

WHO and UN promote the use of digital technologies to improve immunization services in North Macedonia



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Since the beginning of the pandemic national health authorities in North Macedonia have made efforts to unlock the full potential of available technologies to improve how services are provided and how the health system is managed. WHO and the United Nations (UN) in North Macedonia have supported these efforts as part of the joint programme “Safe and Innovative Health Services in Times of COVID-19” implemented by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), WHO and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

“Harnessing the power of digital technologies is essential for more responsive, cost-effective and data-informed health services, when it comes to both COVID-19 vaccination and routine immunizations. WHO has supported the introduction of innovative digital tools in the health sector as part of the Government’s efforts to overcome challenges in planning, logistics management, vaccine administration, and immunization monitoring,” highlighted Dr Anne Johansen, the Regional Director’s Special Representative to North Macedonia and Head of the WHO Country Office a.i. in Skopje.

One of these innovations has been the establishment of a national electronic immunization database, connected to patients’ e-health records, that provides accurate and timely data on vaccination. The data are especially useful for policy-makers in designing interventions aimed at reaching areas and populations with low vaccination coverage rates. A new web portal has also been set up to give patients quicker and easier access to their immunization records, including their COVID-19 vaccination certificates. The portal has the added benefit of alerting parents to when their children need to return for their vaccinations.

Improving data collection through digitalization, for both COVID-19 vaccination and routine immunizations, opens possibilities for better monitoring, coordination and evidence-based planning and decision-making. At the same time, the overall modernization of the immunization process helps to reduce administrative tasks, allowing health workers to devote more time to caring for their patients.

As one of the most trusted sources of information, health workers play a key role in achieving high vaccination uptake. Therefore, it is crucial to provide health professionals with the knowledge, resources and tools to support their patients in making vaccination decisions.

“WHO in North Macedonia has developed electronic training packages to equip health-care workers with new skills and knowledge on immunization to help them to thrive and, in doing so, strengthen the national health system for the benefit of the whole population,” noted Dr Johansen.

Around 60 immunization programme managers across the country were trained in planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of the immunization system. In addition, 340 health-care workers were trained on vaccine cold chain equipment and systems, immunization safety, monitoring and surveillance, as well as ways to reach all parts of their communities.

Accredited OpenWHO training courses related to COVID-19 and vaccination were also adapted into local languages. The knowledge gained from these courses helps health-care workers to improve the quality of immunization services, share innovative vaccination practices with their peers and promote vaccination uptake to their patients.

“Integrating digital technologies into the health system can improve the way services are delivered and bring about long-term benefits. In the future these activities will help to increase vaccination coverage for routine immunizations and COVID-19 vaccinations,” concluded Dr Johansen.

WHO will continue to support North Macedonia’s COVID-19 response and recovery, including the use of digitalization where needed to bring health benefits to the country’s population.

“Safe and Innovative Health Services in Times of COVID-19” is a joint

programme aiming to improve access to sexual and reproductive health, immunization, and gender-based violence support services for women, adolescent girls and children, with a special focus on the most vulnerable populations in remote and underserved areas. The activities are being implemented jointly by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA, and made possible by contributions to the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund from the Governments of Austria, Cambodia, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.

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