

Safer Internet for Children

ARC Fund has started its second decade as the coordinator of the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre (SIC), established in 2005 with the financial support of the European Commission. The Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre is a member of the [International Association of Internet Hotlines \(INHOPE\)](#) and of the [European Network of Safer Internet Centres \(InSAFE\)](#). During the past year, the SIC team continued to work on several of its trademark programs and initiatives promoting safe and positive use of digital technologies among children and young people, and started several new ones. The bulk of Centre's efforts focused on enhancing the digital literacy and combating online hate speech.

Overall, the SIC organized 16 and participated in 27 national and international events in 2016, and conducted 24 trainings (15 for schoolchildren, 5 for teachers and 4 for parents). The Centre's experts have made 40 radio and TV appearances and gave over 20 interviews for print media.

The SIC work was covered in more than 100 publications.

Through its Hotline and Helpline SIC took various actions on more than 1.000 reports and cases concerning children sexual exploitation online and problems with minors on the Internet.

The new website of the [Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre](#), launched towards the end of 2015, attracted considerable attention, as can be seen from the visitor statistical data (the site is visited on average by about 400 users per day). The new website united both services of the Centre (Hotline and Helpline), which previously had separate web pages, making it easier and more straightforward for the users to submit reports or ask for consultations. This was reflected in the increased number of reports and consultations compared to the previous years. The website also has a mobile version, easing the access for the tablet and smartphone users.



Projects and initiatives

The [National campaign against gender-based violence](#) addressed issues such as early sexualization, the lack of parental control over the children's Internet use, and the fact that children are increasingly exposed to online content unsuitable for their age. The sexualized media and information environment consolidate the gender stereotypes, and children start to

adopt models and behaviour in which gender-based violence is perceived as something normal. The campaign [#облечисебе \(Dress Up\)](#) was developed in active cooperation with a youth panel, consisting of 12 volunteers, aged between 15 and 17, and featured a large number of information materials (flyers, brochures, posters, stickers, T-shirts, gift boxes, and

an audio and a video clip). The official video of the campaign was seen by over 100,000 Facebook and YouTube users. The campaign included a public debate “For and against uploading a sexy selfie” on April 26, with participation of over 30 young people. The event was streamed live on Facebook.



A public youth debate on the topic of nude selfies online was part of the national campaign.

During the year, the SIC concluded its work on another important project: “**Children, Parents and Teachers against Hate Speech and Discrimination**”. The team worked with a group of teachers, pedagogical counsellors and experts to produce a special methodology with 10 work modules for children from grades 1-4. The methodology encourages the development of tolerance and acceptance of difference among the children. After it was tested in 10 schools, the methodology was finalized and published as a school textbook *Children, Parents and Teachers against Hate Speech*. The entire first edition was sent to more than 150 schools across Bulgaria.



The guidebook for teachers.

After a very successful inaugural year, the **Cyberscout initiative**, supported by Telenor Bulgaria, continued in 2016 with the second round of trainings. Two-day trainings were conducted in six Bulgarian towns (Bozhurishte, Elena, Shabla, Pomorie, Panagyurishte and Stara Zagora) with participation of a total of 162 children aged 10-14. During the trainings, the children deepened their knowledge about the most common dangers children face online and the ways to avoid them. The Cyberscouts were also trained to pass on what they have learned to their peers. With their training completed, the Cyberscout teams were given a task to organize awareness-raising events in their schools on the topic of online safety. A jury will evaluate all the events and the three best initiatives will be awarded on the next International Safer Internet Day (February 7, 2017, in Sofia).



Certified cyberscouts from Stara Zagora.

The International Safer Internet Day remains one of the most important occasions for drawing public attention to the work and mission of the Safer Internet Centre. This year, it was marked on February 9 in the Peroto literary club in Sofia. At a ceremony three 2015 Cyberscouts teams (from Popovo, Smolyan and Vidin) received awards for their efforts to raise awareness among their peers about the online risks for children. The main event was the Conference “Dos and Don’ts...For a Few Likes More.” Over 60 children, teenagers and adults discussed the acceptable and unacceptable ways in which young Internet users seek popularity and social approval through social media. The participants discussed various ways for preventing

and fighting online sexual exploitation of children, online bullying, gender-based violence and other forms of abuse of children and minors.



Youth discussion at Safer Internet Day event.

Empowering children in the digital age through early development of digital literacy is a common arch of two projects the SIC is implementing in partnership with the Sofia University and the support of Oak Foundation. The main goal is to design a methodology for training future primary school teachers to work with children in the area of early digital and media literacy. A methodological manual for primary school teachers, including lesson plans for work with children from the first to fourth grade, will improve the digital literacy of the pupils, make them more resilient towards online risks and enhance the possibilities for studying, creativity and socialization in the online world. To provide the necessary background information, a national representative study on online behaviour of Bulgarian children was carried in September-November, with participation of 1400 Internet-using children aged 9-17. Several analytical reports based on the study are under preparation and will be available in early 2017.

The **annual Familathlon** took place for the eighth time at the usual place – the Sofia South Park (May 15). As in the previous years, the event provided an excellent opportunity to thousands of families to test their skills and have fun while participating in a large variety of games, sports and educational activities. The Safer Internet Centre participated with various games on the topic of children's online safety, presented the National campaign against

gender-based violence with the help of two volunteers from its Youth Panel, and set up the mobile clinic for devices used by children – PC Doctor.



As part of the international initiative of Telenor **“Be Smart – Use Heart,”** experts from the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre assisted and trained over 260 employees of Telenor Bulgaria, who visited more than 60 schools across the country on September 29. Over 10,000 pupils participated in educational games, aimed at raising awareness about online bullying and its consequences. To this end, two different open-air activities were prepared. Pupils from grades 1-4 played the game “I can and I know what to do on the Internet.” The goal of the game was to present to the children different risky situations linked with the online bullying, and teach them how to deal with them. Pupils from grades 5-8 participated in the “Profiler” game, which increased their sensitivity towards online bullying. Young people took an online test to evaluate their potential behaviour in several archetypical situations dealing with bullying. Through the exercise they also learned how to react positively and constructively.

In 2016, the annual competition **“Teacher - leader in the digital era,”** was organized for the sixth time. It is open to all teachers from grades 1 to 12. The 2016 campaign was dedicated to the topic of digital and media literacy among children due to its exceptional importance for building skills and successful strategies for learning, finding information, active citizenship, fun and communication.

Prevention – resources and trainings

The most effective way to protect children and teenagers online is through prevention. ARC Fund, therefore, pays considerable attention to development of new materials and resources for educating and informing children and professionals working with children, as well as to engaging them in different training programs. Topics covered by these trainings include online safety, prevention of real and virtual violence,

cyberbullying and online hate speech. Professionals working with children and youth in education, prevention and intervention areas were trained to apply in their work different methodologies developed by the SIC (*Prevention of virtual and real violence through interactive education in school; Empowering fathers, empowering children; Children, parents and teachers against hate speech and discrimination*).