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The importance of the consultation process in order to implement public policies. Public consultation on enhanced cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases

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Abstract. Between 20-25 November 2020, we applied a questionnaire on public consultation on enhanced cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases, on a sample format of 130 responses. The objectives of the research were to measure the social perception of citizens about public vaccination policies during the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, this case study aims to identify the factors that influence the vaccination program, ways and initiators of communication on the safety, efficacy and effectiveness of vaccination, both for citizens and for medical specialties. In addition, another objective is to identify the credibility of vaccination campaigns and their effective evaluation. Moreover, this study aims to find out people's perception of how each state should adapt to internal needs (relative to European public policies), but also the opinion of respondents about the responsibility for information and ways to document them with scientific and convincing arguments, concluding how well a public health policy could be managed if there is adequate consultation.

Keywords. vaccination, public consultation, public health policies, public administration, covid-19, pandemic

1. The concept of public policies

With the development of society, as a result of the fierce desire of people to increase the standard of living, the limit of life expectancy, the quality of the services that are at their fingertips, the public administration was born. It carries out all its activities "under the regime of a public authority, of organising the execution and actually executing the law and of providing public services, in order to satisfy the national/general public interest"¹.

Thus, we note that the citizen, with his needs, is put in the center of attention, his rights and obligations are recognized, he's offered information in a more transparent way, being the most important person for the civil servants. The latter must build a close relationship with the citizen, captured in three situations: applicant, beneficiary and taxpayer.

¹ GEO no. 57/2019 of 3 July 2019 on the Administrative Code, published in Of. M. No. 555 of 5 July 2019, Part I, p. 2.

Including a vast field, the literature has drawn clear lines to consolidate a package full of definitions and characteristics for public policies, explaining in the same sense their major influence on citizens, but also the importance that people have in developing and adopting policies, according to democratic principles.

In this sense, the activity of the administration, intertwined with that of the public authorities, is closely linked to the creation of public policies, seen as a sum of decisions that lead to the achievement of objectives through the allocation of resources. Etymologically, the notion of public policy focuses on an internal or external activity, carried out by the decision-makers of the state that brings added value to all the collectivities that have the same expectations.

If they're realised when "a public authority - central or local - intends, with the help of a coordinated action programme, to modify the economic, social, cultural environment of social actors"² in different areas (public policies on the environment, health, culture, education, science or public administration policies), they are assigned a series of definitions, characteristics, all referring to the positive contribution to the problems arising in a society.

Although a new and topical concept, public policy was given explanations, such as "a set of interrelated decisions, taken by a political actor or a group of actors, regarding a series of goals and the means necessary to achieve them in a given situation"³ or even "everything that a government decides to do or not to do"⁴.

Starting from the technique to improve the living conditions of the citizen by modernizing the services offered, to the notion of politics seen as a response, a package of decisions, as vision, reaction to problems, justification, activity of several actors, it needs to be adopted with a sense of responsibility and cooperation, with perseverance and motivation, to make their long-term contribution to the environment that surrounds us, whether we are talking about the worldwide, European, national or local plan.

Beside these meanings brought to policies, we can also state their similarity with different aspects of reality such as, policies seen as official authorization, because a law passed by the legislative power which requests or initiates the carrying out of an activity or even the entry into force of a normative act is subsequent to the implementation of a policy. Policies are an expression of the ideal purpose or situation, and an eloquent example of this can be national development strategies that have a normative character, placing over time, certain objectives to be achieved in a field.

Therefore, the concept of public policy is associated with a process carried out, based on a purpose, on interdependent promises that start from the most common to the vital, but a thorough knowledge and a clear understanding of them can be achieved through careful, retrospective and prospective analysis.

2. Analysis of public policies

The examination of public policies, by far, is different from the research done in the major branch sciences (natural sciences, social or formal ones), but it has flourished as a sub-branch of the social sciences and as an interdiscipline of economic and political ones and thus deserves to be studied.

² Rus Mihaela, Sandu L. Mihaela, Taseţe Tănase, *Proposals for public policies in Romania. Case Studies*, Journal of social sciences-Technium Volume 3, 2020, p.3

³JenkinsWilliam *Policy Analysis: A Political AND Organizational Perspectives*, 1978, London, p. 82.

⁴JenkinsWilliam *Policy Analysis: A Political AND Organizational Perspectives*, 1978, London, p. 82.

A dissemination of information about public policies, seen omnisciently, prepares and helps to cooperate better with the future and improves knowledge about society. The analysis of public policies, born on the increased concern of the government, is a technique for measuring organizational effectiveness by examining and evaluating the effect of a program.

This is achieved through a study that aims to bring to the surface information that further leads to the implementation of objectives. At the same time, it can be seen as "an applied discipline of the social sciences that uses multiple methods of research and argumentation to produce and transform information relevant to public policy, which can be used in political environments to solve public policy problems"⁵.

What is more concretely analyzed is, from a perspective, the way of creating the policy, the criteria for selecting the solutions, its beneficiaries, and, from another angle, the substance of the policy, including its description and compatibility with other already existing policies. In addition, an analysis also allows its monitoring and evaluation, as the last step in the adoption process, which captures the unanticipated impact and effects. To be understood, "public policy research"⁶, sometimes called science, is done through different theories, but also certain models that simplify problems, using communication and predicting certain results. When we are referring to the theoretical perspective, the field of public policy is closely related to the relationship with the citizen.

A first theoretical approach is the state-of-the-art one, which is characterized by rationality and the initiative of the government. At the same time, this approach focuses on the argumentation of state intervention, most often in the case of market failure, on the distribution of power between actors and the role, respectively, the influence of the state on the creation of policies. Within this theory, the citizen is the beneficiary, and the process of policies is formed in central and local government.

Another approach, the stadia one, also characterised by rationality, focuses on the citizen-client relationship, which is directly involved in the activities, in particular through its consultation. Also, the stadia approach, analyzes and explains the framework of policy actions, also mentions how citizens can draw the guidelines for the direction of a policy.

In the third approach, that of "open" policies, which have a major coverage, the citizen is a "partner of governance"⁷, having the opportunity to evaluate, provide and design policies. This leads to a collaborative and coordinated governance between the citizen and the state that reduces the costs and burdens of the administration and increases the participation of citizens in the adoption of public decisions. In addition, this theory is the result of the development of technology, of links between the citizen and representatives of public institutions, which have increased the degree of communication and the number of technical solutions.

Methods of policy analysis, seen as representations of elements of problems, built with clear purposes, are widely used in the social sciences to understand and explain the causes and results of a policy, and even to predict certain consequences that occur in policies.

Institutional model. In a democratic society, the state is the network of institutions that balances economic, social and conflicting interests. This activity is intertwined with the attempt

⁵Weimer L. David And winning R. Aidan, *Public policy analysis – concepts And practice*, Third Edition, Arc Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 31.

⁶Lasswell, D. Harold, *The Emerging Conception of the Policy Sciences*, în Weimer It. David And winning Aidan, *Analysis of public policies- public – concepts And practice*, Third Edition, Arc Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 35. Distinction between public policy analysis And public policy research is given by Force customer orientation: public policy researchers are not so much Link by public decision-makers.

⁷ Dennis Linders, *From is-government to we-government: Defining a typology for Citizen coproduction flax the Age of social media*, Government Information Quarterly, Volumes 29, 2012, p.233.

to achieve all the objectives of the entire range of public policies, depending on the preferences of the majority. Also, according to this model, is expressed the role and influence of institutions in policy-making, as they benefit certain interests, which can determine, implement or apply some policies. "The model outlines constitutional provisions, judicial decisions and ordinary law obligations"⁸.

The group model. It is worth mentioning that the interaction between groups generates policies, because the same actors militate for the same purposes and interests. In this direction, there are noted the conflicts between groups for political influence, collectives which are differentiated according to the organization, the persuasion, the material and human resources, but also to the access to decision-makers. An eloquent example is given by political parties or even coalitions of groups.

The model of the elites. By elite is meant the totality of public opinions that influence political issues. The elite model regards public policy as the exponent of the preferences and values of the power of the elite, putting itself in contrast to non-elites represented by those individuals who do not have a high degree of education and have limited financial resources. In general, government officials tend to adopt policies decided by the elite, hesitating to take into account the real needs of the population, illustrating the economic gap between the poor and the rich.

The public choice model. It relates to the decisive role of citizens' preferences, motivated by the consultation process. The public option combines with the social welfare that any actor wants, whether put in the position of voter, or taxpayer, candidate, bureaucrat, political party, government, legislator, interest group, etc. However, there are criticisms that relate to: the different interests of politicians and bureaucrats, in contrast to those of voters outside election campaigns, and to the influence of interest groups that promote certain requirements in accordance with their own interests.

Game theory. Abstract model that requires more than two participants, who must adapt their conduct to illustrate their own desires and abilities, but also expectations about the actions of others. The rules of the game are valid for all participants, who are involved in elections, usually related to order, security and national defense.

The incremental model. This theory focuses on how decisions seen as an extension of previous government activities are made, to which incremental changes are added. Also added is the factorological analysis for the formation of a unequivocal decision. Incrementalism is conservative, and policymakers continue previous policies to save time, money, even if the programs initiated were not relevant.

The procedural model. All stages of a policy have been extensively studied by political scientists, to the detriment of the content of politics, but the relationship between process and content is one to be studied. This model highlights all the official or unofficial stages achieved in the adoption of a policy, stages that I have mentioned in a distinct subchapter.

The rational model. Rationality, a topic debated by the social sciences, is considered the "indicator of wisdom" in decisions, balancing political alternatives with rational reasons. The literature holds that rational choices maximize social benefits, equating rationality with efficiency. Policymakers need to be rational in identifying objectives, classifying them by importance and cost-benefit analysis.

⁸ Charles L. Cochran, Malone Eloise F., *Public Policy: Perspectives AND Choices*, Fourth Edition, Publishing Lynne Rienner, USA, 2014, p. 4.

The model of the system. Characterized by the state as the sum of the institutions with decision-making power, the enforcement of public policies and the use of legitimate force.

3. Typology of public policies

Public policies manifest themselves in different fields of activity, in both levels of government (local and central), and their classification can be made according to several criteria, either by reporting in time: conjectural policies (which are carried out for 1-2 years), structural policies (which show results in medium or long term), by scope, a criterion which gives rise to global economic policies or specific to a single part of economic activity, or according to the criterion of the desired objectives: public policies of recovery or stabilization.

However, the most frequently used policy typologies "are those that classify public action according to the theory of social change that structures it"⁹. In this case, the most significant is the classification built by Lowi¹⁰ according to the criterion of coercion, which is added by Ripley and Franklin. Thus, the typology based on coercion divides public policies into:

- Regulatory policies, where "coercion is maximum"¹¹, with actions consisting in the implementation of norms that impose behaviors in society. Ripley and Franklin thought that they could be "protective and competitive"¹². Example: Criminal Code or Road Traffic Code, Customs Code, which establishes a certain behavior.
- Distributive policies, when some citizens enjoy privileges because the state authorities authorize particular situations nominally designated.
- Redistributive policies, manifested by advantages to citizens who are not individualized to create wellness, "to modify property, the rights of civil people, etc"¹³.
- Constitutive policies, which have a weak degree of coercion in relation to citizens, through actions that are related to power, but which do not directly affect their daily activity. Example: Creation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

4. Stages of a public policy

The process of policy building is complex, based on a technical and professional approach, made by independent researchers or civil servants, who must convincingly argue with structured information the purpose of a policy, the impact and possible decision-making alternatives. The progress over time and complexity of it gave rise to stages known as "the cycle of public policies as subsequent stages of the public policy process (actions and interactions of political or bureaucratic actors)"¹⁴.

It is certain that the organization of the public administration, with its principles, characteristics and skills, brings a major influence on the identification, implementation, evaluation of public policies. Also, the administrative level determines the process of public policies, but the central and local administration must also consider certain steps, including:

⁹Moraru Adrian, Dr. Bumblebee Florin, Alexander Violeta, *Handbook of public policy*, Second Edition, Bucharest, 2019, p.35

¹⁰Lowi J.Theodore, *American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies AND Political Theory*World Politics 16, 1964, pp. 667-715.

¹¹Do Exception from this Coercion a special type of Action regulation, called Self-regulatory (Salisbury, 1968) And that actually amplifies the privileges of the target audience.

¹²Ripley Randal, Grace Franklin *Congress, Bureaucracy AND Public Policy*, Fifth edition, Pacific Grove, Caliph: Brooks-Cole, 1991, p. 89.

¹³Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁴Nae Mariana, *Public policies in territorial development*, University Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015, two: 10.5682/9786062803704, p. 11.

- Identifying the problem. Whether we are referring to the national or local level, the problems are constant and must be elevated to the rank of future public policy, if they are complete, clear and concise, in order to develop some areas of activity (transport, education, health, etc.). The identification of the problem can be carried out directly by the executive and the legislative exponent or indirectly by organizations, citizens, local authorities, agencies.

Although it is certain that the problems and needs are unlimited, they must be filtered according to priority through specific techniques and methods that take into account all resources.

- Adding it to the political agenda. It is the stage in which the officials pay attention to the problem because the need of the citizens or their dissatisfaction is significant, it has proposals for solutions and resources that can lead to the fulfillment of the request. While the central public administration focuses on proposals for laws and public decision documents, the local one depends on local strategies, development opportunities and policies implemented centrally.

- The creation of the public policy framework, i.e. the development by the authorities of a "programme that refers to solving the problem"¹⁵. Methods of solving the problem can derive from his expertise. At first it could be added cost-benefit analysis and operational research, but as they evolved, surveys and interviews gained ground.

The framework strategy is built through legislative techniques to create a project in the form of a normative act through the Legislative, Economic and Social Council and the technical teams of The General Secretariat of the Government and government institutions.

- Its adoption. It is a key point for the administration towards the end of the political cycle, preceding the negotiation. Public decision-making shall be undertaken in various ways, either by quantitative techniques or by qualitative methods.

Centrally, the decision is political, and in the local administration it is an autonomous one, adopted by the mayor and the local council. However, the consultation of citizens is paramount, because the citizen notices the change that occurs in the adoption of the policy.

- The implementation of public policy, when the administrative role and technical expertise become essential. The literature mentions that this step is found at "the intersection of public administration, organizational theory, public management research and political science studies"¹⁶, being initially raised from concern about the effectiveness of large-scale reform programs. There are also cases in which a public policy may fail because "the municipalities responsible for implementation were not sufficiently motivated"¹⁷ or "the number of civil servants proved to be insufficient" or legal norms prevent the implementation of a decision.

- Monitoring and evaluation. It is the time when results are tracked and quantifiable information about the impact of policies is gathered. Monitoring can be done through the press, for example, and evaluation through questionnaires, interviews, case studies, all resulting in reports.

Although the term "evaluation" alludes us to negative aspects, it tends to refer to a retrospective analysis that involves responsibility to indicate a feed-back anchored to reality.

¹⁵<http://www.anfp.gov.ro/R/Doc/2015/Proiecte/Incheiate/MAPN/3.%20Materiale%20de%20formare%20Politici%20publice.pdf> p. 3, accessed on 15.11.2020.

¹⁶ Fischer Fisher, Miller G. J., *Handbook of public Policy Analysis: Theory, politics, AND methods* Publishing Routledge, 2017, two 10.4324/9781315093192, p. 81.

¹⁷ Poem Alba Foundation and the Association of Consultants and Experts in Social Economy Romania, *Handbook of international best practices on methods of participation and influencing public policies* Bucharest, 2019, p.23.

The evaluation can be done through political, legal and administrative means, through questions whose answers become helpful in future policies.

As mentioned above, expertise and reporting to the citizen are essential at any stage of the policy cycle, whether applied locally or nationally. Thus, in terms of development, the future will look much brighter than the present, adding value to any field, increasing the public's trust in the administration, forming a much closer relationship between them.

Also, respecting the stages of a public decision, good governance is brought into the theme, which involves the orientation towards consensus, efficiency, accountability, transparency and effectiveness. In addition, there will be an increase in the predictability of the impact of the application of normative acts, value conflicts will be resolved and the role of the citizen and his lifestyle will be increased.

5. Consultation process. Methods and Stages

Origins, mentions and importance

Starting from the idea that the administration was born from the core of the state to be in the service of the citizen creating a participatory democracy, "with and for the people", as President Abraham Lincoln mentioned in 1863, we devote the consultation of citizens in solving problems at the level of principle, because it is the one that draws up an open government, inclined towards people.

The principle is enshrined at European level for a closer relationship between institutions and citizens and for "eliminating the secrecy of European bureaucrats so criticized by the population of the European Union"¹⁸, but also at national level in Law no. 52/2003 on the transparency of decision-making in public administration¹⁹, which is intertwined with Law no. 544/2001 on free access to information of public interest²⁰.

The Romanian legislative framework is the one that confirms and completes the democratic rights of the people, because they can participate in decision-making according to some steps. First of all, everything starts from information that is done in a two-way directional sense, both on the part of the authorities and on behalf of the citizens.

Secondly, we move on to the consultation of citizens, an essential and useful process in the adoption of public policies, because it allows to bring to the fore their needs and expectations, to increase the transparency of decision-making, to amplify the performance of institutions, offering satisfaction to citizens who enjoy public services and "increase the degree of responsibility of the public administration towards the citizen, as the beneficiary of the administrative decision"²¹.

The consultation process is viewed from a series of angles, depending on the public policy to be approved and applied, but its foundation is Law no. 52/2003 on the transparency of decision-making in the public administration²², because all normative acts must pass through the filter called "public debate", which involves rights and obligations, costs and benefits, such

¹⁸ Sea buckthorn EMilia Lkill, Fărcaș Alexandru V., *European Community law*, Dimitrie Cantemir Publishing House, 2006, p.80.

¹⁹ Law no. 52/2003 of 21 January 2003 on the transparency of decision-making in public administration, published in Off. M. of Romania, no. 7490 of December 3, 2013, with subsequent amendments.

²⁰ Law no. 544/2001 of 12 October 2001 on free access to information of public interest, published in Off. M., nr. 663 of 23 October 2001 as amended and supplemented.

²¹ See Law no. 52/2003 on the transparency of decision-making in public administration, published in Off. M., Part I, No 70 of 3 February 2003, Chapter I, Art. 1, Para. 2, point b).

²² Ibid.

as increasing the trust of citizens through honesty, openness and the chance for citizens to have a defining role in the governance process.

This moment of participation in the decision-making process, according to the law, must be done under certain conditions, such as the publication of a notice at least 3 days in advance at the headquarters of the public authority, which will provide all the information about the upcoming meeting, but also the publication 30 working days before of a notice about a draft public policy, indicating all the necessary data (substantiation note, necessity report, explanatory memorandum, feasibility study etc.).

Within this law, we are also talking about the consultation procedure, which does not discriminate the participants who bring recommendations to the legislative initiatives, and about the benefits it has both among the administrative system and at the level of the citizen.

Turning on the public administration, the contribution of the law is reflected in the increase of the public opinion's confidence, in the removal of the problems of implementing the regulations, in the free obtaining of additional information.

For the citizen, the normative act in force brings its contribution by placing parameters regarding the way in which the public can participate in the activity of the administration, by bringing to the attention of the information and by giving the right to express its point of view regarding the projects that concern it.

Therefore, the transparency law ensures communication and cooperation between the public and private sectors (NGOs, citizens, business associations), provides legislative stability, positive consequences in economic development, and the definitions, principles, rights, obligations, sanctions on which they are based on values that give shape and clarity to the Romanian administrative system.

6. Consultation methods

Characteristic of the democratic process of policymaking, manifested in a multitude of European Union countries, such as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia (the practice of "Talking on the Internet"), the consultation brings with it opportunities that are customized according to the administrative system, the techniques approached, culture, society, needs and resources.

The first step to have a consultation must start from the administration that informs, for example, through "public communiqués, posters, brochures, newsletters, communication by local radio/ TV"²³. Then, there must be the consultation itself, where comments with arguments are requested, and then the involvement is proved (example: deliberative vote, public hearing, working groups). Thus, there is a clear collaboration about finding a suitable solution through techniques such as advisory committees, hearings, etc. However, one can choose to place the decision more quickly to the citizens through direct voting, citizens' juries or referendum.

In this regard, we highlight several options to make a public policy heard and to be adopted in a transparent manner, the methods being able to be deliberative and non-deliberative.

Deliberative methods

Deliberative methods focus on structured debates and examinations with ordinary members who have "an exchange of information about social issues and public policy"²⁴. These methods give rise to deliberative democracy, where citizens make decisions about the events

²³ Arpad Tudor, Abraham Ana-Maria, *Toolkit of tools and techniques for public consultation*, Bucharest, 2015, p.15.

²⁴ Degeling, C. *Deliberative Methods*. In Paul Atkinson, Splough Delamont, Alexandron Callender Joseph. W. Sakshaug, & Richard A. Williams (Eds.), *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*. 2019, doi: 10.4135/9781526421036827356, p. 103.

that directly influence them and "where they enjoy freedom and equality of status (at least as a desideratum)"²⁵. Among these, we mention:

- **Public debates**- A technique of dialogue on a clear topic, where participants organized by teams provide, orally and through their critical thinking, structuring ideas and quick answers. It all focuses on pros and cons about a controversial issue. The arguments presented by someone increase in quantity and coherence, and the one who tells them becomes more credible." The method can also be applied in the private environment, not only at the level of public administration;²⁶

- **Brainstorming**- A meeting with those interested in specific issues, who discuss themselves freely, "individually or in a group to generate ideas, increases creative effectiveness"²⁷;

- **Citizens' Juries**- It is customized by the existence of 15-20 people, who, listening to testimonies, deliberate and give a final verdict;

- **Scenario or work workshops**;

- **Conferences, seminars**;

- **Public coffee**;

- **Planning cell**;

- **Citizens' Summit**- A method known as the "21st Century Town Hall Meeting", which developed from America to Romania, by creating debates that would investigate the opinions of citizens, opinions of the order of hundreds or even thousands;

- **Tripartite commissions**- For example, the commission formed by the executive, trade unions and employers' associations, built to find out the opinion of trade unions and employers' associations about the policies of the government;

- **Deliberative forums**- The main feature of this technique is the deliberation of the choices of over a hundred people in relation to policies of major interest, to which the administration wants to clarify certain priorities. It is a method in which the media usually participates;

- **Citizens' Symposiums** - When technical problems arise in society, such as nuclear energy, pollution, waste, meetings can be held with a so-called "jury" of about 10 people who have different specializations, but who debate public policies together with experts in the field of politics;

- **Joint working groups**- Stakeholders and the administration debate a topic that is the subject of a public decision, "being able to preserve confidentiality until a clear conclusion is reached"²⁸.

- **Open space technique**- Known as "Open Space Technology", it has minimal resources, but it offers the opportunity for planning in the style of a self-organized "non-consultation". This method was born around 1983, when Harrison Owen noticed that during a conference she had organized, conversations and active learning were taking place outside of

²⁵Rabbit I. *Participatory democracy through deliberation, and Advocacy*, The International Conference of the Association Learn & Vision, Fourth Edition, Cluj-Napoca, 22-23 April 2016 p. 1.

²⁶ Bogaci Elena, *Culture of public debate* Conference Conference technical-scientific a Students, master's students And PhD students, 1-3 April 2020, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova p. 1.

²⁷ Wilson Chauncey, *Brainstorming AND Beyond: A User- Centered Design Method*, Elsevier Publishing House, USA, 2013, p.3.

²⁸ Allen M., *The Sage encyclopedia of Communication research methods*, Volumele 1-4, The Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2017, Inc. Two: 10.4135/9781483381411, p. 62.

formal presentations. A diverse number of citizens can participate in this method, from 5 to 2000.

Participants manage their own agenda around a specific theme after being introduced to the principles and practices of open space. There are certain principles by which this method is guided: whoever is the right person, whatever happens in this activity is not wrong, any place is suitable.

Non-deliberative methods

It is these methods that study the issues carefully, being structured, but devoid of debate between citizens, because there is not a clear objective. Among them, we mention:

• **Referendum** - It is the most representative technique for consulting citizens, being mentioned by Law no. 3/2000 on the organization and conduct of the referendum. The main feature of this method is given by mobilizing the population to obtain votes.

Etymologically, the term referendum is rooted in Latin "ad referendum", which means "to express one's opinion", referring to popular intervention and national sovereignty, as the constitution expresses itself.

This activity, carried out in accordance with the Administrative Code, can be: local (referendum convened by the administration or by the citizens, for example when the mayor is dismissed), at the county level or national.

At the same time, according to the criterion of the results, there is an optional referendum (when consulting the population at the initiative of the President on matters of national interest) or a mandatory one (for the revision of the Constitution or the dismissal of the President).

Locally, the optional referendum "may be organized and conducted (...) on issues of particular interest for the administrative-territorial units"²⁹ or mandatory for changing the limits of the ATU, passing the locality from one rank to another (from city to commune or vice versa), organizing new communes, etc.

One of the problems of the referendum or vote is given by the level of electoral knowledge, substantiated by rational ignorance, since it is highly unlikely that a single vote will influence the results of a referendum. People, too, do not deepen the issue of the referendum, only documenting themselves during its campaign. Thus, it has been seen that this technique "creates tension, polarizes public opinion, or even divides society"³⁰.

• **The advisory Committees;**

• **Online forum-** An internet forum is recognized by the form of the messages posted: long conversations, often archived, where a single conversation is called "thread" or "topic". Users can be anonymous or registered with contact details. This web application chronologically displays the impressions of citizens and can be made up of several forums differentiated by the topics covered.

This technique spread with the development of technology (1970), and a significant example is Japan, where millions of posts a day are found, but also China;

• **Focus groups-** A non-deliberative technique based on an interactive discussion with stakeholders, 10-12, coordinated by a moderator through an accumulation of questions. It initially appeared in the environment of entrepreneurs and, being successful, it also spread to

²⁹ Law nr. 3 of 22 February 2000 on the organization and conduct of the referendum, published in M. Of. No. 84 of 24 February 2000, Chapter I, Article 2. Para. 2.

³⁰ Ford, R., & Goodwin, M., Britain after Brexit: A Nation divided. Journal of Democracy, 2017, p.17.

the public environment. This group interview, seen as a closed meeting, makes it easy to obtain qualitative data in a short time if it has a precise purpose and roles for each participant;

• **Delphi Method**- A method of accumulating anonymous opinions from experts, based on a questionnaire that can target transports or the development of technology (its inclusion in education, enhancing the quality of the Internet).

Etymologically, this notion originated around the '50s, when it was intended to estimate the perception of the impact of technology in the Cold War (1941-1991), appearing in the US through the experts of the RAND Corporation. Over time, it has evolved and appeared in the business environment and in the administrative system;

• **Citizens' Group** - Starts from 500 to 2500 people (depending on the size of the territorial unit), who must answer several questionnaires per year, in order to give constant, analyzed and subsequently published feedback. The answers of the questionnaire, which may cover even more topics, also concern solutions to identified public problems;

• **Written suggestions from citizens**- Which is a letter that will serve as an aid in future decisions;

• **Public hearings**- In terms of impact, hearings resemble public debates, but this method is customized by expressing the point of view of non-governmental organizations, and the administration can intervene with an agreement or disagreement. "Public hearings are useful tools that the authorities make available to citizens (...) to express their point of view on a public policy"³¹.

• **Hearing at the headquarters of the institution**- It is customized by the intention of the citizen to bring a public policy proposal or to have his opinion on the work of the administration. The hearing is distinct from the audience because it concerns public issues, not individual ones, with no programming;

• **Opinion polls**- A tool for gathering opinions through a sample, usually electoral options. There are two types of survey: exhaustive (when it targets a small number of citizens, relative to the population) and non-exhaustive.

• **Taking overdraft decisions from citizens or organizations**- When initiatives from experts from different fields come to the aid of the administration, so that the environment in which they live together is much more developed and anchored to their real needs;

• **Open hours**- An unscheduled meeting with a single citizen and a representative of the administration, such as the prime minister, the mayor, the prefect.

Therefore, there are a multitude of democratic techniques that illustrate the way in which a citizen's needs can be heard, but there must be information, motivation and two-way involvement.

7. Stages of the consultation process

Public consultation, in order to be two-way beneficial and to materialize into concrete actions, must follow well-planned steps that reduce problems, provide support and be in line with expectations, reduce marginalization, inequities, exclusion and manipulation, building a partnership and atmosphere according to an open government democracy.

³¹ Dinu D., Ghinea C., Campos C. Albișteanu R., Guide for the participation of civil society in the decision-making process, Editor of the Romanian Center for European Policies, 2013, p.43.

Preparation of the public consultation

It is important to note that the consultation process applies to any normative act, regardless of its issuer (local council, prefect, minister, etc.), but the percentages of the transparency procedure of normative acts vary "between 79% (at the level of ministries) and 17% (at the level of mayoralities in the South Muntenian region)"³². There are also exceptions to the normative acts that are not subject to transparency, mentioned in Law no. 52/2003 on the transparency of decision-making in the public administration³³.

The consultation process is initiated by the public authority, usually issuing it (exceptions: the Relevant Ministry initiates the consultation procedure for ministries), which appoints a responsible for all coordination of the debate and in maintaining a close relationship with civil society. It must take into account the transparency law in drafting the normative act, creating the announcement, posting it on the notice board or on the website (including on the Facebook page, if any), in drafting the minutes of the meeting and, of course, in recording the amendments and observations of the citizens.

If necessary, the person in charge with the observance of the law may be supported by other specialized compartments, but obliged to ensure the material resources that will be used for the debate and all the necessary documents, formulated clearly and concisely. These are statistical data, analyses of the policy justification (impact studies, cost-benefit analysis, feasibility study), a variant of the normative text and an explanatory text that is easy for citizens to understand.

Also, any consultation must consider the principles of the legal text (active participation of the citizen, his consultation, ex officio information) and certain objectives that direct the consultation method and communication channels.

The people to whom the consultation is addressed must be endorsed on a clear list from the outset by those who draw up the public policy, in order to create a qualitative regulatory act. The list will be proactive in forming a database and at each act, using human resources efficiently.

There are a multitude of methods of citizen involvement and they depend on the analysis of the stakeholders, the type of policy or the resources made available.

Conduct of the public consultation

30 days before the endorsement, the announcement (with all the useful data and explanatory text) about a future public policy will be published on the internet in the section "Decisional transparency", and in the last 10, citizens' opinions will be received, usually on the e-mail address. The information should be transmitted to local or central media, if any.

The debate itself is attended by the initiators of the policy, invited experts, specialists, citizens, trade unions, a moderator to guide the whole conversation and who mentions how the activity will be carried out, people to take notes if the debate is not recorded. The consultation must be transmitted in real time, the discussion being carried out by question-answer with or without time limit until all participants have made their recommendations. Everything is part of the debate, in the form of a summary in a report or in a synthesis to be archived, to which all citizens have access.

³² Transparency of decision-making to the report. Research results "I decided to get involved." Romania. February 2015 - February 2016, Academy of Advocacy/ Coalition 52, April 2016.

³³ Art. 6 and Art. 7 para. 13 of Law no. ANRE President's Order no. 52/2003 on the transparency of decision-making in public administration, published in M. Of. of Romania, nr. 7490 of 3 December 2013, as amended and supplemented.

Post-debate stage of public policy

Any debate must be followed by an analysis of the proposals, and the transparency law enforcement officer must argue in writing and individually for not resuming comments from citizens. This right of the people includes "the obligation of the administration to motivate its decisions"³⁴.

Also, all the finalities of the debate must be publicized within a maximum of 10 days, for example through a press release or publication on the institution's website. All consultations carried out, in line with the transparency of the decision-making, must be mentioned in an annual report in order to concretely assess the partnership with citizens and compare the evolution or the less productive behaviour.

Therefore, citizen participation through consultation, either found in the institutionalized form (referendum) or in the non-institutionalized form (opinion polls, hearings, etc.), is "the process by which the concerns, needs and values of citizens are incorporated into the decision-making process within the public administration"³⁵.

Because of this process, the consultation has come to be mentioned as a principle, deriving from the principle of local autonomy, respecting human rights, eliminating organizational dysfunctions and forming the obligation to consolidate a normative act that clearly specifies the interaction with citizens.

At the same time, the consultation proves the existence of an open society with a participatory democracy with tradition, which treats the citizen as a delegated client with responsibilities in both stages of participation: information and consultation.

The result of these two stages educates, forms a developed environment, avoids conflicts, monitors and better evaluates the decisions of the administration, while the stakeholders generating broader perspectives. Thus, all of us, as European and Romanian citizens, should know our rights, make our contribution to the environment in which we live not only in exceptional situations (public elections), but constantly to influence the strategic projects that concern us, creating a prosperous state.

Thus, I believe that just as we can change decisions locally, we can also make our contribution at central level or even in the European Union, whose decisions directly leave their mark on the Member States. However, we need to know how our initiative can get on the government's agenda after we have identified a problem, how our intervention can take place and how we contribute to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

8. Public consultation on enhanced cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases

Research objectives

Vaccination programs face major challenges such as declining coverage, avoiding vaccination, lack of supply and proper management of health problems. Although difficult to approach because they are planned and organized according to the need for citizens by area, they must not be forgotten, but prioritized in the current situation in which people put their health at risk in the most common ways of interaction. Thus, I have carried out a citizens'

³⁴ Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 30.03.2010, number 83/400 art. 41, of 2, letter c), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0389:0403:ro:PDF>, retrieved 01.06.2021

³⁵ chewtynd Eric And chewtynd Frances, *Participation Citizen for Improving the decision-making process in Administration local public*, Research The Triangle Institutes—Program Assistance for Administration Public din România, București, 2001, p. 83.

consultation consolidated on several objectives in order to find out their perception of how certain diseases can be prevented.

General objective: To measure the social perception of the population regarding the public vaccination policies during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specific objectives:

SO1: Identification of factors influencing the avoidance of vaccination among the population;

SO2: Identify timely communication channels of the Administration with the public and specialists about the safe use and efficacy of vaccines and measuring their effectiveness;

SO3: Identify actions to make the vaccination programme credible and assess its effectiveness.

Study participants

Thus, I conducted a questionnaire-based study, applied between November 20-25 2020, in which 130 respondents participated, namely 107 women (82.31%) and 23 men (17.69%). Their average age is 23 years.

From the perspective of the background environment, 70 people (53.85%) are from the urban space and 60 respondents (46.15%) from the rural one. Out of the 130, 86 do not present knowledge in the mentioned areas: public administration, education sector, social care sector, health, pharmaceutical industry or vaccination.

Centralization and data analysis

When asked who you think are the most important actors in promoting the recommended vaccine, most respondents indicated that the following public institutions are very important: the World Health Organization (4.25 out of 5), doctors and nurses (4.24 out of 5) and other public services (school programs, health campaigns, etc.) (3.58 out of 5).

Chart 1- Who do you think are the most important actors in promoting the use of the vaccine?

Item No.	Important actors	Average response	Standard deviation
1	World Health Organization	4.25	1.09
2	Doctors and nurses	4.24	1.12
3	Other public services (curricula, health campaigns, etc.)	3.58	1.18
4	Pharmacists	3.41	1.2
5	Pharmaceutical industry	3.4	1.25
6	Media	3.33	1.53
7	European Commission	3.22	1.25
8	The European Parliament or other European institutions	3.12	1.3
9	Parents or members of the family	3.12	1.41
10	Governments of EU Member States	3.09	1.21
11	NGOs	3.07	1.19
12	Public figures in EU Member States	3.05	1.26

13	Groups of patients	3.05	1.29
14	Civil society	3.02	1.2
15	Friends, acquaintances	2.75	1.39
16	Religious leaders	2.32	1.44

When asked how the health authorities can better communicate with the public about the safe use and effectiveness of vaccines, 63.08% of the 130 people considered that the health authorities communicate with the public through Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), followed by 54.62% of the shows dedicated to radio / TV, but also by the articles in the press with a percentage of 46.15%..

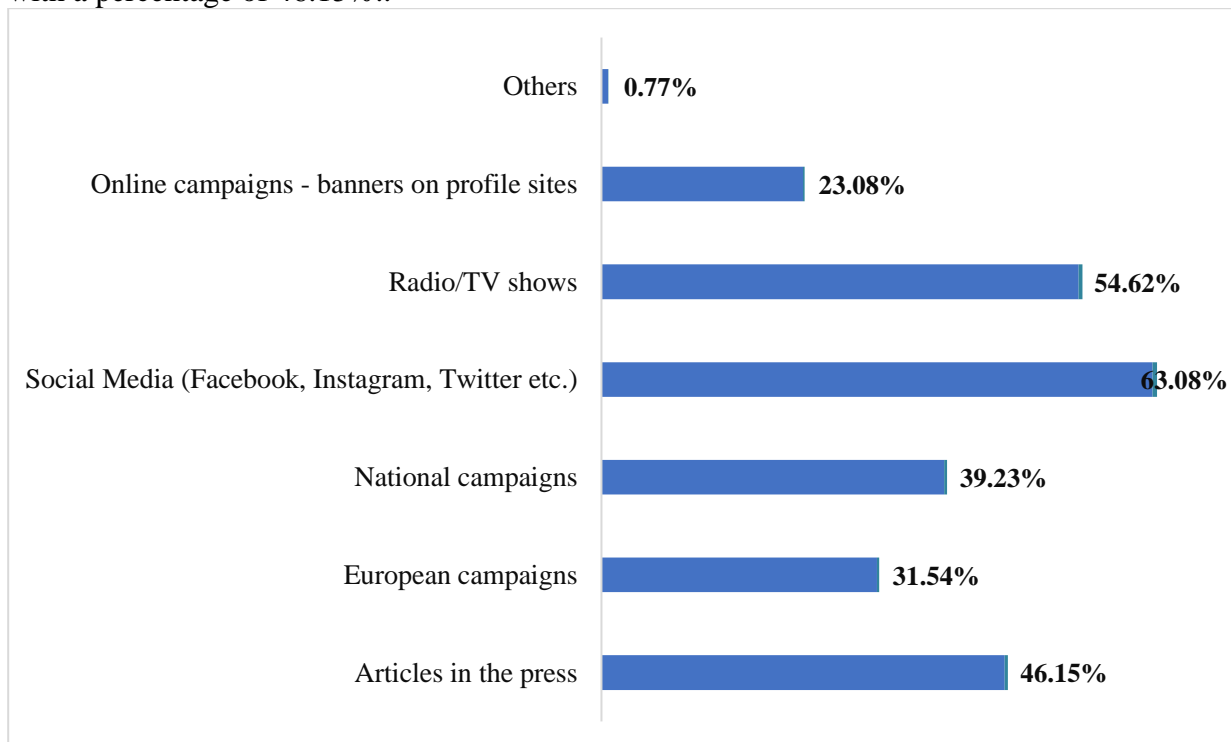


Figure 1- How can health authorities better communicate with the public about the safe use and efficacy of the vaccine?

Moreover, when asked about how health authorities can better communicate with health professionals or employees about the safe use and efficacy of vaccines, most of them (78.46%) considered specific on-the-job training (including online training) appropriate.

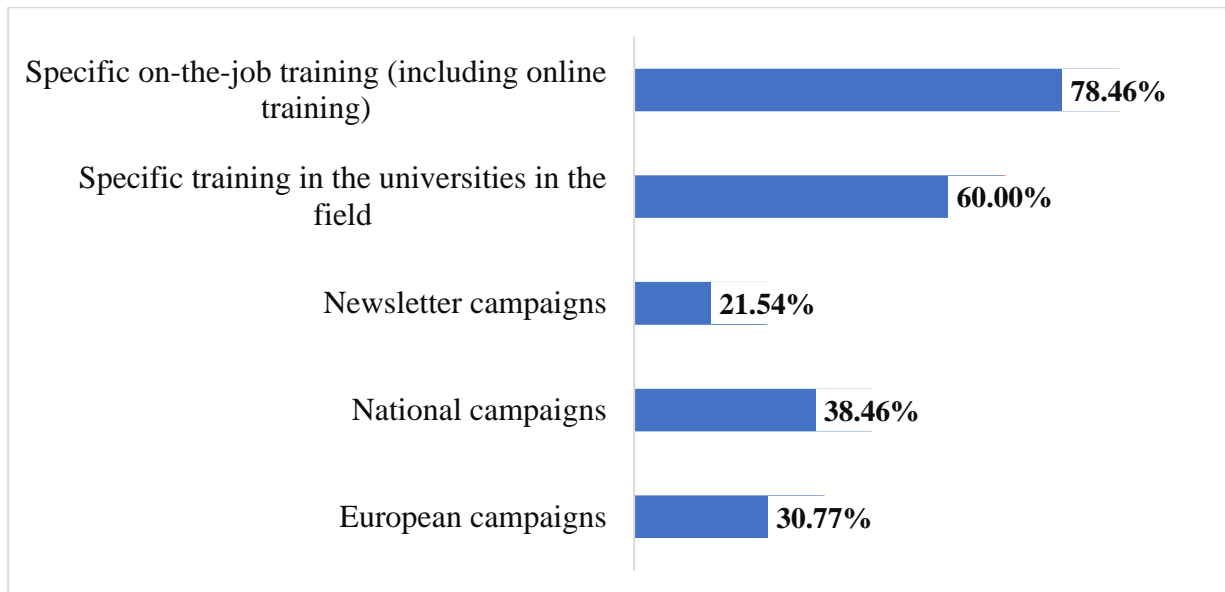


Figure 22-How can health authorities better communicate with health professionals/employees about the safe use and efficacy of vaccines?

Asked about the impact of some factors on avoiding the vaccine, the participants considered that they do not have a very high confidence in the effectiveness of the vaccine, in the health system and in the competence of doctors 49.23%, being followed by those who think they avoid the vaccine because they are not satisfied and because there are risks that come with vaccination.

Chart 2- How much impact do these factors have on avoiding the vaccine?

Item No.	Factors	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Confidence in the efficacy of vaccines (issues of confidence in the efficacy and safety of vaccines, in the system that provides them, including the reliability and competence of health services and healthcare professionals, motivations of decision-makers deciding on the necessary vaccines)	3.49	1.12
2	Satisfaction (the perceived risks of vaccine-preventable diseases are low and vaccination is not considered necessary)	3.35	1.25
3	Convenience (the extent to which it influences the physical availability and to pay, geographical accessibility, the ability to understand and use immunization services)	3.34	1.12

The 130 respondents were also questioned about other factors that influence the vaccine avoidance. Thus, 47.89% prioritized as having a high impact the fear of possible side effects, 43.13% lack of information and then 41.76% unreliable news on social networks.

Chart 3- What other factors do you think have a big influence on avoiding vaccination?

Item No.	Other important factors in avoiding the vaccine	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Fear of potential side effects	4,25	1,10
2	Lack of information about the impact and side effects of vaccination	4,21	1,09
3	Unreliable news on social media and the internet	3,96	1,27
4	Lack of availability of vaccines	3,94	1,14
5	Distrust of science	3,89	1,26
6	Attitude (negative or neutral) of general practitioners	3,83	1,10
7	Difficulties in accessing vaccines	3,8	1,16
8	Introduction of mandatory vaccination for some vaccines	3,76	1,32
9	Financing issues (e.g., extra out-of-pocket expenses)	3,72	1,24
10	Recommendations to healthcare providers	3,59	1,19
11	The activity of anti-vaccination groups	3,49	1,29
12	Belief that individual decisions have no impact on the community	3,38	1,23
13	Diversity of vaccination programmes/timetables between countries (e.g., each country has its own rules on the time, place and frequency of vaccination)	3,28	1,22
14	A size suitable for all vials (e.g., the same dose used for all types of vaccine)	3,07	1,34

Asked if the European Union is communicating with citizens about the subject of vaccines authorized to increase people's trust in the administration, 63 participants (47%) considered that they do not, and 41 people 35% did not want to give an answer in this regard, while 26 of them, that is, 18% said that the EU is informing the citizens correctly.

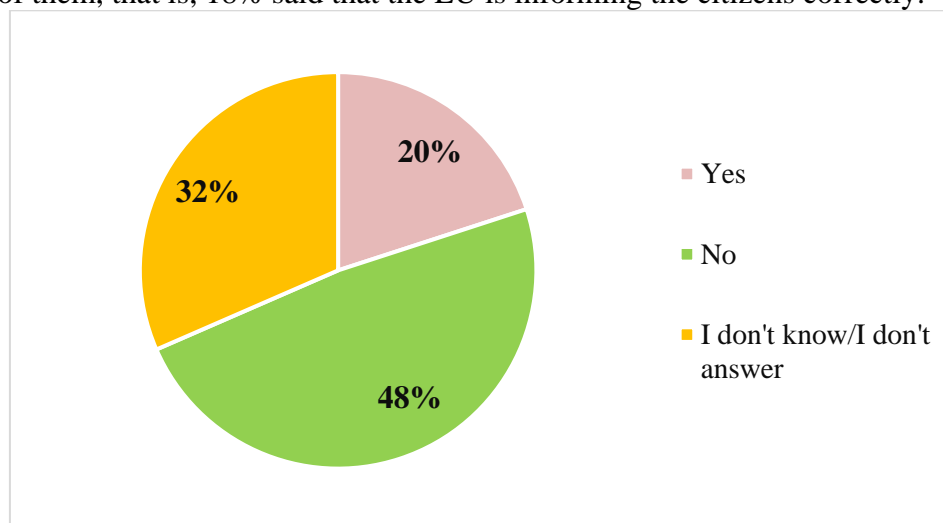


Figure 3- Does the EU provide adequate communication to citizens about the benefits of authorized vaccines to maintain or increase trust?

In order to amplify member states' efforts to increase the vaccination rate, respondents consider that the following useful cooperation activities should be carried out: providing media campaigns, developing a useful information website and information sessions.

Chart 4- In order to reduce the avoidance of vaccination and to amplify the efforts of EU Member States to increase vaccine coverage rates, what cooperation activities do you consider more useful?

Item No.	Cooperation activities	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Member States share media campaigns on vaccination	3,62	1,04
2	Establishment by Member States of a user-friendly information website based on evidence about the safety and efficacy of vaccines for the population and healthcare professionals	3,59	1,14
3	Member States and health professionals develop and provide information sessions with parents about vaccination	3,58	1,18
4	Member States and associations of health professionals together provide training for health professionals	3,55	1,09
5	Member States shall jointly assess the impact of intervention strategies to address vaccine avoidance	3,52	1,11
6	Member States have common tools to track what is published on the media, to monitor public confidence in vaccines, to properly understand and address public concerns	3,5	1,07
7	Member States establish a common approach to a recommended EU vaccination programme and an EU vaccination card and registers	3,48	1,11
8	Member States establish a common EU mapping on vaccine coverage, vaccine safety and vaccine efficacy	3,46	0,94
9	Member States are exchanging best practices on vaccination	3,42	1,11

For the efforts to provide arguments about the vaccination program, the 130 participants in the study consider that extremely important, with a percentage of 80.77%, are the professionals in the field, being followed by international organizations 64.62%.

Chart 5- Who do you think should strive to provide scientific arguments in favor of the vaccination program?

Item No.	Actors to argue scientifically	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, etc.)	4,38	0,95
2	International organisations (e.g., WHO, Global Health Safety Initiative)	3,97	1,06
3	European Commission and EU agencies (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, European Medicines Agency)	3,95	1,01
4	Pharmaceutical industry	3,35	1,12
5	Member States	3,35	1,08

6	Non-governmental organisations	2,86	1,19
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Asked about how doctors or other health professionals can be helped in the vaccination process, people chose several useful options, ranking first (57.69%) two ways: providing materials to explain the benefits and risks of vaccination and scheduling a test/vaccination for all patients who consult for various reasons.

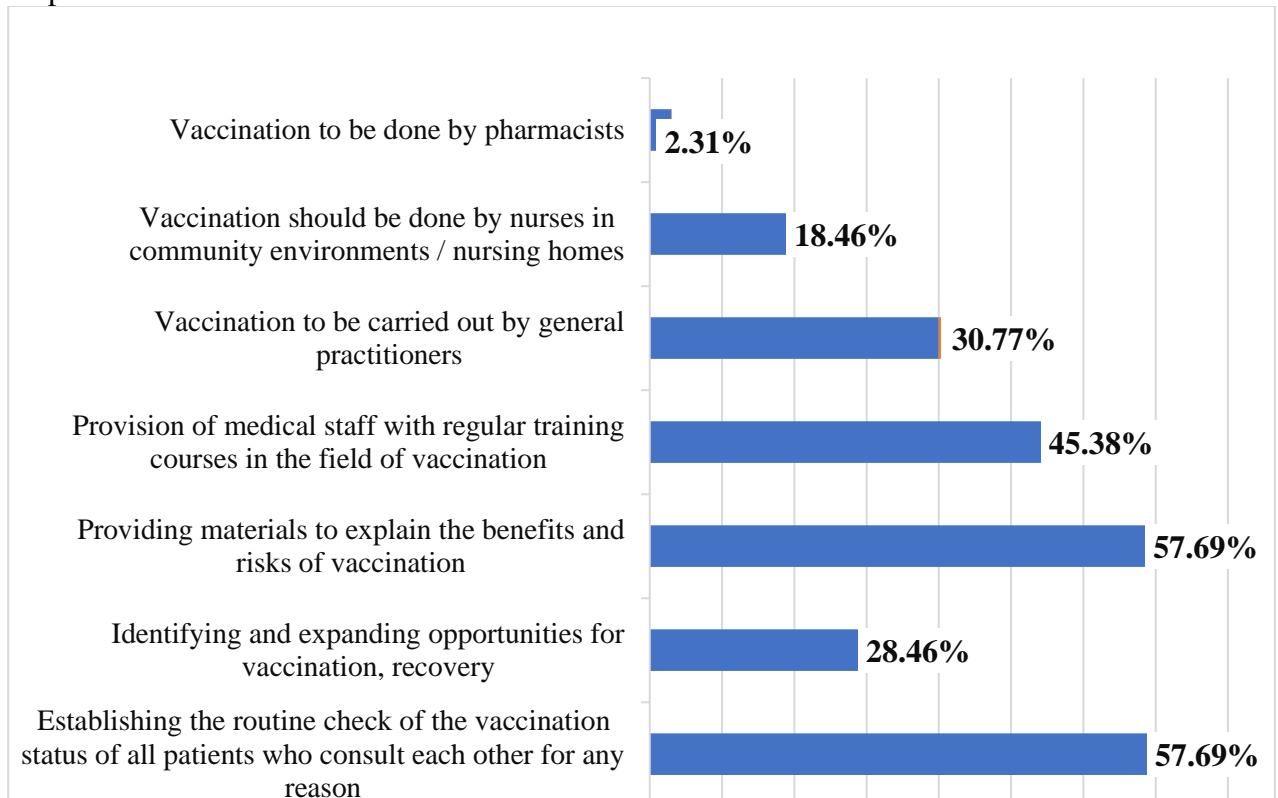


Figure 4- What actions can be useful to better support health professionals in favor of vaccination?

At the same time, it is obvious that civil society contributes to the vaccination process, but in different ways, which the 130 respondents to this study have ordered according to their importance. Thus, of an extremely important value is the information of teachers and staff in schools, a solution chosen by 65.38%, followed by the promotion of routine checks and vaccination status in students in schools - 56.15%.

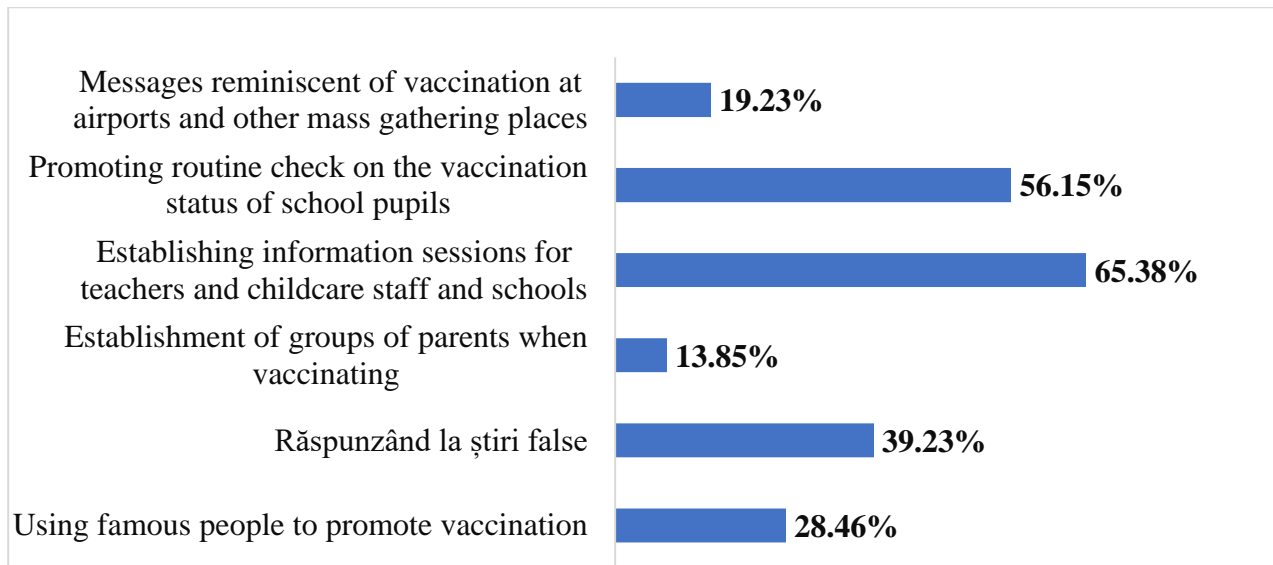


Figure 5- How can civil society help overcome vaccine avoidance?

Moreover, vaccination programmes can also be improved through organisations responsible for ensuring good officials, providing good organisation and complying with citizens' expectations. Among the most important institutions or organizations, 80.15% of citizens appointed professionals in the field, followed by international organizations (e.g. WHO, UNICEF, Global Health Safety Initiative) 70.77%.

Chart 6- Which organisations are responsible for ensuring the proper functioning of vaccination programmes?

Item No.	Organizations/Institutions	Yes	Not	I don't know/ I don't answer
1	Healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses, pharmacists)	86.15%	3.08%	10.77%
2	International organizations (WHO, UNICEF, Global Health Safety Initiative)	70.77%	5.38%	23.85%
3	Pharmaceutical industry	56.92%	16.15%	26.92%
4	EU Member States	45.38%	18.46%	36.15%
5	European Commission and EU agencies (ECDC, EMA)	38.46%	12.31%	49.23%
6	Non-governmental organisations	22.31%	40.00%	37.69%

Given that vaccination is a topical measure, a process that citizens are demanding in as many numbers as possible, the shortage of vaccines must be anticipated, and a good organisation must be drawn up. In this regard, the 130 respondents identify extremely important (73.85%) the prioritization of vaccine development and research with an average of 4.17 out of 5. Also important are the simplification of vaccination programmes by an average of 3.83 out

of 5 and the creation of a repository of key vaccines at EU level, with an average of 3.82 out of 5

Chart 7- What political interventions would have the biggest impact on mitigating the vaccine shortage?

Item No.	Political interventions	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Prioritizing vaccine research and development	4,17	0,99
2	Simplification of vaccination programmes	3,83	1,1
3	Key vaccine repository at EU level	3,82	1,05
4	Stakeholder dialogue	3,77	1,08
5	Joint vaccine purchase of EU countries	3,73	1,11
6	Mutual assistance between Member States, sharing of vaccines	3,55	1,08
7	Willingness of the person in the political environment to get vaccinated	3,48	1,12
8	Vaccine prognosis	3,38	0,98

Each of us puts our health first, without a doubt, and this brings with it fear, the need for information, expectations from close friends, family, the pharmaceutical industry, hopes from different institutions or organizations. Thus, the study on the public consultation on the enhanced cooperation against diseases that can be prevented by vaccination is a topical one, being imperative to know people's perception about vaccination during the pandemic produced by the COVID-19 virus.

According to respondents, the highest expectations they have come from the World Health Organization, those in the medical field and from medical services. For them to communicate better with citizens, because information is the first step in the process of consulting a policy, they must use technology, starting from networks such as Facebook and Instagram, to TV shows and press articles.

It is also found that this communication must be made for those in the field of health, not only for ordinary citizens, but the most appropriate ways are: online or on-the-job training. Also, considering that it is a new virus, information would also be needed through specific training for those in the university field.

Through these questions, respondents showed distrust in vaccines, which signals poor communication, lack of performance of the medical system and medical professionals. In addition, they mention that they do not opt for vaccination out of fear of side effects, which again proves that there is no information to convince citizens about the impact of a vaccine.

Concluding, it is found that the development and research in the field of vaccination must be advantaged, this process must be simplified, that there must be more dedication from both national and European authorities and civil society in order to reduce outbreaks of infections, to combat the work of anti-vaccine groups, to increase the number and quality of public health policies.

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