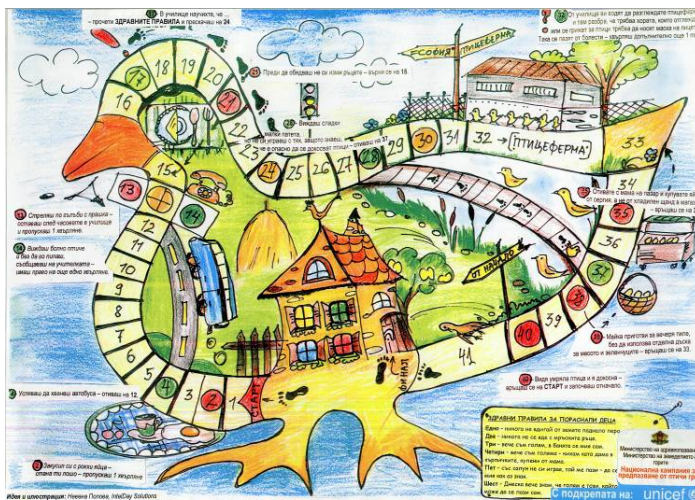




**GOLDEN WORLD AWARDS  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS**

2007 Competition | Call for Entries



# *National Campaign on Avian Flu Prevention*

*Republic of  
Bulgaria*



*The National Campaign on Avian Flu Prevention was the first of this kind in Bulgaria, focusing on proactive rather than reactive behaviour of state and local health authorities to combat the new emerging health threat. The crisis communication component is a powerful example that PR is far beyond media relations and is a strategic tool for communication management. The two most important communication channels used in the area of Kardzhali (near the Turkish border of Bulgaria, where an outbreak of bird flu occurred) were bread shops and Turkish mosques. Current project shows the importance of cultural differences (Roma and Turks) and the need to build them in successful communication plans.*

## **1. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY**

This project was implemented for UNICEF – Bulgaria – a leading advocate for children’s rights and partner of the Ministry of Health of Republic of Bulgaria (MoH) in variety of children’s health related projects. The National Campaign on Avian Flu Prevention was designed to assist the MoH and the Crisis Committee at the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria to help them in their preparedness for the fight against avian flu.

A very specific problem of the campaign was the coordination of variety of stakeholders from the Government such as the MoH, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and their regional authorities, including a number of international donors such as WHO and UNSAID which also worked in the field.

Another problem was the need to work with minorities – both Roma and Turkish – most of which were either illiterate or do not speak any word of Bulgarian language and live in remote areas.

*The outbreak of avian flu near the Turkish border of Bulgaria was a challenge to dissemination of relevant health information quickly, using proper channels. It has to be underlined that the immediate speedy reaction did not affect the quality of the products – brochures, posters, radio and TV public service announcements were created in only 10 days, coordinated with the state stakeholders, pre-tested with potential users, produced and disseminated among over 15,000 affected by the problem villagers, while their birds were massively being killed by the authorities and whereas most of the people – Muslims by religion – had the prejudice that avian flu has been sent to them by Allah and thus they are not supposed to fight against it.*

Criteria by which the success of the campaign was to be evaluated were:

### ***For the national campaign:***

- Preparation of relevant mix of information materials for small farmers, Roma, Turkish minority, media, children and general public (pre-tested by each target group)
- Number of civil servants from the local health authorities trained
- Number of journalists informed on avian flu prevention measures

*For the crisis communication component:*

- Number of people in the area of Kardzali informed on avian flu prevention
- Forming local health information network.

## **2. RESEARCH**

The preliminary research included desk research of previous and ongoing avian flu campaigns of UNICEF around the world, detailed review of articles on avian flu in Bulgarian media in the past 6 months, sociological survey on the level of knowledge and awareness on avian flu among general public, small farmers and Roma communities and focus groups sessions. A special cultural, ethnic and religion profile was made for the Roma and Turkish minorities.

## **3. PLANNING**

The main objectives of the campaign were to prepare the state and local health authorities and media in Bulgaria to address a public information campaign on avian flu and to assist the MoH in promoting proper hygiene habits and health culture.

The motto of the campaign was *Protect the Children, Yourself and the Birds.*

The main target groups were:

- **Small farmers from across the country**
- **Children aged 5 -12**
- **Teenagers aged 12 – 18**
- **Roma small farmers**
- **Roma children**
- **Turkish minority**
- **Health journalists**
- **Civil servants in local public health services**

The main communication tactics characterising this assignment was *the use of the culture and language of each specific target group – from children to minorities and health specialists*, but keeping the overall synergy of campaign messages. For this a number of pre-testing activities were organised.

The measurable criteria to determine the success of this project were: *preparation of proper information materials developed for each target group (to be evaluated as such after pre-testing); number of civil servants trained in each public health service office in the 28 regions of the country, 25 health journalists trained, development of health information dissemination network formed by state and local institutions, NGOs and media.*

#### **4. EXECUTION**

The main target groups and the communication tactics for each of them were:

- **Small farmers from across the country**

Detailed informative brochures were prepared for them with useful information on the epidemiology and spread of avian flu, veterinarian and health measures, tips and useful telephone numbers. The local veterinarian services, local public health offices and the markets for live birds in the country (for which a special map was prepared) were identified as main communication channels.

- **Children aged 5 -12**

A special family game was prepared for the youngest children educating them what is right and wrong in avian flu prevention. The game is to be distributed through the local public health services, health mediators and health NGOs.

- **Teenagers aged 12 – 18**

Special comics were developed placing avian flu as a teenager modern topic to chat about. The comics were to be distributed through local public health services and media.

- **Roma small farmers**

For the Roma population posters and picture brochures were prepared. Most of their contents was illustrated with proper photographs using Roma models. These were to be distributed by the local public health services and the Roma mediators.

- **Roma children**

Unfortunately, gambling games dominate the childhood of many Roma children in the country that is why for them special playing cards were developed. These were to be distributed by the local public health services and the Roma mediators as well.

- **Turkish minority**

TV and radio public service announcements in Bulgarian and Turkish language were prepared to be broadcasted by local media.

- **Health journalists**

Special training on avian influenza prevention and media kits were designed.

- **Civil servants in local public health services**

Training was designed and all materials were disseminated as design and models to be produced locally by each local public health service.

A sudden outbreak of avian influenza occurred in Kardzhali near the Turkish border of Bulgaria. All birds in the nearby villages were killed by the authorities. The locals did not speak much Bulgarian and believed it is Allah that has sent this to them, thus they had to suffer it. There was need for rapid information dissemination and stopping the transmission of AI to birds in other areas of the country. Special brochures and posters largely illustrated with pictures were prepared only for 10 days (including design, pre testing and coordination with the main stakeholders). Alternative information channels were identified –most visited places in this area were the bread shops where bread has been transported twice a week. This was the natural gathering point from where the spread of information is easiest. In addition, the communication team contacted the local Office of the Mufti and organised the distribution of information materials through the local mosques after the regular Friday services. In this way the main prejudice that the avian flu is sent by God was combated – *as Allah now “was sending” the information for the prevention.*

## **5. EVALUATION**

Each target group identified received its proper mix of information materials ranked as mostly acceptable by 85% of the interviewed. Civil servants were trained in each public health service office in the 28 regions of the country including 25 health journalists. A health information dissemination network was formed by state and local institutions, NGOs and media. As a result of the project, UNDP has decided to fund an additional component for training Roma health mediators and producing a movie on avian flu prevention.