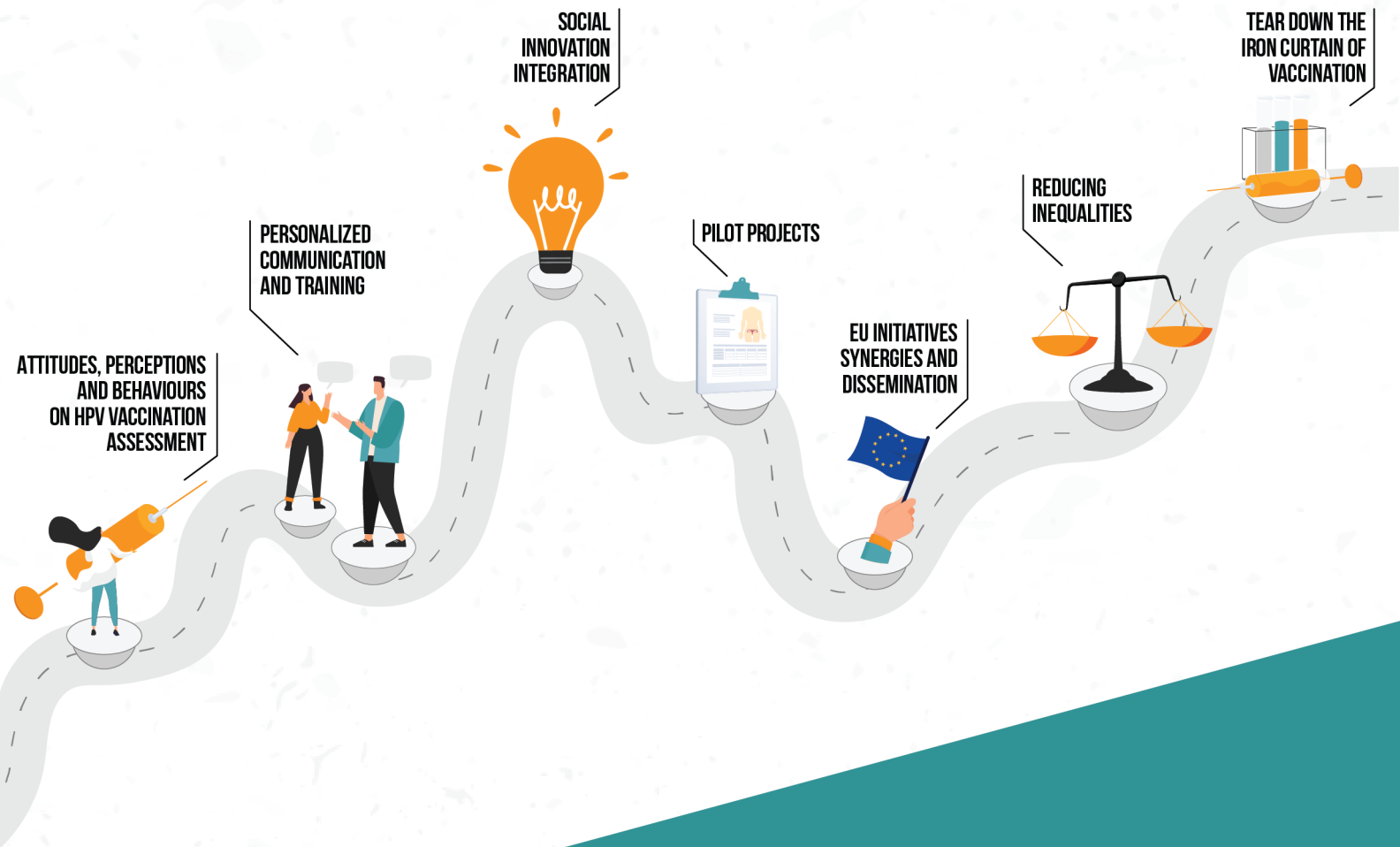


Rethink and Reduce inequalities in HPV vaccination through personalized communication and training, based on social innovation and behavioural determinants of health



D3.2. REPORT ON THE LAUNCHING EVENT

APRIL 11, 2024



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Launching event

"PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ON HPV VACCINATION - CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS"

April 11, 2024

CONTEXT

The Renasterea Foundation for Women's Health together with the Centre for Innovation in Medicine (InoMed) and the Eurocomunicare Association, as partners, are implementing the project "Rethink and Reduce Inequalities in HPV Vaccination through Personalized Communication & training, based on social innovation and behavioral determinants of health" (ReThinkHPVaccination), co-funded by the European Union through the EU4Health Programme. The main goal of this project is to support Member States and EU-widening countries to ReThink and ReStart their HPV vaccination campaigns and so take a step closer to achieving Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and Cancer Mission objectives with regards to HPV vaccination and cancer prevention.

The launching event - "PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ON HPV VACCINATION - CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS" is part of Work Package 3: Combating fake-news and the infodemic. According to the project description, in this phase the guideline will be made public through an event with communicators, mainstream media representatives, international experts (ESO, JRC and Cancer Mission) and authorities, explaining to them how to avoid spreading fake information and presenting the consequences of spreading fake-news. We will also provide a short version (handbook) of the guideline in Romanian and other printed branding materials.

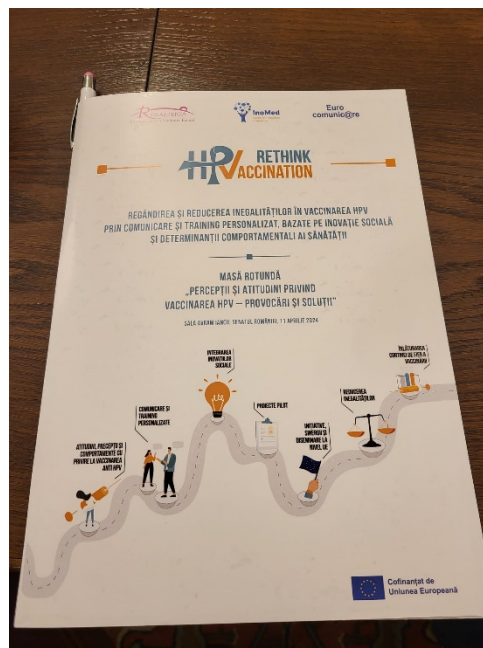
The event aimed at bringing together public policy leaders on vaccination and cancer prevention, experts in combating misinformation and fake news, national and international public figures to present and discuss the results of the sociological study on behaviour, perceptions and attitudes towards HPV vaccination in Romania, conducted in November 2023 as part of the ReThink HPV Vaccination project, as well as the communication guide for the general public, health professionals and authorities, developed as part of the same project.

The launching event was organized in partnership with the Senate Public Health Commission from the Romanian Parliament. The event took place of April 11, 2024, starting with 10 AM, at the Palace of Parliament, Bucharest, Avram Iancu Room.



Picture 1. Launching event - "PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ON HPV VACCINATION - CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS"

Each participant received a folder with printed materials and engraved with the project visuals.



Picture 2. Folder received by participants.

AGENDA

10:00 - 10:15 - Reception of participants

10:15 - 10:20 - Opening of discussions - Dana Deac (moderator) purpose of the meeting

10.20 - 10.45 - Need to address the problem

- Prof Dr Adrian Streinu Cercel - President of the Health Commission of the Romanian Senate
- Mihaela Geoană, President of the Renaissance Foundation - objectives of the ReThink HPV project
- Senator Nicoleta Pauliuc - Video message
- Dr. Tiberius Brădăţan - State Secretary, Ministry of Health
- Professor Jeliuzko Arabadjiev, Cancer Mission Board member (video message)

10:45- 10.55 Delia Nicoară - Specialist in Public Health, Oncological Institute „Prof. Dr. Ion Chiricuţa” - Cluj Napoca

10:55 - 11:05 - Dr. Gindrovel Dumitra, National Society of Family Medicine - the role of family doctors in adoption of preventive behaviour by the population

11.05 - 11:10 – Dr. Alina Diaconu, primary gynecologist, Renasterea Medical Centre of Excellence - the role of gynecologists in recommending HPV vaccination in the female population over 19 years old

11.10 - 11.15 – Dr. Dégi László Csaba, Professor at Babeş - Bolyai University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work in Cluj - Napoca, President of the European Cancer Organization (ECO) in Brussels, Executive Secretary of the International Psycho-Oncology Society (IPOS) and Romanian representative to the American Association of Oncology Social Workers - video message

11.15 - 11.25 - Aurélie Joris, MD PhD, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University Hospital Saint Pierre Brussels -live connection on ZOOM

11:25 - 11:40 - Platform presentation, InoMed representative – Dr. Marius Geantă

11:40 - 11:50 - Presentation of the study results and communication guide - Alina Duduciuc - PhD at Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, SNSPA, coordinator of the postgraduate programme Communication in the Field Health, Eurocomunicare Association

11:50 - 12:00 - Rotaru Ileana - lecturer at the Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy and Humanities, Faculty of Communication, West University of Timisoara - the role of stakeholders in local communities to combat disinformation, Eurocomunicare Association - VIDEO material

12:00 - 12.10 - Raluca Simbotin Associate Director Policy & Government Relations, MSD Romania - European models successful vaccination campaigns in Sweden and Portugal

12:10 - 12:20 - Victoria Asanache, Oncology Patient Navigator - role of patient navigators in prevention, screening and therapeutic management of patients

12:20 - 12:45 - Open discussion. Questions and answers

13:00 -14:00 - Lunch (Rustic Restaurant - Senate)

DISCUSSIONS

Dana Deac, journalist and media expert from the Rethink HPV project, commenced the event as the moderator, offering insights into the project's background and discussing the vaccination landscape and cervical cancer scenario in Romania.

“Romania remains a country where the incidence of cervical cancer is still relatively high. HPV vaccination can have a major impact in reducing illness and death from the disease. By promoting vaccination and ensuring access to these vaccines for all young people, Romania can make significant progress in combating cervical cancer and improving public health”. (Dana Deac, journalist).

Prof. Dr. Adrian Streinu Cercel, President of the Health Commission from the Romanian Senate, highlighted the need for addressing the issues of limited information about health in general, and, more specific, about the HPV vaccination. Both girls and boys have to be vaccinated in order to reduce the burden of cervical cancer and other associated cancers in Romania and other European countries. Prof. Streinu Cercel cited Australia as an example, where cervical cancer has been effectively eradicated through widespread HPV vaccination efforts.

The President of Renasterea Foundation, **Mihaela Geoana**, described the Rethink HPV project and its main achievements in the first year of implementation:

- Launch of knowledge centre on HPV vaccination communication: www.rethink-hpv.eu
- Conducting the study "Behaviour, attitudes and perception of HPV vaccination in Romania";
- Development of the personalized HPV vaccination communication matrix;
- HPV vaccination messages and leaflets for adolescents and teachers
- Development of HPV communication training curricula;
- Local partnerships established with representatives from Arges and Vrancea counties to support the pilot project;
- Partnerships with national and European NGOs to promote HPV vaccination;
- Constant communication on HPV vaccination, both to high-level stakeholders and to the general public, about the project, its funding and activities, HPV vaccination, benefits, health risks in the absence of the vaccine has generated an increased level of awareness, as more than 1 million people have heard at least one of the messages generated by the project.

“We are at an unprecedented point in the history of HPV immunization in Romania, where access to the vaccine is very easy, but which involves a path that parents and women eligible for compensated vaccination need to understand and navigate easily. We are more than five months after the implementation of the new mechanism for obtaining the vaccine (the transition from the request to the Public Health Directorate through the family doctor, to the compensated prescription), the change in the sample of beneficiaries (from girls aged 11-18 years, to the inclusion of women 19-45 years, the inclusion of boys between 11-19 years). All this information will have to be communicated intensively through all media, targeting each segment of the population, in order not to lose the positive trend of HPV vaccination in which we are situated”. (Mihaela Geoana, President of Renasterea Foundation).

Senator **Nicoleta Pauliuc** conveyed a video message expressing recognition of the significance of the roundtable and the broader conversation concerning HPV vaccination in Romania within the European context. By fostering a collaborative approach among various stakeholders, efforts to promote HPV vaccination can be more effective in ensuring widespread understanding and acceptance, ultimately leading to improved public health outcomes.

Afterwards, **Gindrovel Dumitra**, representative of the National Society of Family Medicine, discussed about the role of the general practitioners in prevention and health-oriented behaviour. At the moment, important steps have been taken in Romania to increase the HPV vaccination rates which is ensuring free of charge vaccination for boys and girls and 50% compensated price for women aged 19-45. Due to this campaign, the vaccination rate started to increase, yet, it is still very low because of low levels of information and the spread of fake news and misinformation. In the past, family doctors exhibited hesitancy and harbored doubts about the HPV vaccine, resulting in limited promotion to their patients. At the moment, he estimated that at least 90% of the Romanian family doctors have trust in the HPV vaccine are willing to recommend it.

“I want to congratulate you for all the consistency you have added (referring to the efforts of Renasterea Foundation), because actually, I have always said, after the HPV vaccination failure in 2008, what was missing in the public space was consistency” (Gindrovel Dumitra, representative of the National Society of Family Medicine).

Dr. Tiberius Bradatan, state secretary, Ministry of Health, stressed the importance of targeted communication campaigns on promoting HPV vaccination by tackling the disinformation and fake news that are spread.

“It is very clear that after the pandemic episode, the power or the voice of the anti-vaccinationists became very strongly known, very well heard and unfortunately it has had a spillover effect in the sense that other processes, vaccination projects and the national vaccination programme have taken a hit, but I think this time we will be able to overcome the impact, what has been said in the public space and what the fake news has meant. And here I come to the area of communication, as much as we wanted to avoid that. We have to go into this area, because the voices that support vaccination and that come with scientific arguments, with arguments” (Dr. Tiberius Bradatan, state secretary, Ministry of Health).

Senator Raluca Ioan pointed out the need for stronger pro-vaccination messages from doctors and media representatives in order to spread the information about the possibility of getting the HPV vaccine.

Young women have been diagnosed with cervical cancer, highlighting the pressing need for increased awareness, education, and access to regular screenings, as mentioned by **dr. Alina Diaconu**, primary gynecologist. Some mothers still harbor fears regarding potential side effects of the HPV vaccine, such as infertility, contributing to their uncertainty about whether to vaccinate their children or not.

„I invite my patients who have children, both girls and boys, to come to my cabinet and explain to them together with their children whether they are 9 years old, 10 years old, whether they have started their sexual life or not, to explain to them what the role of this vaccine is and to explain to them what chances it gives them to be

able to enjoy a healthy child, and girls and boys alike to be proud that they have done this and that they can have a protected intimate life from this point of view as well” (dr. Alina Diaconu).

Profesor Jeliuzko Arabadjiev, member of the Cancer Mission Board, transmitted a video message where he highlights the need for consolidated effort for promoting HPV vaccination in order to reduce the burden of cervical cancer and other associated cancers and pathologies.

Dr. Dégi László Csaba, President of the European Cancer Organization (ECO) in Brussels, supports the effort of Rethnik HPV project and believes that promoting HPV vaccination effectively involves a multifaceted approach that addresses various stakeholders and utilizes diverse communication channels.

“Cervical cancer is a major burden for women’s health in Romania; actually, for thousands of girls and women every year. However, it is also true that we have a powerful weapon against HPV: vaccination against HPV virus. And yet, this the reason why we are meeting again today. Certain perceptions and attitudes regarding the HPV vaccine. I think we can put it bluntly, certain widely spread myths, disinformation and misinformation, they are the reason why we meet, the reason why we fight and they represent a very big challenge for us” Dr. Dégi László Csaba, President of the European Cancer Organization (ECO).



Picture 3. **Dr. Dégi László Csaba**, President of the European Cancer Organization (ECO) – video message

Dr. Marius Geantă, President of InoMed, stressed the importance of personalized communication when designing communication campaigns. He, also, presented the results they achieved through the project, starting with describing the Knowledge Center and continuing with the personalized matrix for communication.

„Our health is influenced 60% as a proportion by factors related to our social environment and individual behaviour. We if we have spoken, and I think it was very good that we have spoken about HPV vaccination so far, we have spoken from a medical perspective, the vaccine is effective and safe, we have heard a lot today, and from a health system perspective. We compensate, we have national program,

okay, these are health decisions. But at the end of the day, those segments matter very, very little in the equation, actually. And to be able to have a greater impact, we have to take into account what is not usually taken into account and that is this social and individual behavioural component” (Dr. Marius Geantă, President of InoMed).

PERSONALISED COMMUNICATION MATRIX FOR HPV VACCINATION

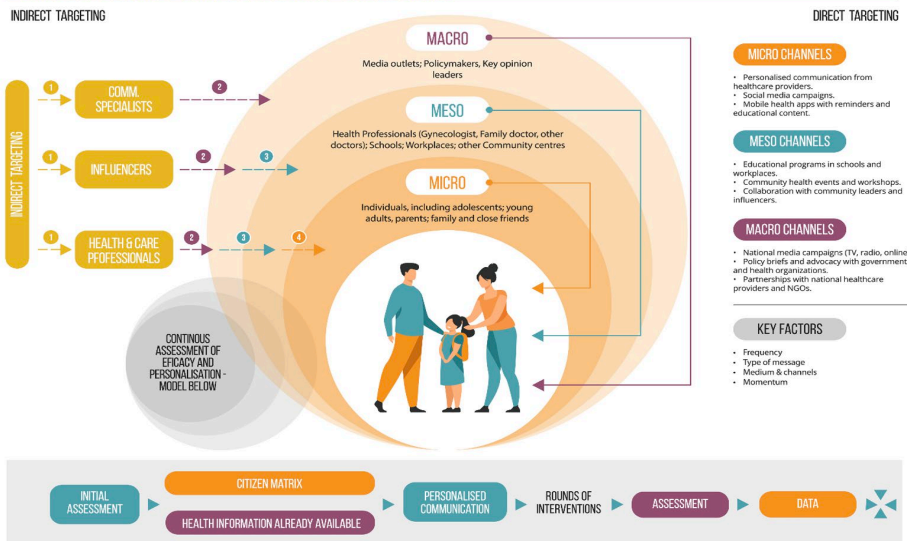
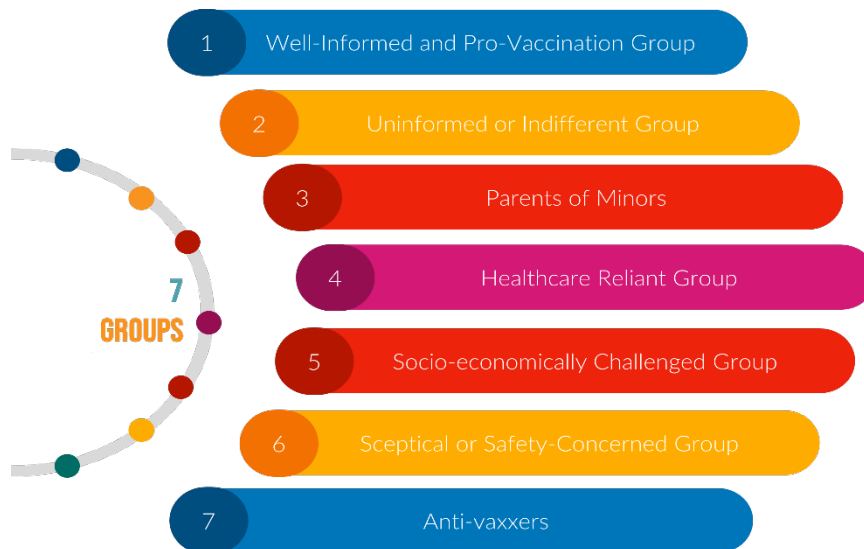


Figure 1 HPV Vaccination Communication Matrix



The main objective of the event was to present the national study conducted in November 2023 „Behaviour, attitudes and perception of HPV vaccination in Romania” and the communication guide on HPV vaccination. Both deliverables were presented by **dr. Alina Duduciuc**, Eurocomunicare Association.

“Of course, from the HIV-AIDS epidemic to the present day, there has been talk about the relevant role of communication in health care, but we can only decline an effective communication strategy if we understand what the public's evaluative judgments are on the issue being campaigned for. So we need to find out what people know, how informed they are, what their perceptions are about the safety and effectiveness of vaccination, how and where they inform themselves, i.e. what is their orientation towards sources of health information, what are their concrete behaviours, how they have so far vaccinated their children with the compulsory or the recommended classical vaccination scheme” (dr. Alina Duduciuc, Eurocomunicare Association).

Main results of the study:

- The majority of respondents (79%) had heard about HPV infection. Their socio-demographic profile is: mostly female, young (18-34 years), living in urban areas.
- Nearly 6 in 10 consider the optimal range for vaccination to be between 10 and 15 years, and few think it is between 0 and 9 years.
- Of the respondents, 67% did not receive vaccination advice.
- The majority (54%) believe that vaccination should be made compulsory to a large extent.
- More than half of respondents (57%) consider HPV vaccination safe or very safe.
- Both respondents (93%) and their children (95%) are not vaccinated against HPV.
- The main reason for not vaccinating is lack of recommendation (90%).

The purpose of the guide on HPV vaccine communication is to provide key information about the HPV virus and the benefits of vaccination against it. It explores the risks associated with HPV infection, the importance of vaccination prevention, and the common myths surrounding them. The guide aims to provide accurate information and increase the level of information about vaccination against diseases caused by the HPV virus. A deep understanding of this issue is crucial to individual and public health. That is why this material navigates through key information about HPV, how the vaccine works, who should get vaccinated, and what benefits it brings to protecting against this virus. The guide tackles common myths and doubts, and provides resources to support the decision-making.



Rotaru Ileana, lecturer at the Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy and Humanities, Faculty of Communication, West University of Timisoara, he critical role that stakeholders within local communities play in combating disinformation surrounding HPV vaccination. She underscored the importance of these stakeholders, such as healthcare professionals, educators, community leaders, and policymakers, in actively engaging with the public to provide accurate information and address any concerns or misconceptions.

Raluca Simbotin, Associate Director Policy & Government Relations, MSD Romania, has presented successful models of promoting HPV vaccination in other European countries such as Sweden and Portugal, both of them achieved the recommended rate of over 90% HPV vaccination rate. Some of the solutions that could help Romania in increasing the HPV vaccination rate are: setting a concrete goal for HPV vaccination, some targets and modelling for the next few years so that we reach the elimination targets, setting up electronic registries and, of course, sharing good practice.

Victoria Asanache, cancer patients' navigator, emphasized the necessity for more robust communication campaigns. Furthermore, she shed light on the challenges faced by cancer patients in navigating institutional processes and described the significant burden it places on them.



Picture 4. Participants at the launching event

PARTICIPANTS

	Name	Surname	Institution/ organization
1.	Arsene	Mihail	Direcția de Sanatate Publica Arges
2.	Asanache	Victoria	
3.	Bescheru	Ana	MSD Romania
4.	Bobîrnea	Iulian	Fundatia Renasterea
5.	Botezatu	Mihai	Fundatia Renasterea
6.	Brădăţan	Tiberius Marius	Ministerul Sanatatii
7.	Cazacu	Adriana	Fundatia Renasterea
8.	Chiotea	Dorin	TVR
9.	Cimpoca	Mirela	D.G.A.S.P.C. - sector 1
10.	Cociasu	Oana	Medic One
11.	Comanescu	Alina	ECO - HPV Action Network
12.	Copos	Cristiana	Fundatia Renasterea
13.	Cucos	Bianca	INOMED
14.	Dănaŭ	Diana	D.G.A.S.P.C. - sector 1
15.	Deac	Dana	Fundatia Renasterea
16.	Diaconu	Alina	Fundatia Renasterea
17.	Dobrescu	Paul	Eurocomunicare

18.	Duduciuc	Alina	Facultatea de Comunicare si Relatii Publice din cadrul SNSPA - Coordonator al programului postuniversitar Comunicare in Domeniul Sanatatii, Eurocomunicare
19.	Dumitra	Gindrovel	Asociatia Societatea Nationala de Medicina Familiei/ Medicina Generala
20.	Durucu	Matei	Fundatia Renasterea
21.	Durucu	Liliana	Fundatia Renasterea
22.	Enache	Marina	Eurocomunicare
23.	Geantă	Marius	INOMED
24.	Geoană	Mihaela	Fundatia Renasterea
25.	Hosszu	Alexandra	Fundatia Renasterea
26.	Nume	Prenume	Institutia
27.	Ioan	Raluca	UMF Carol Davila, IOMC, Polizu
28.	Ivanescu	Bogdan	DoctorMIT.ro
29.	Lazar	Janina	Directia de Sanatate Publica Vrancea
30.	Maier	Călina	SCOG " Prof. Dr. Panait Sîrbu"
31.	Marinescu	Izabela	TVR
32.	Negară	Cătălina	Fundatia Renasterea
33.	Nicoara	Delia	Institutul Oncologic „Prof. Dr. Ion Chiricuță” - Cluj Napoca
34.	Oancea	Claudia	Fundatia Renasterea
35.	Pauliuc	Nicoleta	Senator PNL - Președinte Comisia pentru apărare din Senat, Președinte OFL
36.	Pîrvan	Mirela	Eurocomunicare
37.	Popescu	Loredana	ASE
38.	Rotaru	Ileana	Facultatea de Științe Politice, Filosofie și Științele Comunicării, Membru Comitet Științific din cadrul proiectului Rethink HPV Vaccination
39.	Rusu	Violeta	Fundatia Renasterea
40.	Simbotin	Raluca	MSD
41.	Sofariu	Corina	Medic One
42.	Spinu	Valentina	Fundatia Renasterea

43.	Spiridon	Lenuța	Fundatia Renasterea
44.	Toma	Daciana	SNMF
45.	Trifon	Gabriela	MSD

PICTURES



PRESS RELEASE

Bucharest, April 15, 2024 - At the Palace of Parliament, the round table organized by the Renaissance Foundation in partnership with the Health Committee of the Romanian Senate brought to public attention the first results of the ReThink HPV Vaccination project, which identified perceptions and attitudes about HPV vaccination and highlighted challenges and solutions in this vital area of public health. By promoting vaccination and ensuring access to these vaccines for all young people, Romania can make significant progress in fighting cervical cancer and improving public health. In this context, the ReThink HPV Vaccination Project - co-funded by the European Commission, coordinated by Fundația Renașterea and having as partners the Centre for Innovation in Medicine | Innovation in Health (INOMED) and Eurocomunicare - is all the more important.

The event on 11 April was attended by leading figures from the fields of medicine, sociology and communication, representatives of legislative and executive authorities and the media.

Among the prominent participants were Professor Dr. Adrian Streinu Cercel, President of the Health Committee of the Romanian Senate, who discussed the role of education in promoting HPV vaccination in Romania. "We need to start health education as early as possible. Let's talk to children about hygiene, protection and the benefits of vaccination. We have the model of countries that have been vaccinating since 2009. For example, in Australia they have done continuous education and through HPV vaccination of girls and boys they have achieved the elimination of cervical cancer. There is no more of this disease in Australia!" concluded Professor Streinu Cercel.

Mihaela Geoană, President of the Renaissance Foundation, presented the objectives of the ReThink HPV project, highlighting the importance of education and awareness of the benefits of prevention. "Although extremely important steps have been taken in terms of prevention, in our country, statistics still place us at the top in cervical cancer incidence and mortality. Today, both primary and secondary prevention are very accessible, but they are not sufficiently communicated and therefore accessed. As we reiterate at every event, any health campaign or project needs to be intensively communicated to every segment of the population, through all media, in order to change the dramatic statistics on cervical cancer in Romania," said Mihaela Geoană.

Dr Tiberius Bradățan, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Health, discussed ministerial strategies and policies to improve access and implementation of HPV vaccine. Dr. Gindrovel Dumitra, Primary Care Family Physician, coordinator of the vaccinology group of the National Society of Family Medicine (SNMF), member of the Scientific Committee of the ReThink HPV Vaccination Project, underlined the crucial role of family physicians in promoting and implementing preventive practices among the population and asked for the help of the media and other involved institutions to disseminate the right messages about HPV vaccination.

The video messages in support of the ReThink HPV Vaccination project were sent by Senator Nicoleta Pauliuc, supporter of cancer patient programs, initiator of numerous laws for patients, herself a cancer survivor; Jeli azko Arabadjiev, Associate Professor of Oncology, President of the Bulgarian Scientific Society of Immuno-Oncology, Member of the Committee of Experts in Medical Oncology of the Bulgarian Ministry of Health, Consultant in Medical Oncology at the European Society of Medical

Oncology; Dr. Dr. Dégi László Csaba, Associate Professor at Babeş - Bolyai University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work in Cluj - Napoca, President of the European Cancer Organization (ECO) in Brussels, Executive Secretary of the International Society of Psycho-Oncology (IPOS) and Romania's representative to the American Association of Oncology Social Workers; Associate Professor Ileana Rotaru from the Faculty of Political Science, Philosophy and Communication Sciences, West University of Timisoara, member of the Scientific Committee of the ReThink HPV Project.

Reporting directly from Brussels was Professor Dr Aurélie Joris, obstetrics and gynaecology physician at the Saint Pierre University Hospital in Brussels, who presented an overview of HPV cancers and their associated mortality rates across the European Union. She also showed the challenges and solutions of the Belgian model which are the same ones that the ReThink HPV Vaccination Project has identified in Romania.

The presentation of the <https://rethink-hpv.eu/ro/> platform was given by Dr Marius Geantă, President of the Centre for Innovation in Medicine | Innovation in Health (INOMED), partner in the ReThink HPV Project. The results of the sociological study and the communication guide, two of the stages completed so far in the project, were presented by Prof. Dr. Alina Duduciuc from the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, National School of Political and Administrative Studies (SNSPA), coordinator of the postgraduate programme Health Communication - Eurocomunicare, partner in the ReThink HPV Project.

Raluca Simbotin, Director of Policy and Governmental Relations of MSD Romania spoke about European models of vaccination - successful campaigns in Sweden and Portugal.

Victoria Asanache, cancer patient navigator spoke about the role of patient navigators in prevention, screening and therapeutic management and brought up the courses that will take place between May and November as part of the pilot project that will take place in Arges and Vrancea counties. The round table was also attended by representatives of the Public Health Directorates of the two counties mentioned, who support the pilot project for training communicators - ReThink HPV.

The event was marked by intense and constructive discussions, where issues such as vaccine accessibility, effective communication among the population and the need to involve all relevant actors in public health promotion were debated. Journalists and communication specialists (Izabela Marinescu and Dorin Chioţea from TVR, Dr Bogdan Ivănescu -doctor MiT, Oana Cociaşu -Medic One) actively participated and supported the role of the media in communicating the benefits of the HPV vaccine and reducing the incidence of cervical cancer and other HPV-related diseases.

The debate addressed multiple issues related to HPV vaccination, including public perceptions and attitudes, challenges encountered in vaccination campaigns and proposed solutions to overcome these obstacles. The debate highlighted various challenges related to HPV vaccination, such as the lack of adequate information among the population, the stigma and myths associated with HPV vaccination, and the need to strengthen efforts for equal access to vaccination in all parts of the country. Participants stressed the importance of effective communication in promoting vaccination, highlighting the need for an integrated approach involving health authorities, health professionals, the community and civil society. At the same time, the importance of correct information and health education to increase awareness and acceptance of vaccination was stressed in order to reduce the incidence of cervical cancer in Romania.



The Renasterea Foundation for Women's Health together with the Centre for Innovation in Medicine (InoMed) and the Eurocomunicare Association, as partners, are implementing the project "Rethinking and Reducing Inequalities in HPV Vaccination through Communication and Tailored Training based on Social Innovation and Behavioural Determinants of Health" (ReThinkHPVaccination), co-funded by the European Union through the EU4Health Programme. The main aim of this project is to support EU Member States and enlargement countries to rethink and restart their HPV vaccination campaigns and thus take a step closer to achieving the European Cancer Plan and Cancer Mission targets for HPV vaccination and cancer prevention.

More details about the project: <https://rethink-hpv.eu/ro/>