizens who have not been vaccinated yet, do not intend to be vaccinated in the future. Only about 33% of the unvaccinated plan to get vaccinated in the future;
- Most refusers do so out of fear of side effects and because they do not trust the information provided by the media.

Most Belgians believe that the vaccine is effective in lowering the risk of contracting the Covid-19 and that vaccination is the best way to return to a pre-pandemic lifestyle. Yet around one third of the Belgian population has serious concerns about the side effects of the vaccine.

"With our research now we know what is behind this vaccination hesitancy. The insights we collected provide policy makers with key information to effectively tackle resistances and strengthen Governmental plans to fight against the current pandemic", said Dr Davide Rigoni, CEO at iCense.

The questionnaire set up by iCense in collaboration with the VUB, aims at revealing how people perceive the vaccination and what really drives their decision to be vaccinated or not.

"Since the start of the pandemic - says Prof Timothy Desmet, co-CEO at iCense - we have seen a dichotomy in the population, there is an ingroup which is in favor of the

iCense BV
Rue Charles Martel 6-8
1000 Brussels, Belgium
www.icense.org
info@icense.org



iCense

vaccines, and an outgroup, which is against the vaccine. Through this study, we understand both groups and what drives them much better. After this, we will investigate how unvaccinated people can be convinced to still be vaccinated".

The study also shows that clearly stopping vaccines in certain countries has seriously damaged confidence in vaccines and undermined vaccine readiness in Belgium. Therefore, to effectively proceed with the vaccination programs **there is need to extend the scope of the survey to all EU citizens, by assessing people's hesitancy towards covid-19 vaccines across all the member states.**

END

Press contact

info@iCense.org

Summary of the research “Perception and attitude towards the vaccination anti-Covid-19 in Belgium”

by Davide Rigoni, Phd, Founder and CEO at iCense
davide.rigoni@icense.org

The research “Perception and attitude towards the vaccination anti-Covid-19 in Belgium” is part of a scientific study that aims to map in detail all possible reasons for being reluctant to vaccinate and is funded by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) through their specific Covid call¹.

The research conducted by iCense and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) maps out in detail all possible drivers and barriers of the vaccination attitude and focuses specifically on the reasons behind vaccine hesitancy. The research aims in the second instance to examine how you can motivate people to get vaccinated anyway.

Key preliminary results

- ✓ Most Belgians are vaccinated and positive about vaccination or are willing to get vaccinated (around 85% in total);
- ✓ Of the 11% of the citizens who have not been vaccinated yet, almost half report they do not intend to be vaccinated in the future. Only 1/3 of the unvaccinated plan to get vaccinated;
- ✓ Most refusers do so out of fear of side effects and because they do not believe the information provided by the media;
- ✓ The figures show regional differences, with Wallonia showing a higher rate of vaccination rejection (54% of the unvaccinated) than Flanders (27%).

Most people in Belgium are vaccinated and positive about vaccination or are willing to get vaccinated. The main reason why people are positive towards vaccination is the perception that the vaccine is effective in lowering the risks of contracting the Covid-19 infection. Those who are already vaccinated are convinced that vaccination is the best way to protect their own health and the health of others: 86% of the people who are in favor of vaccination think vaccination “*is necessary to ensure health*”, and 92% think that “*vaccination is*

¹ Project Number G0H0420N

necessary to protect the most vulnerable people”.

Another reason why most citizens have a good attitude towards vaccination is the return to a pre-pandemic economy and lifestyle. For instance, 67% of those with a positive attitude toward vaccination find it important to be vaccinated *“to be able to go to cafes or restaurants”*, and 80% consider vaccination important *“to be able to travel again”*.

About 11% of the people who have already been vaccinated are nevertheless not positive about the vaccination. One reason why vaccinated people report negative feelings towards the vaccination is the fear of side effects, which is due to lack of research. 34% of the vaccinated think the *“vaccination may cause serious side effects”*, and 37% think *“that not yet sufficient research has been done into Covid-19 vaccines”*. Also, for 30% of the vaccinated, the fact that some countries stopped the vaccination with AstraZeneca and Johnson&Johnson made them worried. A considerable portion of vaccinated people also report that they have a negative experience due to the social pressure to get vaccinated. 31% of respondents who have been vaccinated stated that they felt pressured to get vaccinated, and 45% think that *“if you don't get vaccinated, you will be looked at in the wrong way”*.

The fear of the side effects of the vaccine is the main reason for not getting vaccinated. Most of the respondents who do not want to be vaccinated (82%) reported that the *“vaccination could cause blood clots”*. The fear of blood clots is relatively widespread, as more than a third (35%) of people who want to be vaccinated or have already been vaccinated say they are afraid of blood clots. 70% of women who do not want to be vaccinated think *“that the vaccine is dangerous for pregnant women (for the fetus)”*. The fear of side effects is smaller among the group of unvaccinated people who still want to be vaccinated (43%) and is even lower among those who have already been vaccinated (13%).

Another important barrier towards vaccination is the lack of trust in the media. Among the refusers, 78% are *“skeptical against the information provided by the media”* compared to only 48% of people who have the intention to still vaccinate, and 35% of the people who have already been vaccinated.

There are regional differences in attitudes towards vaccination. In Flanders there is a more positive perception of the vaccine, with 87% of Flemish people reporting being positive towards vaccination and only 4% reporting being negative (9% is neutral). In Wallonia, 78% of the people are positive and 10% are negative towards

the vaccination (12% is neutral). Brussels is the least positive of the Belgian regions: 77% of the respondents are positive and 12% are negative towards the vaccination (11% is neutral).

Looking at the citizens who have not been vaccinated yet, Flanders is again the region where people are most willing to be vaccinated (43%), followed by Brussels (40%) and Wallonia (33%). In Wallonia, 56% of the unvaccinated have no intention of being vaccinated (11% is uncertain), against 40% in Brussels (20% is uncertain) and 30% in Flanders (27% is uncertain).

French-speaking and Dutch-speaking regions not only differ in general attitudes towards vaccination, but also have different perceptions of safety in relation to how many people in total should be vaccinated. While most Dutch-speaking respondents would only feel safe if 90% of the population was vaccinated, most French-speaking respondents would already feel safe if 80% of the population were vaccinated.

This finding shows that expectations about when things can return to normal are different in the two Belgian regions. Compared to the French-speaking regions, the Dutch-speaking regions seem to be more cautious, as they would like to see almost everyone vaccinated before returning to a pre-pandemic life.

The two linguistic groups also differ in their attitudes towards the vaccination passport, as 76% of the Dutch-speaking respondents are positive about the vaccination passport, compared to 68% of the French-speaking respondents.

The general attitude towards vaccination is related to the educational level of the respondents. Negative attitudes towards vaccination are reported by 10% of the respondents with a lower education (Primary or Secondary education), 7% of the respondents with a Bachelor and only 3% of people with the highest education level (Master or Doctorate).

The level of education is also related to the willingness to be vaccinated. Of the group that has not yet been vaccinated, 30% of the highly educated citizens do not want to be vaccinated, compared to 56% with a Bachelor and 47% of the respondents with a lower education level.

Higher levels of education are associated with a more positive attitude towards vaccination. This positive attitude also leads to the concrete intention to be vaccinated in the short term.

Contact

info@icense.org