

# AWARENESS AND MEDIA CAMPAIGN - A KEY FACTOR FOR THE SUCCESS OF CENSUS 2011

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## 1. Introduction

On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011 Bulgaria conducted seventeenth Population and Housing Census in its modern history. Data collection took place in two stages. From 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2011 for the first time Bulgarian population was offered the opportunity to fill in census questionnaire via internet. In the last three weeks of February (from 10<sup>th</sup> till 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2011) the interviewers visited households to conduct face-to-face interviews with those who had not used the internet option.

The Census was an overall success. It is well recognized in Bulgaria that Census 2011 appeared to be the largest population mobilization in recent Bulgarian history, a period of full support to the survey by all stakeholders - government, local authorities, media, citizens and communities, a time of active NSI presence reflected in a positive manner by media. A key factor for the successful preparation and implementation of the Census was the nationwide, well targeted and comprehensive integrated public communications campaign.

The Census 2011 public communications campaign was one of the most extensive and far reaching marketing campaigns ever conducted in Bulgaria. Census is a complex exercise and the final outcome depends strongly on the population participation rate. Therefore the campaign attempted to motivate each person to take part in it and to make its feeling like it is a crucial part of Census. For a very limited time frame our marketing activities reached 3 millions of households.

A key milestone in the preparation of Bulgarian Census 2011 was the understanding that communications had to be indispensable part of the whole process. In the previous Censuses the focus was on the dissemination of results. As regards to the communication side the emphasis was on the public awareness promoted mainly through media channels. Changing media landscape and the development of modern ICT technologies have shifted focus from a simple dissemination to a more interactive way of communications with users and respondents of official statistics. Census as the largest in scope statistical survey is not an exception. Furthermore, having the importance of census itself it is absolutely essential to ensure that the data collected are

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accurate and complete. In order to turn Bulgarian citizens into committed supporters of the census an effective and well targeted communications strategy was developed. It is now a standard practice to apply marketing approach to the output of official statistics, but it has not been applied on such a scale to the Census data collection. The collection phase of Census 2011 was a significant communications exercise. More than 3 million households needed to be aware of the importance of Census but also to understand how and when they might participate and in particular, how to use the internet opportunity.

It was not enough to talk about the importance of census and to generate interest in the up-coming results. The public communications campaign had to address a number of issues related to the innovations in the census methodology and implementation. It had to provide answers to a number of questions: Why the residents should be willing to participate? How they could use e-census opportunity? Why it was necessary to be co-operative with census interviewers? In answering all the challenges and innovations related Census we had faced serious budget constraints and the data collection had to be carried out at the lowest possible cost.

This paper describes the content, goals and stages of the communications campaign for Census 2011 as well as outlines its main components and channels (media campaign, national and local partnerships, social media, on-line interactions and trainings) that prompted participation and led to the Census success. Lessons derived from our experience can help other national statistical offices in the preparation of their own communications campaigns and efforts for informing, motivating and getting support of citizens and institutions.

## **2. Goals and Scope of Communications Campaign**

In the preparation of Census 2011 we identified a number of new challenges that have not been existing before and that, in turn have influenced the scope and the content of the public communications campaign. Proliferation of new communications channels, emerging of social networking, increasing importance of privacy concerns, appearance of citizen journalism and existing of mistrust of governmental institutions among some societal groups are among the phenomena that require a change and reshape in the communications and dissemination policies of official statistics in general and in the preparing and implementing census in particular.

In addition to the general challenges listed above the public communications campaign needed to reflect innovations in the organization and implementation of the Census.



The major one refers to the introduction of the e-census. For the first time in the history of Bulgarian statistics the citizens were able to complete their questionnaires online. Additional challenge related to the public communications campaign was the decision of the Parliament to advance the Census and to conduct it earlier than it was planned initially. This resulted in a very limited timeframe for the preparation and the implementation of the public communications campaign.

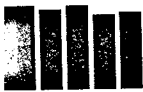
To overcome these challenges and to ensure broadest possible participation in the Census we had to develop a flexible and innovative approach, different from the strategies implemented in the previous censuses. The public communications campaign had three main goals:

- To increase census coverage through making people aware of the importance of census results and motivating them to take part in it;
- To improve accuracy of census results;
- To generate a positive environment and support to the census interviewers during the field work;

The mix of two main ways of data collection (e-census and traditional face-to-face interviews), carried out consequently, required the communications campaign to take place in three phases:

- Educational phase - the period before the Census date;
- E-census motivation phase - the period of e-census (From 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2011);
- The period of getting support to the traditional field work - the period of three weeks of visiting households and conducting face-to-face interviews.

Each phase required specific actions in order to achieve the goals, to prompt participation and to spread the census messages as broadly as possible. The Census 2011 public communications strategy was incorporated in the general strategy of transparency and openness to the society of the statistical surveys methodologies applied by Bulgarian NSI. This principle was extensively applied in the period of preparation of the Census 2011 when the census program, the questionnaires and instructions had been developed. A number of consultations with academia, government institutions, and non-governmental organizations were carried out. The debate on the scope, content and design of the census questionnaires was opened to the general public and this helped a lot in getting people aware of the importance of census results, of the benefits that the census may bring at local and individual level. The openly sharing of information on



then census forms contributed to the building up of confidence in the objectives and methodology of the process especially as regards to the sensitive questions related to ethnicity, disability, mother tongue and religion.

To meet our goal of a complete and accurate census, we developed a communications strategy that consisted of the following main components:

- Paid advertising;
- Media partnerships and training;
- National and regional partnerships;
- On-line interaction and using of social media channels;
- Targeting of specific groups and communities with engagement of community leaders.

As the budget for paid advertising was relatively small a great deal of the attention was put on the other four elements of then campaign. The communications strategy covers both national and regional level but a special emphasis was given to ensure consistency and co-ordination of activities and to provide unifying themes and messages across all segments.

### **3. Components of the Census 2011 Public Communications Campaign**

*Paid advertising* covered radio, television and print media. A plan for the advertising was prepared by a marketing and advertising agency that received the assignment after an opened tender procedure organized by Bulgarian NSI. Despite of the limited budget, the advertising was well received by the public. The plan for the advertising was strictly followed and ensured consistency of the activities across all media. It covered both national and regional media. During the preparation of the advertising plan a thorough analysis of the specific needs of the local markets was carried out and those that need a tailored made approach were identified. A special attention was given to the populations and communities that were considered hard to count such as minorities, remote areas, and refugees' camps.

A key building block in the Census 2011 public communications campaign was *the visibility and active presence of NSI in the media* during the data collection period and within several weeks before the Census date. The cornerstone of our successful co-operation with media was the large-scale and intensive training of journalists that the Bulgarian NSI undertook in January 2011, the month preceding the Census start. We



organized several two days seminars - of national media, of regional media for each region, of the persons responsible for public relations in the district administrations and of their counterparts in municipalities. In sum more than 200 journalists of practically all media presented in the country took actively part in the training. During seminars the NSI staff focused on explaining the benefits versus costs of census and the role of the census results for the planning and funding a range of services especially at local level such as health, education and transport. The training was also used to receive a feedback form the journalists on the topics and questions that were of particular interest to the public. This information helped for the final tuning and adjustment of the communications campaign to the expectations and needs of the various census stakeholders.

There is clear evidence that the *training of the media* catapulted Census into the society in a positive manner. In fact since the starting date, during the whole data collection period and up to now we have enjoyed a very positive attitude to the Census and its implementation by the National Statistical Institute. There was an enormous media interest during the data collection phase. The Census was the event number one in the week of the e-census according to the national media rating of the most important events. In general the media coverage of the Census was either positive or neutral. There were really few cases of rather negative coverage but they were questioning the benefits of asking some questions in the census form (i.e. why it was necessary to ask about families, about availability of water, sanitary bath, etc.) rather on a concrete problem of census implementation. The key factor for the success of the media campaign was the ready availability of NSI staff and of the President in particular for handling media requirements. We dealt with the critical comments on the spot and attempted to anticipate and to apply a pro-active approach to the "hot" topics that might turn into problems. The top management and key census experts of NSI participated in more than 70 media events in the Census month - 35 TV, 14 newspapers and 26 radio interviews. More than 10 direct TV sessions from the NSI building or other places were incorporated in the TV central news. In sum approximately 2000 media events with the participation of NSI staff were realized in one month. There were much more local media events with participation of our staff in the regional statistical offices. A special role in the process of promoting census was the trip around the country of the President of NSI that covered all regions in Bulgaria. Everywhere local press conference, meetings with local authorities and NGOs, with children, students, universities, local leaders and gatekeepers of some communities were organized. In each region an attempt was made to tailor the public communications to the local needs, to show how the census results would help to address local problems with infrastructure, labour markets, community services, etc.



A key building block of our public communications campaign was *the establishment of national and local partnerships*. Enormous efforts were spent on building targeted, customized and trust - based co-operations with the local authorities at municipal and district level. We got their support in many ways especially as regards to the E-census. In many places local authorities provided rooms equipped with computers and internet where citizens could free of charge complete census forms on-line. They organized help desks in the premises of the municipalities and district administrations. During Census we received the so called third part endorsement where the mayors and regional governors gave their formal support (by official letters) to the E-census. These letters were sent to all regional government structures and public institutions and distributed to all residents via media and internet. In addition at a meeting of the Council of Ministers the Prime-minister Mr. Boyko Borissov and the vice-prime minister and minister of finance Mr. Simeon Djankov asked all the ministers to send letters promoting internet census as an easier, quicker and more convenient option that also saves financial resources and protects environment.

In the last years internet has become the main channel for the dissemination of statistical results and sharing information on the data methodology and production. Census 2011 public communications campaign relies heavily on the *on-line interaction and using social media channels* in getting people aware of the purposes and organization of the Census. A separate web page dedicated to Census was created. In addition NSI provided a set of promotional materials that had been distributed to the local authorities free of charge to be used in their regional campaigns. During the Census 2011 campaign we have tried to use for the first time the opportunities provided by the social media. After some discussions in the office and a thorough analysis of the pros and cons of the NSI' presence in social media we decided to implement consciously and in a limited scale this approach. Namely we did not open our accounts in Twitter and Facebook but our team has been participating in the similar dedicated to Census pages created by others. We responded to people that were asking questions on Facebook. In this way we responded in real time to the concerns raised by the society. We used social media in order to provide links to websites where more detailed information can be found. In addition social media proved extremely useful in reaching some of the hardest to count groups that live a lot of online and in social media.

Bulgarian NSI had been working with local authorities and community groups to make sure the 2011 Census accounts for population diversity. Special attention was paid to ethnic minorities, non-Bulgarian speaking communities, and homeless. A crucial moment in the designing a well targeted campaign was the surveys and research conducted before and



during the data collection on the factors that motivate different social groups to take part in the Census and in particular in the E-census. Showing commitment and transparency we shared our research with local authorities and non-governmental institutions, thus enabling them to better tailor Census 2011 messages to their local populations.

#### **4. Key Content issues of the Census 2011 Public Communications Campaign**

The attitudes of 2011 Census were quite different from those of Census 2001. Nowadays behavior of internet users and concerns on privacy and security were more clearly articulated than in the past. A significant effort was made to address these concerns. It was widely explained using various media channels how and when the census interviewers would approach households. The people were asked to be pro-active in the identification of the interviewers - to ask to see their identification card if they did not automatically had showed it. A helpline for advice in identification of the 2011 Census staff was opened.

A special emphasis was given on the fact that despite the refusal to complete the Census form is an offence under the Census Law and leads to prosecution and a fine, we have not aimed at that. On contrary we had attempted to convince the people that Census is a useful exercise that eventually brings benefits to local communities and households. As a result at the end of the Census 2011 there were as few as 50 recorded refusals to fill in Census forms.

#### **5. Key Factors for Successful Census 2011 Public Communications Campaign**

There several guiding principles on which our Census 2011 Public Communications Campaign was built up and that in turn proved to be key factors for the overall Census success:

- *Activity instead of passivity* - Communications were based on action rather than counteraction. NSI teams tried to foresee the results from the activity and express, and defend grounds instead of responding to provocative attacks or assumptions.
- *Positivism instead of negativity* - There was emphasis on the positive trends, activities, services and future benefits for the society as a whole. Actions to overcome the existing problems were shown instead of focusing public opinion only on them. The demand for positive solutions and final results was highlighted.



- *Bidirectional instead of unidirectional* - Population Census 2011 team ventured on a model of bilateral communication and feedback from target audiences.
- *Openness instead of closeness* - The system of open communications and access to information enabled to all members of society created a sense of unity, built confidence in the institution, and created teams of like-minded people.
- *Coordination instead of the lack of coordination* - A program, built on the targeted and orderly messages subject to common purpose, in which there was coordination and control in terms of who, when and how performs public communications was created.
- *Involvement instead of exclusion* - Including more people in the process of communication helped to break the “we-they” framework. The very census interviewers themselves played the role of communicators, informing in advance friends and relatives of what’s ahead.

These principles were at the basis of the successful and entirely positive media campaign, lack of crisis situations and achievement of the objectives - increasing the level of awareness and gaining partnership, interest and participation of citizens, institutions and the media, creation of an atmosphere for equal dialogue with all participants in Population Census 2011.

To facilitate and integrate campaign and to use the expertise of our staff to the fullest a core team on communications was established. This team included two groups of experts - public communications experts and statisticians. Their main task was to coordinate communications activities and to avoid working in silos. This team had been working in close collaboration with external firms that had been involved in the design and implementation of the campaign. It reviewed all the promotional materials to ensure the messages were consistent over different groups and regions. There was a daily monitoring of the participation rates and the team identified areas of low response and prepared a response mix of activities that might be undertaken to increase participation rate.

## 6. Conclusions

The well targeted, efficient and nation-wide campaign was, certainly a precondition for the overall Census 2011 campaign. However, the positive results go beyond the Census. The campaign proved the good cooperation between the institutions at central and regional level. The Population Census became a national priority supported by all state institutions, local authorities and citizens of the country. Thus, the overall confidence in the role and mission of official statistics had increased.





## РАЗЯСНИТЕЛНАТА И МЕДИЙНА КАМПАНИЯ - КЛЮЧОВ ФАКТОР ЗА УСПЕХА НА ПРЕБРОЯВАНЕ 2011

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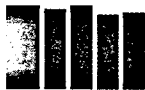
**РЕЗЮМЕ** Статията представя съдържанието, целите и етапите на комуникационната кампания за **Преброяване на населението 2011** и ролята ѝ за успешното му провеждане. Изтъква се ключовото значение на комуникациите за постигането на широка обществена осведоменост и за създаване на атмосфера за равнопоставен диалог между всички участници в преброяването. Комуникационната стратегия на Преброяване 2011 се разглежда като компонент на общата стратегия на прозрачност и отвореност към обществото, прилагана от Националния статистически институт на България. Представени са и основните компоненти и комуникационни канали на кампанията (медийна кампания, национални и местни партньорства, социални медии, онлайн взаимодействия и обучения), както и ключовите фактори за успеха ѝ.

Специално внимание се обръща на новите предизвикателства (разпространението на нови комуникационни канали, появата на социални мрежи, тревогата за защита на личния живот, появата на гражданска журналистика и други), които налагат промяна в обхвата и съдържанието на комуникационната кампания и в политиките за разпространение на резултатите от преброяването.

В статията се изтъква и значимостта на иновациите в организирането и провеждането на преброяването и по-специално използването на модерните информационно-комуникационни технологии за постигане на по-интерактивна комуникация с гражданите. Посочва се и подкрепата на правителството за насърчаване на интернет преброяването като един по-лесен, по-бърз и по-удобен вариант за провеждането му, който също така спестява финансови ресурси и е по-благоприятен за околната среда.

Основните изводи на статията се свързват с успеха на кампанията за превръщане на Преброяването в национален приоритет, подкрепен от всички държавни институции, местните власти и гражданите на страната, и за повишаване на общото доверие в ролята и мисията на официалната статистика. Посочват се и някои уроци от нашия опит, от които могат да се възползват други национални статистически служби.

\* Доц., д-р, Председател на НСИ до 20 март 2012 г.



## ОСВЕДОМИТЕЛЬНАЯ И ИНФОРМАЦИОННАЯ КАМПАНИЯ В СМИ - КЛЮЧЕВОЙ ФАКТОР ДЛЯ УСПЕХА ПЕРЕПИСИ НАСЕЛЕНИЯ 2011 ГОДА

*Мариана Коцева\**

**РЕЗЮМЕ** Статья представляет содержание, цели и этапы коммуникационной кампании **Переписи населения 2011 года** и ее роль для успешной реализации переписи. В ней подчеркивается ключевое значение коммуникаций для достижения широкого информирования общественности и создания атмосферы равноправного диалога между всеми участниками переписи. Коммуникационная стратегия Переписи 2011 года рассматривается как компонент общей стратегии прозрачности и открытости к обществу, применяемой Национальным Статистическим Институтом Болгарии. Представлены также основные компоненты и коммуникационные каналы кампании (такие как кампания в СМИ, национальные и местные партнерства, социальные СМИ, он-лайн взаимодействия и обучения) и ключевые факторы для ее успеха.

Особое внимание уделяется новым вызовам (как например, распространение новых каналов коммуникации, появление социальных сетей, забота о неприкосновенности частной жизни, возникновение гражданской журналистики и т. д.), которые требуют изменений в охвате и содержании коммуникационной кампании и политик в области распространения итогов переписи.

В статье также подчеркивается значение инноваций в организации и проведении переписи населения и, в частности, использования современных информационных и коммуникационных технологий для достижения более интерактивного общения с гражданами. Указывается поддержка со стороны правительства в связи с поощрением Интернет-переписи как более легкого, быстрого и удобного варианта проведения, который также экономит ресурсы и является более благоприятным для окружающей среды.

Основные выводы статьи связываются с успехом кампании по превращению переписи в национальный приоритет, поддерживаемый всеми государственными учреждениями, местными органами власти и гражданами страны, и для повышения общего доверия к роли и миссии официальной статистики. Представлены также и некоторые уроки из нашего опыта, которыми могут воспользоваться другие национальные статистические ведомства.

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