FEEDBACK IN COVID-19

Real-time tracking of community views

Case studies from Belarus, Romania, and Turkey

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Romania, 2021 *Romanian Red Cross volunteers distribute hygiene packages and information materials to help reduce transmission of the COVID-19 virus and combat the pandemic. © Romanian Red Cross*

Cover photo: © Belarus Red Cross

INTRODUCTION

In any pandemic, the engagement and support of communities is critical to tackling the spread of disease, meaning listening to and understanding the people we seek to serve must be a priority.

Throughout the COVID-19 response, across the Region of Europe, National Societies have sought to listen to the communities where they work, knowing that understanding people's views is key to tackling the virus.

Some adapted existing tools and mechanisms, others sought low-cost ad-hoc solutions which could be swiftly rolled out within existing capacity, and others still have invested to establish entirely new systems.

This case study looks at some of these different approaches National Societies have taken, the choices they have made based on their different contexts, the benefits and limitations they have experienced, and the best practices they have discovered.

BELARUS
SETTING UP A SIMPLE FEEDBACK MECHANISM

As the scope of the COVID-19 pandemic became clear, the Belarus Red Cross swiftly swung into action, supporting across a range of crucial areas.

Procuring and distributing protective equipment; delivering food and medical prescriptions; setting up an information and psycho-social support telephone line; and sharing information about how people could avoid spreading the disease, all quickly fell within the National Society's remit.

As these activities became established, the National Society sought ways to better understand if these were the activities people needed.

Alongside a survey gauging people's understanding of COVID-19 and their preferred information channels, a feedback mechanism was established as a way for people to share their views with the National Society.

Feedback could be submitted in person at branch offices, over the telephone, via social media, and in person during Red Cross activities.

Between July 2020 and March 2021, more than 1,600 pieces of feedback were received with most registered in-person or over the phone.

For anonymity, names were not recorded, although some demographic information was requested to help track patterns that might need to be addressed.

Of the feedback messages received, almost three quarters were requests for services, and around a fifth were requests for information, more than 80 thanked the Red Cross for their work, and just five were complaints.

With the concept proven, work is underway to develop the feedback mechanism and integrate it alongside the National Society's telephone line, a potentially rich source of further feedback.

Ilya Melgotchenko

Community Engagement and Accountability focal point Belarus Red Cross

The majority of feedback was resolved at the point at which it was submitted, but the system has fed into broader systemic change.

On the basis of people's questions about COVID-19 we worked to improve our information materials

In another case a woman approached one of the Red Cross Branches for practical support, and the volunteer who helped her recognised she might also benefit from psycho-social support.

As a result of that, a service providing psycho-social support for older people over the phone was organized.

To build on the information provided through the feedback mechanism, we are now conducting a series of surveys about people's attitudes to vaccination and we'll use this to further inform our work.

Igor Trusov

*Disaster Management Officer with the Belarus Red Cross*

For collecting feedback, we started by developing a Google form – we logged how the feedback was submitted, what the feedback was, some demographic information about the person submitting the feedback, and whether there was any action in response.

We shared the form with our branches who filled the form in and submitted it online when they received feedback, this created a simple system that automatically compiled the data, giving us an overview of all the feedback coming in.

The system is not perfect right now, but we are on our way to making a good system, and if we can integrate it alongside the hotline that would be an important step. If we can combine them together to analyse the feedback data from both, that will really help improve our understanding.

We had feedback mechanisms for different programmes before, but COVID-19 has given us a real push to develop things further.

Next we'd like to consolidate things into a single large-scale feedback system to better understand the impact of our work, how we can tailor our activities to be more relevant, and respond as effectively as possible.
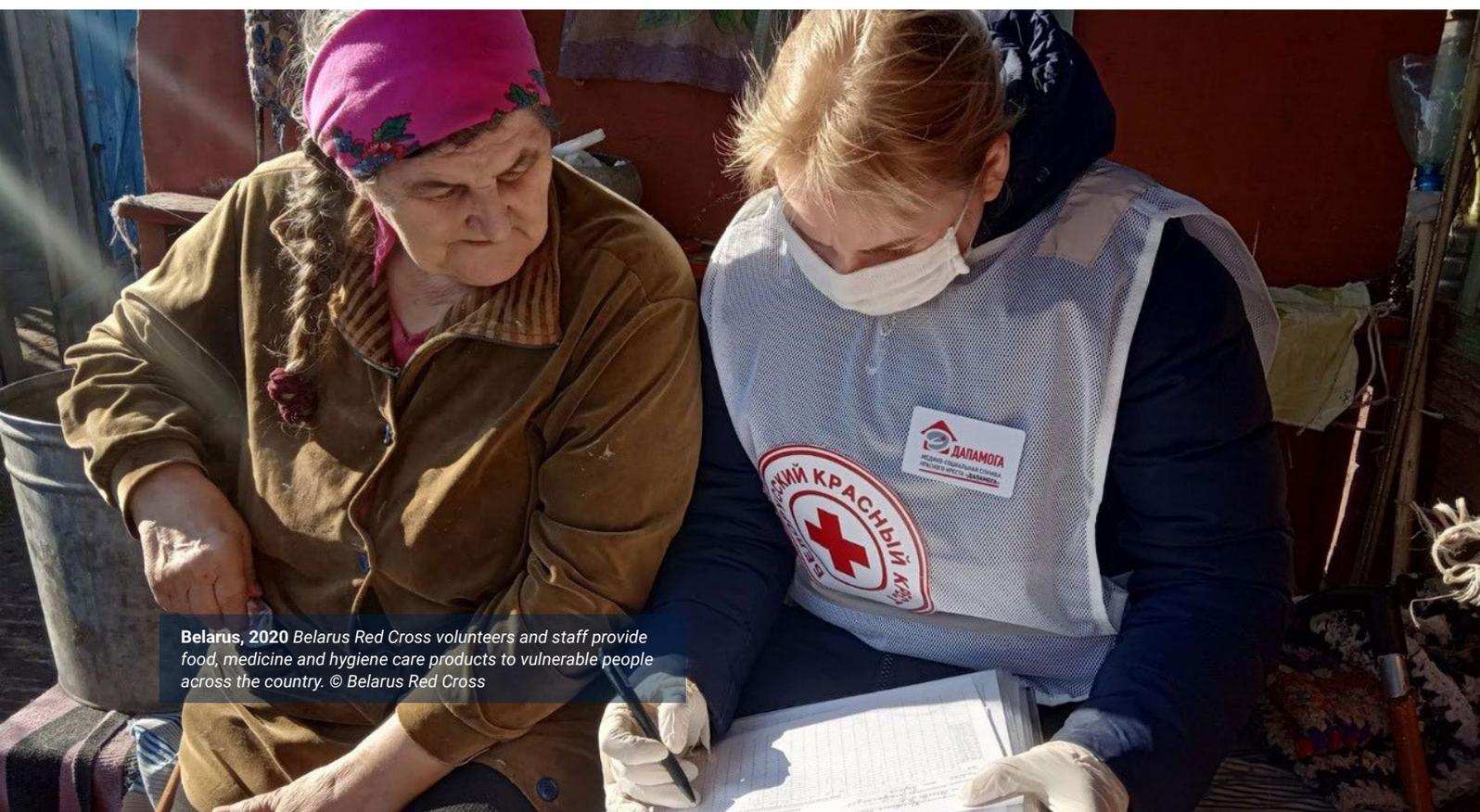
Belarus, 2020 *Belarus Red Cross volunteers and staff provide food, medicine and hygiene care products to vulnerable people across the country. © Belarus Red Cross*

Key Lessons

Start small and build

Belarus Red Cross avoided over-complication by beginning with a system that placed as little demand as possible on staff and volunteers, including basing the system in commonly used software and tools people were already familiar with.

Manage your data

Even "small" systems like this in Belarus can generate huge amounts of data – while demonstrating that minimal feedback mechanisms can be effective, it's important that we do not just collect data, but that systems and human resources are in place for it to be effectively managed, analysed, and acted on.

Keep looking for improvements

Once a feedback system is up and running, continually review its performance and make adaptions to ensure it functions as effectively as possible, meeting the needs of the people that use it – both those submitting feedback into the system, and those managing it. Integrate the mechanism alongside other information gathering tools – surveys, assessments, and monitoring activities – to consolidate and triangulate all data coming in.

Links

https://redcross.by/

Contacts

Ilya Melgotchenko Belarus Red Cross Community Engagement and Accountability focal point – i.melgotchenko@redcross.by

TURKEY
A COMPREHENSIVE KOBO FEEDBACK MECHANISM

The Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) has been instrumental in supporting some of the almost four million people who are refugees or asylum seekers that call Turkey home,

Operating 18 Community Centres nationwide, TRCS offers vocational and language training, and health and psychosocial support, as well as other services, to refugees, asylum seekers, and people from host communities.

The Community Centres have been crucial for sharing information about COVID-19, with many of those attending the centres unable to access Turkish-language news or information networks.

As well as establishing regular Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP) surveys, the National Society, working with the IFRC, also set up a feedback mechanism for people to send feedback, questions, rumours, and complaints about COVID-19 to TRCS.

Community centre staff and volunteers were trained to use the free KoBo Toolbox system to record and submit feedback shared with them through the course of their work.

Completed forms, submitted through mobile devices and laptops, are automatically compiled into a central database, enabling a swift overview and analysis of feedback coming in.

Most questions raised through the system are resolved on the spot by TRCS staff and volunteers, and the system has also been useful for tracking rumours, and highlighting specific issues to be addressed.

Although the feedback mechanism and KAP surveys both aim to better include voices of people affected by the pandemic in TRCS programming, integration has ensured they complement each other without duplicating.

Tenadi Gölemerz

Monitoring and Evaluation Officer
Turkish Red Crescent Society

The KAP and the feedback mechanism are mutually supportive, but serve different purposes.

The feedback mechanism focusses on direct feedback, questions, complaints, and rumours and is continuously functioning.

People can still use it now, it's really important to have that to be accountable to the people we are working with.

The KAP survey focussed on understanding people's practices and knowledge and perceptions at a point in time, so they were different, some of the information was similar and it was good to have two separate sources, but it wasn't duplication.

Fatma Nur Bakkalbaşı

IFRC Community Engagement and Accountability Officer in Turkey

Staff and volunteers are trained on collecting feedback and using the system, so all community centre staff are able to enter data – anything they heard from community members or during outreach activities.

There's one formal focal point in each community centre but others have also been trained so they can input the data directly themselves or they can request the focal point to enter it into the system.

We collect feedback from refugees and from longer-term residents and produce a monthly quantitative report through a dashboard to highlight key issues, and another four-monthly report which includes more qualitative analysis.

There were some hygiene package distributions, and some comments came back about the appropriateness of some of the items, so through the system we were able to report this and the packs were adapted based on the feedback.

There were also lots of questions and requests around activities and services at the Community Centres, so when we saw that we made sure we shared more information locally about the Community Centres, the services and activities available, and what they did and didn't do – it provided a real opportunity to share with communities about our work.

It was really useful having both the KAP and feedback mechanism, many of the issues raised in the feedback mechanism tally with the survey findings, so there are similarities, but the KAP survey takes a long time – the feedback system is live, we can see the information coming in in real time, see issues instantly and respond.

At the same time, not everyone wants to come forward and give feedback without being asked, and the KAP survey proactively reaches out to people to ask their views, so it's been important to have both.

Key Lessons

- **KoBo Toolbox is your friend**

  Turkish Red Crescent Society opted to use KoBo Toolbox – a free, user friendly, data collection system which staff and volunteers were already familiar with. Existing familiarity with KoBo and information management capacity, meant the feedback mechanism could be delivered in-house, with training and implementation of the system further developing the skills of National Society staff and volunteers.

- **Real time tracking and regular reporting**

  Although the system provides almost real time tracking of rumours and other issues, providing an early warning system for issues to be responded to before they escalate, regular monthly and more-detailed four-monthly reports provide an opportunity to consolidate and analyse findings and bring these to the attention of management and programme decision makers for action.

- **Integrate and triangulate**

  The feedback mechanism has been specifically designed to work alongside regular KAP surveys carried out in the same areas, ensuring they complement each other and expand the National Society's understanding of communities, without duplicating effort. Together the KAP and feedback reports provide a strong evidence base for programme adaptation and decision making.

Links

Information on KoBo Toolbox – https://www.ifrc.org/ifrc-kobo

Rumour Tracking Report available on the community engagement hub – https://communityengage-menthub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/10/Rumour-tracking-report-2021.pdf

Community Feedback Reports on Community Engagement Hub – https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/community-feedback-report-turkey/

KAP Survey Results on Community Engagement Hub – https://communityengagementhub.org/resource/knowledge-attitudes-and-practices-kap-assessment-on-covid-19-round-3/

Lessons Learned Report on Community Engagement Hub – https://communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/09/COVID-19-LESSONS-LEARNED-WORKSHOP-REPORT.pdf

Contacts

Tenadi Gölemerz Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Turkish Red Crescent Society – tenadi.golemerz@kizilay.org.tr

Fatma Nur Bakkalbaşı IFRC Community Engagement and Accountability Officer in Turkey – fatmanur.bakkalbasi@ifrc.org

ROMANIA
HARNESSING THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERS FOR FEEDBACK

As the Romanian Red Cross (RRC) responded to the pandemic – supporting communities with health information and equipment, and assisting vulnerable people with basic necessities – recognition grew of the need to listen and respond to people's feedback.

But with the National Society operating on an emergency footing, anything new had to fit seamlessly alongside existing work.

To keep things simple, an online form was created covering basic demographic information and key questions – such as what rumours people had heard.

The form was then shared electronically with branches covering some 1,700 communities, requesting volunteers and staff to complete them with feedback they encountered during their work.

Over the course of four months, forms were received back from more than 500 communities, representing the views of thousands of people.

While teams were not able to fully close the loop and respond to people's feedback and questions individually, findings were able to inform practical changes, with the system's success inspiring greater inclusion of feedback, participation, and community engagement in future plans, including vaccination efforts.

Having now completed KoBo training with the IFRC, the next round of RRC feedback collection will take the form of a more formal survey, and with doses now widely available – and amid concerning levels of vaccine hesitancy – will have an increased focus on vaccination.

Andreea Furtuna

*Head of Programmes
Romania Red Cross*

I could feel that the COVID-19 information campaigns weren't really hitting their mark and we needed to do something to listen more to people and change what we were doing.

There was a suggestion from the Budapest office that we should try and implement a feedback mechanism, which I was familiar with a little bit from a previous project with the Swedish Red Cross.

We talked with CEA and Information Management colleagues in the regional office, and we looked at KoBo, but we felt we were too busy to take on something completely new, so we decided instead to use a Google form and have a slightly different approach.

People were already familiar with this as a tool, and were able to access the forms from anywhere, including on their phones when they were in the field.

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Working through our volunteers, they used the form to record feedback and other information they had heard when they visited communities.

It was not like a survey going door-to-door, but volunteers compiled everything they heard into a single document, and then I received the completed forms back by email.

Each form represented the feedback from an entire community, and we were really impressed by what the volunteers were able to achieve.

It wasn't perfect, and if we had more time and other resources we might have done things differently, but for what it was, it worked really well.

We found out a lot about people's perceptions in the communities where we were working, things which were practically applicable to our COVID-19 work – for example, that people in remote areas often felt they were not at risk, that this was a disease only people in cities needed to worry about – and the additional resources required to do it were practically zero.

Volunteers were going to the community and having discussions for their work anyway, they knew how to use the forms, and the time it took to do was minimal.

The data we got back was definitely good enough to be useful, and set us on the path to develop further.

KoBo might be a better option overall, but if you have limited resources or are not familiar with KoBo, and you need to get something up and running quickly, then this is a simple option that really works.

In our follow-up survey we will use KoBo, we want to find out about vaccination – who people feel should come and speak with them about vaccination, whose opinion would they trust and respect? What kind of evidence or reassurances do people need and trust?

For the new project, we realised that all the trainings should start with Community Engagement and Accountability, so that people can understand why listening and building trust is so important, and that we should include this in all our activities.

The big change is in our own mentality, we realise that the first thing we need to do is listen to people and ask them for their input and involvement, that is the really new thing.

And we'll use that engagement and feedback and have a dialogue with communities all the way through, from the very beginning in planning, and through implementation all the way to the end.

We know it will be difficult, but there is a need to engage with and include the communities we work with, it's really important that happens.

Key Lessons

Keep it simple

As with Belarus, Romania benefitted from keeping things simple, starting with familiar tools, building on existing capacities, and ensuring that demands on staff and volunteers were kept to a minimum. Even such an apparently simple system can generate useful, actionable data.

Volunteers know

Local understanding is an invaluable resource. Volunteer feedback reports may not have the same scientific rigour as some other data collection methods, but the insight provided through their own understanding, experiences, and interactions, can be unparalleled.

Include, engage, and involve communities

For activities to be really effective – not just for feedback mechanisms – communities need to be included from the very beginning and throughout, from inception to evaluation. To ensure trust is established and maintained, feedback mechanisms must "close the loop", keeping people informed of what is happening and how their feedback is being responded to.

Links

https://crucearosie.ro/

Contacts

Andreea Furtuna Romania Red Cross, Head of Programmes – andreea.furtuna@crucearosie.ro

CONCLUSION

Throughout COVID-19 when, despite the increase in National Societies' activities, opportunities for normal face-to-face interaction reduced, it has been critical for alternate channels of communication and feedback to be swiftly established.

As the examples here have shown, various approaches to ensuring feedback is collected, analysed, and responded to are possible, with approaches adapted to what is feasible and effective, to ensure communication channels are open and accessible.

1 **Build on experience** – All the National Societies featured here focused on systems that could be managed within existing capacity. In Belarus and Romania, standard office software already familiar to staff and volunteers, enabled them to collect and respond to significant volumes of feedback, informing adaptation and the development of further COVID-19 activities. In Turkey, KoBo Toolkit – again, a system the National Society already had experience using – facilitated the collection and management of feedback on a mass scale, while also allowing triangulation with KAP survey results.

2 **Value of volunteers' networks** – The connection volunteers have with their communities, and the insights this can bring, should not be underestimated. RRC were able to capitalise on staff and volunteer's role as the National Society's eyes and ears to collect representative feedback from communities to inform the development of better-tailored activities.

3 **Close communication with communities** – The National Society mechanisms also highlighted the need to involve and engage communities in the design and implementation of systems as much as possible, and particularly the need to "close the loop" – keeping people informed of feedback being received and how it is being responded to as a key to maintaining trust.

4 **Value of continuous review** – By definition feedback mechanisms are always a work in progress, constantly looking for ways to further improve, with no one definitive, final, perfect model, and these are examples are no different. Simple, effective systems can be developed using minimal resources, but it is important that these are built on, and continually reviewed and developed to remain effective and fit for purpose.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

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It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

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There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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