

Terms of Reference and Scope of Services

Coordination of population support activities during physical distancing measures

BACKGROUND

The Project Development Objective of the “Serbia Emergency COVID-19 Response Project” (SECRP) is to respond to the threat posed by COVID-19 and to strengthen the national health system for public health preparedness in Serbia.

The activities planned under component 1: *Emergency COVID-19 Response* will be implemented through 3 subcomponents:

- Subcomponent 1.1 - Case Detection, Confirmation, Contact Tracing, Reporting
- Subcomponent 1.2 - Social Distancing Measures and Communication Preparedness.
- Subcomponent 1.3 - Health System Strengthening

Under subcomponent 1.2: *Social Distancing Measures and Communication Preparedness*, the Ministry of Health plans to promote the implementation of preventive non-pharmaceutical measures in the context of the emergence of a new, more contagious strain of coronavirus, as well as to support the population in the situation of long-term physical distancing measures through the previously initiated activities.

Mental health support

The pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has changed the world in the past year. At the very beginning of the pandemic, the focus of all discussions was on how the virus affects physical health and what consequences the virus leaves on the body. Very little was said about mental health and its preservation in a pandemic.

Although it is one of the most important non-pharmaceutical measures in combating the further spread of respiratory virus infections, such as SARS-CoV-2, the measure of *physical distancing*, the long-term use of this and other measures to limit population mobility can have considerable negative consequences for everyone's mental health.

The feeling of fear of infection, long-term isolation and living in conditions of quarantine or self-isolation, has left psychological consequences on most people, even on those who have not had any problems with mental illness so far. A special challenge in maintaining mental health is the traumatic experience of sudden loss of a family member, especially if he/she is also the breadwinner of the family, so the fear of illness that a person feels is mixed with the feeling of existential vulnerability which further aggravates his/her mental health.

As a consequence of daily and long-term exposure to numerous stressors, the general population experiences, in addition to a dominant state of fear, an increased feeling of anxiety and depression, which are recorded among members of all population groups. In some cases, such a condition is manifested through more frequent use (or abuse) of alcohol and other psychoactive substances, and, in extreme cases, self-harm and suicidal behaviour.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, health systems around the world are suffering from an extremely high level of workload. The highest pressure is put on the workers in the health system who are employed on the first line of the fight for human health and who come into contact with a large number of patients on a daily basis, at the same time facing challenges in terms of organisation and logistics. A further aggravating circumstance are numerous sources of stress that were not present in normal circumstances: work in intensive care with seriously ill people, high mortality rate, lack of time that can be devoted to patients, extreme working conditions in spacesuits, etc. Due to all that, the risk of developing the "burnout syndrome" among health professionals is multiplied in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In view of the above, the Ministry of Health, in order to reduce the rate of anxiety and depression in conditions of social isolation, as well as destigmatisation related to COVID-19, opened national telephone helplines to provide psychosocial support to all citizens in need. By calling the given telephone numbers, all interested persons (persons in isolation and quarantine, families of infected persons, health professionals and associates) will be able to get help from experts who will provide counselling and support, as well as appropriate information on ways to overcome stress and anxiety, thus contributing to the preservation of the mental health of the population in the conditions of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Information and community engagement strategy

Under SECRP Component 1, funds have been allocated for numerous activities aimed at informing the community, as well as citizen engagement.

At the beginning of the pandemic, before strict non-pharmaceutical measures were taken, the Government of the Republic of Serbia launched a national coordination strategy from the top level as well as a public communication strategy, informing citizens about the new virus and all the measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

It is also planned to further develop and test the messages and materials that will be used during the epidemic and to improve the communication infrastructure for the purpose of disseminating information from the national to the regional and local level. Communication activities will support cost-effective and sustainable methods, such as promoting handwashing through various communication channels (mass media, counselling, schools, workplaces) and integrating them into specific interventions and ongoing communication activities conducted by the Ministry of Health. In addition, the system for registration of citizens for vaccination will be additionally promoted, as well as the issuance of certificates on the received vaccine.

Supporting to community engagement will enable the following:

- Community engagement in needs assessment and prioritisation, with specific strategies to ensure that vulnerable groups (older people, people with disabilities, immunocompromised people, Roma and the economically marginalised, etc.) have access to communication channels which will enable them to best express their needs.
- Establish participatory monitoring and reporting mechanisms to enable communities to help monitor responses to COVID-19 at the local level and provide feedback on service delivery gaps (availability of information, access to relevant care, equal treatment, etc.).
- The implementation challenges presented through physical distancing and isolation have been addressed through the development of consolidated, affordable and secure digital solutions which promote and support receiving feedback from the community.

Vaccination promotion

Vaccination is a simple, safe and effective prevention measure.

The Republic of Serbia is among the countries in which vaccination against the COVID-19 pathogen has already begun, and activities aimed at maximizing the coverage of the population with immunisation are carried out on a daily basis. The National Coordination Team for the preparation and implementation of immunisation has prepared and adopted the necessary operational plans and expert-methodological instructions for the immunisation roll-out in line with the priorities, with the expert support of the *Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut* Institute of Public Health of Serbia.

The population has been provided with an electronic system in order to register for vaccination, as well as for issuing a certificate on the received vaccine.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the population support campaign during physical distancing measures is to preserve the mental health of the entire population through activities carried out by the Ministry of Health.

In addition, members of different population groups are encouraged to communicate and engage the community in all activities carried out by the Ministry of Health, such as strengthening communication strategies to inform all vulnerable populations about the key role of physical distancing in reducing transmission rates and the impact of COVID-19 on everyday life and developing a positive attitude towards all the recommended measures which are necessary for the successful implementation of the campaign (adoption of behaviours such as hand washing, proper way of wearing a mask, avoiding touching the face, etc.).

Special health-educational messages and adapted forms of communication for their distribution will be designed for particularly vulnerable population groups (nursing homes, shelters, Roma settlements, etc.).

In addition, messages related to the promotion of immunisation against the COVID-19 pathogen will be strongly supported.

TARGET GROUPS

Preparedness for a potentially new wave of COVID-19 caused by new strains of the virus is key to effectively protecting the entire population.

Given the comprehensive nature of the problem resulting from the long-term implementation of physical distancing measures, the support activities will be targeted at the general population in Serbia.

OWNERSHIP

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TIMELINE

Thirteen months (May 2021 – May 2022)

DELIVERABLES

The consultant shall deliver the following:

- Design, advertising plan
- Media buying
- Monitoring report
- Final report

COMPANY QUALIFICATIONS

- At least one public health campaign in the previous 3 years
- At least one contract worth 80,000 EUR in the field of public campaigns in the previous 3 years
- Annual income of at least 250,000 EUR in the period 2017-2019.

INDIVIDUAL QUALIFICATIONS (Qualifications of Employees)

Key Personnel:

- Project manager: At least 3 years of experience in designing and advertising campaign with at least one public campaign in last three years
- Advertising consultant: At least 3 years of experience in designing and advertising/participating in campaigns, with at least one project in last three years
- Design specialist: At least 3 years of experience in designing campaigns, with at least one public campaign in last three years.