

# ADULT VACCINATIONS IN EUROPE. UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL

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## OBJECTIVES

Adult vaccination is often underestimated, yet it is a critical aspect of public health. Every year, vaccine-preventable diseases affect many Europeans, especially vulnerable groups such as the elderly and people with serious or chronic illnesses. This study aims to examine the status of adult immunization in European Union (EU) countries and to estimate the gaps between adult immunization needs and coverage.

## METHODS

We collected data on vaccination recommendations for adults against influenza, pertussis and herpes zoster, as well as vaccination coverage in the European Union. Using epidemiological data, we estimated the actual vaccination needs of the adult population and compared these needs with the current immunization coverage in the EU.

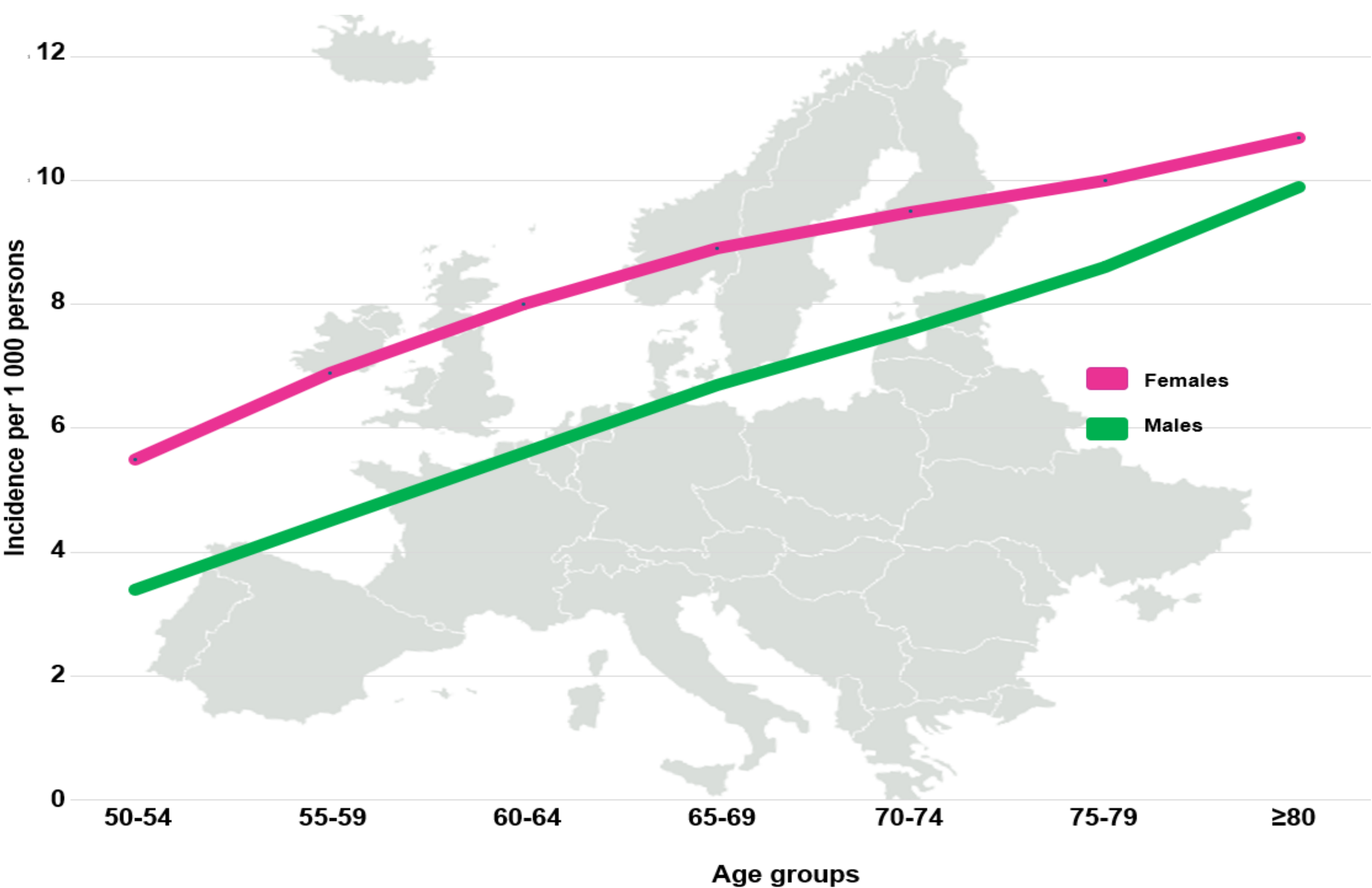


Figure 2. Herpes zoster incidence in Europe (2020)

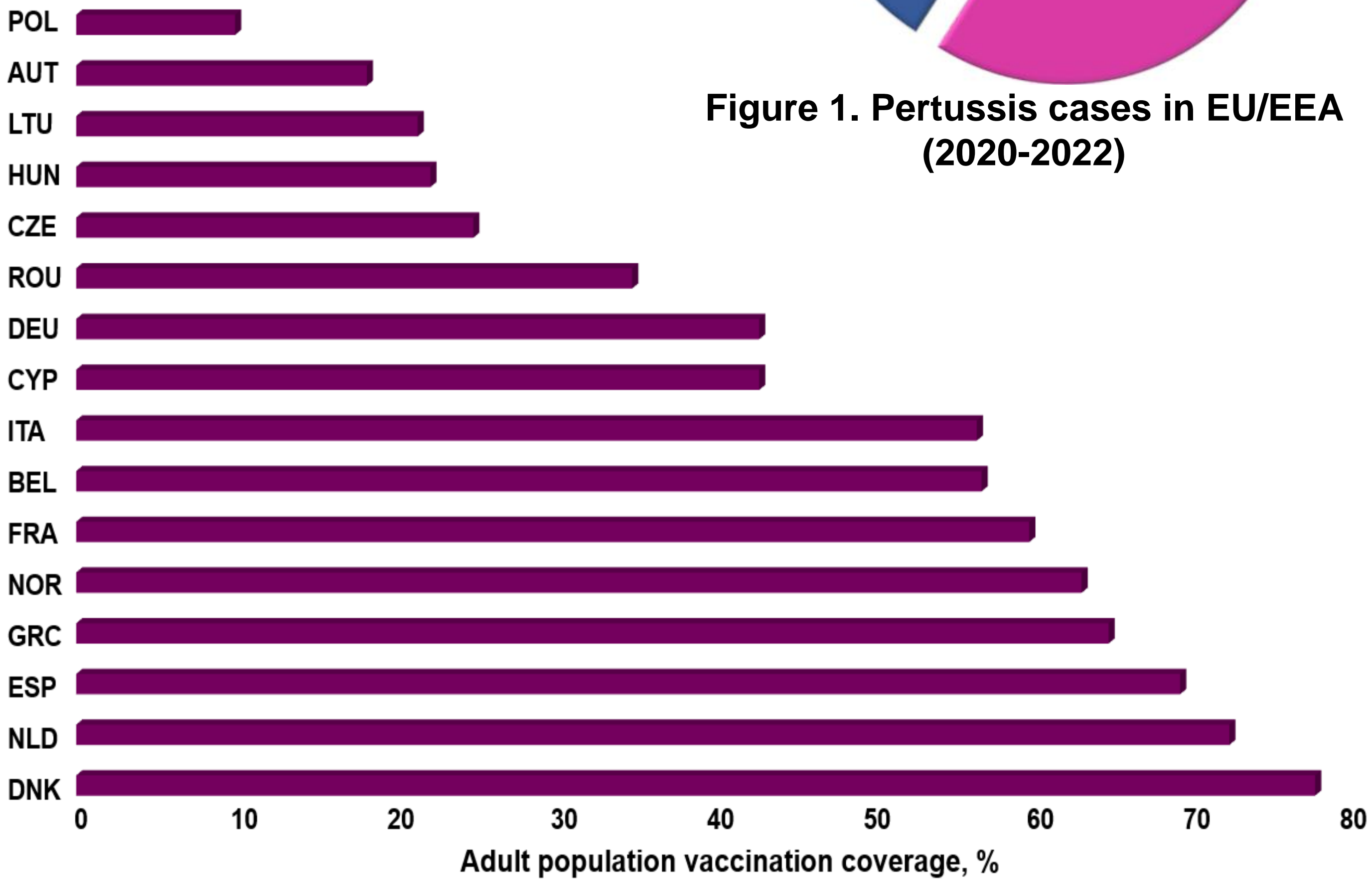


Figure 3. Influenza vaccination coverage in adult population in EU (2021)

## RESULTS

The study reveals substantial gaps between adult immunization targets and actual vaccination rates across the EU, accompanied by significant regional disparities. Despite existing recommendations, pertussis cases remain high, particularly in countries such as Poland, Denmark, and Germany, indicating gaps in vaccine uptake (Figure 1). Herpes zoster incidence rises sharply with age, affecting more than 10% of Europeans aged over 80 years, with higher rates in females, highlighting the need for targeted vaccination strategies for older adults (Figure 2). Influenza vaccination coverage varies widely, with higher rates in Western and Northern Europe compared with Central and Eastern Europe, leaving many older adults unprotected (Figure 3). These findings emphasize an urgent need for a coherent and strengthened adult vaccination policy across the EU to ensure comprehensive protection of vulnerable populations.

Table 1. Adult vaccination recommendations against herpes zoster, influenza and pertussis across EU

	AUT	BEL	CYP	CZE	DNK	FRA	DEU	GRC	HUN	ITA	LTU	NOR	POL	ROU	ESP	NLD
Herpes zoster																
Influenza																
Pertussis																

AUT – Austria; BEL – Belgium; CYP – Cyprus; CZE – Czechia; DNK – Denmark; Fra – France; DEU – Germany; GRC – Greece; HUN – Hungary; ITA – Italy; LTU – Lithuania; NOR – Norway; POL – Poland; ROU – Romania; ESP – Spain; NLD – The Netherlands.

Legend: ■ government funded ■ not government funded ■ partially government funded

## CONCLUSION

To reduce mortality, morbidity, and societal costs, it is imperative to establish robust adult immunization programs. Challenges to improving adult vaccination coverage include financial constraints, vaccine hesitancy, logistical problems, and inconsistent national health policies. The vaccination needs of the adult population far exceed the current coverage. Strengthening initiatives to promote adult vaccination across the EU is essential. Removing barriers to adult vaccination and aligning national policies with immunization needs can enhance public health outcomes significantly. There is a pressing need for concerted efforts to close the gap between the required and actual adult vaccination coverage in the EU.

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