

ROMANIA: MEASLES/RUBELLA VACCINATION SOCIAL MOBILIZATION CAMPAIGN

28 September 1999

Final Report

period covered: March 1998 - February 1999

With 93% of the intended recipients vaccinated, the measles campaign was considered a complete success. In the process, the image and profile of the Romanian Red Cross was strengthened throughout the country, and the contribution of the Red Cross volunteers to the campaign was a key factor in ensuring its success. Experience from the planning, implementation and evaluation of the campaign will also prove of use to the National Society in the organization of similar initiatives in the future.

The Situation

An outbreak of measles which began in December, 1998 led to a total of 33,199 confirmed cases and 24 deaths. With the situation worsening, at the request of the Romanian Ministry of Health the World Health Organization (WHO/EURO) and the U.S. Centre for Disease Control (CDC) undertook a mission to Romania in March, 1998. The information gathered suggested that there was a risk of a significant outbreak of measles occurring in 2002, involving predominantly high school-aged children and young adults.

In order to address this problem the mission recommended that a catch-up vaccination campaign be conducted in schools in 1998, targeting all children from 7-18 years of age who lack written documentation of having received two doses of measles vaccine in the past. Using the vaccine wastage factor, it was estimated that 3.5 million doses would be needed to vaccinate 3.1 million children. It was expected that if this step was taken, the predicted epidemic in 2002 would be avoided and by that time the Romanian government expects to cover its own future vaccine requirements and meet the two dose schedule. A further element was incorporated into the vaccination programme providing a combined measles/rubella vaccine for the large number of girls aged 13-18 who do not have immunity. An estimated 150 cases of congenital rubella syndrome occur each year, most of which could be avoided by vaccination.

On the basis of the above findings, the Romanian Red Cross (RRC) was requested by the Ministry of Health to participate, as an auxiliary to the public authorities, in mobilizing the target population for the proposed national vaccination programme. Additional support was requested from the International Federation, through the Romanian Red Cross, to provide financial assistance to carry out the campaign and to provide a total of 700,000 doses of vaccines to support the programme. The International Federation received a generous response from its donors in response to a call for support outside the formal appeal format to assist this project.

The Operation

Planned Programme w

Following initial agreements between the Ministry of Health and the Romanian Red Cross on the division of roles within the mobilization campaign and vaccination programme, a Plan of Action was drawn up by the National Society, with the assistance of the Federation's health representative in Romania, setting out the objectives of the campaign. The social mobilization campaign was to focus on informing and motivating the general public and, more specifically, parents, adolescents, schools and other groups or institutions responsible for or working with children within the target age group (7-18 years) to achieve the highest possible vaccination coverage, explaining why young people should be vaccinated and paying special attention to vaccination amongst the more vulnerable groups, including out-of-school children. Memoranda of Understanding were subsequently signed between the International Federation and the Romanian Red Cross, and the Federation, National Society and the Ministry of Health.

Actual Programme w

Social Mobilization Campaign

Prior to the launch of the national vaccination campaign promotional materials were developed by the Romanian Red Cross aimed at reaching the target groups and including small (45,000) and large (50,000) posters for schools and public places, information pamphlets (60,000) about the need for vaccination, small incentives for children (T-shirts (2,680), key rings (2,700), pencils (5,300) and calendars (286,000), a TV spot and 50 video copies for branches and information folders for branch staff and volunteers.

The National Society headquarters worked closely with its branches throughout the course of the campaign, introducing the campaign objectives, implementation strategy and resource needs during a meeting in August, followed up by the distribution of an information kit in September consisting of press release models, and letters of introduction to local government, health, and community representatives to mobilize support for the campaign at a local level. Promotional materials followed at the beginning of October, ahead of the official launch of the mobilization on 5 October, and the vaccination campaign on 15 October. A total of 82 training workshops were held for RC youth volunteers involved in the information campaign and distribution of the materials. Within the initial information strategy, emphasis was placed on TV spots at both national and local levels, which were broadcast free of charge.

Following an initial impact assessment carried out in six districts two weeks after the start of the campaign, a re-launch was carried out in November with a focus on increasing pick up amongst out-of-school children, children from Roma communities and children in isolated areas. Additional posters and information pamphlets were printed, including a 1999 calendar card with the campaign logo for beneficiaries. The re-launch also focused on strengthening co-operation with the district public health directorate staff in identifying and approaching the out-of-school communities. Support and closer co-operation was also requested from the Roma community leaders to achieve this.

Based on the pick up rate reported in mid-December (52% of target group vaccinated compared to 13.1% at end of October), it was decided to extend the vaccination programme to 22 January, in an effort to reach the target percentage (over 95%). During the extension period, a number of field visits were carried out (involving both NS and Federation representatives) to evaluate the situation and identify opportunities to further increase pick up levels amongst the out-of-school groups. The information gathered and conclusions drawn were shared with the Ministry of Health co-ordinators.

Vaccination Programme

The International Federation provided some 700,000 doses of vaccine for the national programme, channelled through the Romanian Red Cross. Despite the late arrival of 17 boxes of vaccine, the

vaccines were distributed to the districts ahead of the start of the national vaccination programme on 15 October. Vaccination in the field was carried out by district health directorate staff, whilst vaccines were delivered and plans drawn up by EPI (Extended Programme of Immunization) staff.

Final vaccination figures amongst target group:

{ Vaccinated in-school children - 95%.

{ Vaccinated out-of-school children - 71%.

{ Total of vaccinated people - 93%.

Final Evaluation

The final evaluation of the vaccination programme and social mobilization campaign was carried out from 7-16 February, involving a team of representatives from WHO, CDC Atlanta, UNICEF, the International Federation, the Romanian Red Cross, the Romanian Ministry of Health and Institutes of Public Health. A separate evaluation of the social mobilization campaign and its impact on the population was also prepared by the National Society headquarters and branch directors and the International Federation, based on an evaluation questionnaire filled in by Red Cross volunteers at the district level through interviews with vaccinated/non-vaccinated persons.

The Delegation

The International Federation's main role was to mobilize international donor support for the social mobilization campaign and for part of the vaccines. The Federation also provided advice and assistance to the Romanian Red Cross in elaborating the plan of action and in implementing the campaign through its health representative, who visited the National Society on a number of occasions during the campaign period. Additional support particularly prior to the end of the campaign and during the final evaluation was provided through the development delegate from the Regional Delegation in Budapest.

Participation of the Operating National Society

The RRC was responsible for carrying out the social mobilization campaign for vaccination, co-ordinating activities through three National Society officers (in the health and public relations departments) and the head accountant at headquarters level, overseen by the Director General, and with the 42 directors of the Romanian Red Cross branches. A total of 1,775 volunteers were involved in the implementation phase. The National Society also carried out an interim evaluation and final evaluation of the campaign.

Co-operation with Authorities and with Other Agencies

The key roles within and objectives of the vaccination programme and social mobilization campaign were agreed with the Romanian Ministry of Health before the programme launch in October and the National Society headquarters continued to work closely with the Ministry, with the support of the Ministry of Education, and with other international partners involved in the programme and campaign. At a district level, the Red Cross branches worked with the district public health directorate staff, the local authorities and with community leaders to ensure the successful mobilization of the target group. Contacts with community leaders were also initiated at a national level where appropriate. Vital contacts with the media, national and local TV and radio networks were also maintained to ensure the successful transmission of the campaign message to the general public.

Analysis of the Operation

Needs Assessment

The campaign was initiated in response to the findings and recommendations of a World Health Organization (WHO/EURO) and Centre for Diseases Control (CDC Atlanta) mission to Romania. This

assessment of needs identified the action needed to stop the evolution of the present measles epidemic and prevent a future epidemic.

Objectives/Plan of Action

Modifications w

The objectives and plan of action were drawn up during the summer 1998 and provided a solid basis for implementation of the mobilization campaign. The plan provided for an initial impact evaluation shortly after the start of the campaign to enable any modification to or re-focus of the campaign message or methods if necessary. This interim evaluation showed the necessity to focus on mobilization amongst the out-of-school children, Roma children and those in isolated areas, and to strengthen co-operation with the district public health directorate staff in identifying these communities. Additional promotional materials (a reprint of the posters and pamphlets and printing of a pocket calendar as a gift to beneficiaries) were prepared for the re-launch. The only major modification to the plan of action was the extension of the vaccination programme and therefore the mobilization campaign to 22 January 1999, to further increase the pick up rate amongst the target group.

Operational Concerns w

Initially, the main operational concern was regarding the commitment of the Ministry of Health, and the district public health directorates, to ensuring vaccination of the out-of-school population. Thanks to the efforts of the RRC and the International Federation in this respect, a common approach was finally agreed on committing all parties to vaccination, without discrimination, of both in and out-of-school children. However, as a certain degree of independence was given to the district health directorate staff in carrying out the programme, some directorates concentrated on the vaccination of in-school children first, which led to disappointing pick up amongst out-of-school children initially.

The low level of pick up amongst out-of-school, Roma children and those in isolated areas, was also a major cause for concern, which led to new initiatives in December/January involving in some cases the establishment of mobile vaccination teams to reach those who had limited transport possibilities.

The lack of definitive figures regarding the number of eligible children for the programme at the start led to some uncertainty in calculating vaccination percentage coverage. For the final evaluation, both the reported number of eligible children (from dispensary and school lists, and door to door checks) as well as census data were used.

Conclusions

Strengths and Achievements w

Through its social mobilization campaign, the Romanian Red Cross contributed to the vaccination of 93% of the targeted population, which should have an impact on the evolution of the current measles epidemic.

The campaign also contributed to strengthening the image and profile of the RRC throughout the country, both internally and externally. Co-operation between the headquarters and branches was strengthened, with information exchange and feedback occurring regularly between the two levels. According to the final campaign evaluation results from the branches, the promotional materials and information received were appropriate, useful and in adequate supply (apart from the information folders of which an additional 72,331 copies were made at branch level). The contribution of the Red Cross volunteers to the campaign was a key factor in ensuring its success, also strengthening their commitment to the National Society and proving highly appreciated amongst the general public.

Co-operation with external partners, particularly the Ministry of Health has also been strengthened as a result of the campaign, with 87% of branch responses indicating good co-operation with local health

authorities and 77% indicating good co-operation with local municipalities. Co-operation with Roma leaders was also strong.

Experience from the planning, implementation and evaluation of the campaign will also prove of use to the National Society in the organization of similar initiatives, in resource mobilization and in communications issues in general. A campaign of this nature has not been carried out by the National Society since 1949, and therefore provided an important precedent for future work in this field. It also helped to increase recognition of the National Society, particularly its role as auxiliary to the state in the provision of certain services, in the civil society environment and amongst the general public.

Weaknesses w

The target vaccination figure of over 95% of the eligible population was not achieved, due to difficulties in reaching out-of-school children in certain districts. However the final vaccination figure of 93% was acknowledged as a successful outcome of the programme, which was the largest campaign administering vaccine by injection ever conducted in Romania. Although contacts with Roma community leaders at a national level were good, some difficulties were encountered at a local level, which had an impact on the ultimate pick up rate. Despite good co-operation with national and local media in general, there were some incidences of negative messages being transmitted, which also led to cases of negative impact on pick up rates.

Follow-Up w

Following completion of the vaccination programme, the RRC was involved in both internal and external evaluations, the conclusions of which will be drawn upon to improve performance in related programme areas or for future initiatives of this type and has opened up possibilities to become involved in other health education activities. Where vaccines remain in some districts, the local authorities and branches have shown their intention to continue the vaccination programme and mobilization campaign to further increase total coverage figures.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Fundraising and Reporting Department

Bjorn Eder
Director
Europe Department

Campaign Supplies/Donation

Supplies	Amount	Organisation Donated or Purchased
Measles vaccine: VVRIC (Cantucuzinu Institute)	300,000	Ministry of Health
Rouvax (Pasteur-Mérieux)	2,100,000	Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
Measles-Rubella vaccine	592,000	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Eolarix (SKB)	100,000	Smith Kline Foundation
	60,000	Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
Injection equipment		
Disposable 2.5ml syringe/needle	3,000,000	Ministry of Health
Reconstruction equipment	300,000	Ministry of Health
Disposable 5ml syringe/needle	300,000	Becton-Dickenson
Cardboard safety boxes	35,000	UNICEF
Plastic safety boxes	35,000	Becton-Dickenson
Vaccine carriers	464	Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
Social mobilisation materials		
Posters		International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Q&A pamphlets	5,000	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies UNICEF