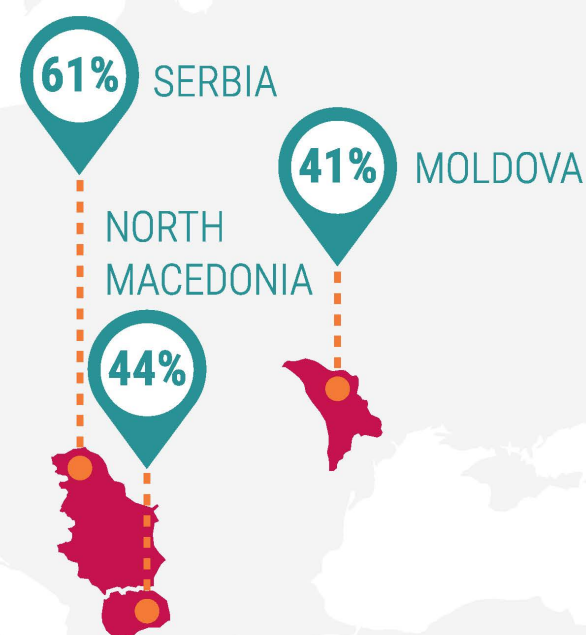


Adaptive learning to advance behavior change to increase uptake of COVID-19 vaccines in Serbia, North Macedonia, and Moldova

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COVID-19 Vaccination Rates



WHAT

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccination rates among pregnant women and people 45+ with a chronic disease remained unacceptably low in Serbia, North Macedonia, and Moldova.¹ USAID's MOMENTUM Routine Immunization Transformation and Equity project used a behavioral integration approach to increase vaccine uptake in these two priority populations. The project focused on getting: 1) providers to recommend the COVID-19 vaccine to pregnant women (PW) and people with chronic disease who are 45+; and 2) PW and 45+ with chronic disease getting the full course of COVID-19 vaccine. This project aimed to change provider behaviors through continuing medical education (CME), and community behaviors through collective engagement (CE) workshops to embrace COVID-19 vaccination as part of a healthy lifestyle, with use of adaptive learning to rapidly identify and adapt program implementation.

HOW

Across the three countries, 1,035 medical providers received CME training.

- Over **99%** said that the training improved their knowledge and understanding of COVID-19 vaccines, healthy lifestyles, and high-quality client services.
- **99%** reported feeling confident in applying what they learned at the course.

2,023 community members attended CE workshops. Afterward,

- **52%** spoke with their medical provider about COVID-19 vaccination.
- **18%** discussed vaccination with their partner for support.
- **8%** received the COVID-19 vaccine.



To continue to adapt and respond to participant needs and understand ongoing barriers to COVID-19 vaccination, the project used several adaptive learning processes: after-action reviews, data review sessions, and rapid interviews with health professionals and community members to inform CME and CE activities.

RESULTS

In January 2024, the project implemented several changes to the CME program to support changes in provider behavior.

FEEDBACK

Time constraints for medical professionals to participate in a day-long course.

Ministries of health vaccination interests beyond COVID-19 vaccines.

CME trainers (and CE) workshop facilitators wanted more information about facilitation techniques.

ADAPTATION

Created a modular version of the curriculum with optional activities based on time availability.

Added information to the CME curriculum, including:

- Flu vaccine in Moldova.
- Measles vaccination (due to outbreaks in the region).

Developed a document with more information on facilitation techniques for providers.

Several changes to the CE workshops and activities were made in Serbia and North Macedonia.

FEEDBACK

The puzzle activity was a favorite because it was an effective and diverse discussion starter. It "elicited strong emotions," "surprise," and "nostalgic memories" among participants.

Decision making often involves people beyond the one to be vaccinated.

Reminders were viewed as too frequent by participants in North Macedonia.

ADAPTATION

Provided take-home puzzles, tote bag, and notepads to workshop participants in Serbia.

Implemented workshops with PW and their partners in Serbia. Implemented workshops with chronic disease patients and their family members in Serbia.

Decreased frequency of SMS reminders and modified content (to be determined in North Macedonia).

CONCLUSION

Applying behavioral integration informed the development of evidence-based, tailored strategies to boost vaccine uptake. Coupled with adaptive learning processes, this approach enabled the project to enhance program implementation in response to changing needs. By continuously using adaptive learning, we aim to understand how the new adaptations will improve two key behaviors: trained CME providers' recommendation of the COVID-19 vaccine to chronic disease patients and PW, and their journeys to complete the full course of vaccination.

¹ Cvjetkovic S, Jeremic Stojkovic V, Mandic-Rajcevic S, Matovic-Miljanovic S, Jankovic J, Jovic Vranes A, Stevanovic A, Stamenkovic Z. Societal Trust Related to COVID-19 Vaccination: Evidence from Western Balkans. Sustainability. 2022 Oct 20;14(20):13547.

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