

## Safer Internet Program

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ARC Fund has been working in this area for 16 years as coordinator of the national Safer Internet Centre (SIC).

The organization operates a Hotline for reporting online content that is illegal and harmful to children and supervises a Helpline operated by its partner Parents Association.

The Centre is a member of the International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE) and of the European Network of Safer Internet Centres (Insafe), now integrated as the Better Internet for Kids network and is Bulgaria's representative in the EU Kids Online and Global Kids Online research networks.

SIC is also a member of the European Crime Prevention Network (ECPN) and the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). Since late 2018, a member of the the Safer Internet Center's Youth Panel has represented Bulgaria in the Children's Council of the Eurochild international network.

The Bulgarian SIC was granted a Quality Certificate by the International Association of Internet Hotlines INHOPE in 2018 and is Trusted Partner of Facebook and Trusted Flagger of Google.

In 2020, the Safer Internet Centre performed a wide range of activities in the field of protection of children online despite the unprecedented situation. The COVID-19 pandemic and the package of prevention measures introduced by the Ministry of Health led to two nationwide lockdowns – in March through May and in December 2020. The organization operates a Hotline for reporting online content that is illegal and harmful to children in cooperation with the other INHOPE

member hotlines, the national Law Enforcement Authorities (LEA) and Interpol, and supervises a Helpline operated by its partner Parents Association. The Hotline reports regarding online sexual exploitation of children are verified and transferred for further legal action to the national Cybercrime Unit. Via the Helpline, trained psychologists consult children, parents and teachers about problems and incidents with children on the Internet.



*Any internet user can file a report – anonymously or not – about online content which is illegal or harmful to children via the website of the Safer Internet Centre*

In 2020, the Hotline received and took action on 17,855 reports, 17,081 of them being reports on child sexual abuse materials, 16 – on erotic or nude content involving children, and 19 – on child grooming. 680 of the reports were directed to the Law Enforcement Authorities (the Cybercrime Unit of the General Directorate for Combating Organized Crime), 17,026 were sent to other Hotlines (members of INHOPE), 3 were directed to other Bulgarian institutions, and in 2 cases the Centre asked for the removal of the online content.

During the year, the Helpline provided 459 consultations on various issues ranging from cyberbullying through security settings to the use of the Internet and digital devices

by minors. Of those consultations, 19 concerned online content potentially harmful to children, 45 concerned privacy settings, 11 were related to personal data, 18 – to online reputation issues, 26 – to various aspects of digital and media literacy, 25 reported cases of cyber bullying, 16 concerned sexual harassment, 4 were on sexting, 11 – on sextortion, 3 – on sexual grooming and 2 were on e-crimes.

In addition to the direct protection and support of children facing online risks as well as the involvement in a number of research projects in the field of online safety and victimization of children and young people, the ARC Fund has developed and has been implementing various educational methodolo-

gies for the prevention of cybercrimes and online abuse of children. ARC Fund coordinates a working group of primary school teachers, university professors and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, which has been set up within the Safer Internet Program.

Being recognized as a center of excellence in the field of child protection on the internet, the ARC Fund participates in various national and international activities and working groups for developing strategies and proposals for necessary legislative measures, social service procedures and practices. It conducts regular trainings of children, teachers, parents, care givers, and social workers and is involved in various awareness raising activities. ARC Fund experts were included in an international working group formed by the European Crime Prevention Network to prepare a more structured and evidence-based strategy for the prevention of crimes against children. The ARC Fund regularly participates in working and training meetings of the Radicalization Awareness Network, presenting its expertise and sharing knowledge and practices with other organizations. ARC Fund also became a Trusted Partner of Facebook and Trusted Flagger of Google. Intervention and support in cases of incidents and risks for children online are important priorities, but the Safer Internet Centre places a major focus on prevention, too.

In 2020, ARC Fund's experts developed a methodology for training young people for peer trainers on topics related to the prevention of sexual exploitation of children online. At the end of the year, 20 young people from the Bulgarian SIC's Youth Panel and three schools in Sofia where trained online in peer training their peers next year. Teachers from the three schools were also trained to support the young peer trainers and to use the methodology for training other children in the future.

ARC Fund has also participated in the development of three tools which address Media

and Information Literacy (MIL) competences described in the UNESCO Global framework for assessment of MIL – an online game for young people, peer-to-peer methodology and storytelling guide. The tools will help young people develop their critical thinking and express their opinion and ideas for solving social problems.

A teaching methodology on the development of critical thinking and fostering tolerance through the improvement of digital and media skills in high schools was drafted in 2020 by ARC Fund experts incorporating the feedback of professional teachers. It consists of 10 lessons on the various types of digital and media skills (communication skills, information assessment skills, etc.) also related to emotional intelligence and critical thinking as prevention mechanisms to far-right messages online and far-right radicalization among youth.

In late 2020, ARC Fund experts developed three additional methodological guidebooks for countering anti-Roma manipulation and disinformation:

- a basic methodology guidebook on how to detect and tackle fake news, disinformation and manipulation, addressing general societal issues and in particular anti-Roma manipulation;
- a practical guidebook for capacity building of Roma leaders, activists, mediators, Roma and pro-Roma, which will equip the target Roma multipliers with the needed specific methods and tools to detect, monitor and counteract fake news and anti-Roma disinformation that accelerate anti-gypsyism;
- a practical guidebook for school teachers on the ways young people can identify and counter hostile narratives, disinformation, manipulation and fake news generating racists stereotypes and inciting hostility against Roma people.

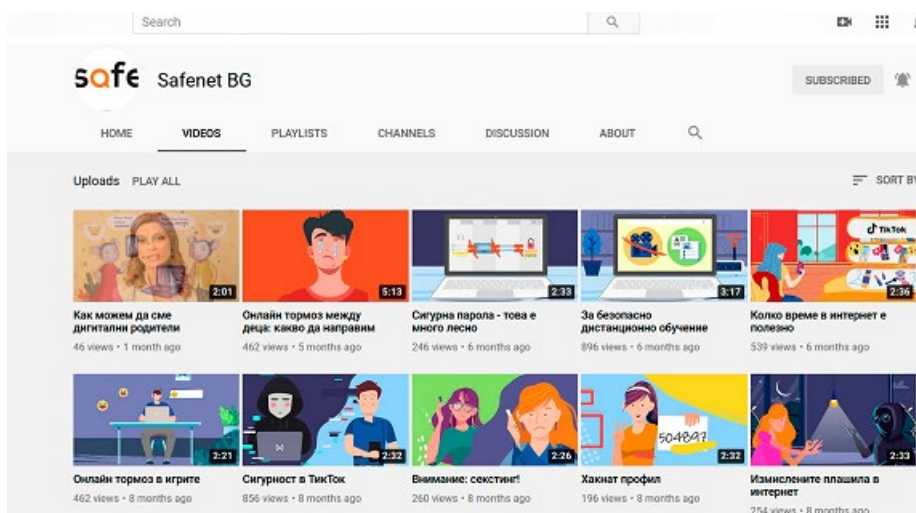
## Part one: Program areas

In 2020, SIC's holistic model for improving the digital and media literacy of students of all age groups through the existing curriculum was applied at 90th High School in Sofia. The model included modules on systematic work with parents as well as the creation of a school community. Teachers from the school attended a series of trainings on the updated holistic model and developed their own teaching plans. ARC Fund experts supervised the lessons, the majority of which were conducted online because of the lockdown, and provided feedback.

More than 1,500 children, close to 560 teachers, about 430 parents and more than 410 professionals (educational experts, teachers and school psychologists, social workers, members of local commissions for combating trafficking of human beings, among others) were involved in trainings and awareness raising events, both in person and online.

In the last 6 years, ARC Fund has been running the Cyberscout training program, which

was ranked 9th in the 2017 competition for the annual European Crime Prevention Award. The Cyberscout program for children aged 11-12 has become highly popular in schools. The results of the training are acknowledged by teachers and pupils alike. In 2020, before the first and the second nationwide lockdowns, ARC Fund and its partners managed to train 150 teenagers from 8 schools in 5 cities and towns across the country. ARC Fund continued to communicate online with the trained students, who have been receiving various *Cyberscout* missions for raising awareness about online safety among their peers. These trained children were also invited to participate in a national Cyberscout competition involving various activities and initiatives for transferring the newly acquired knowledge and skills to their peers. The Cyberscouts, supported by teachers, have managed to reach out to nearly 500 other children. In August 2020, ARC Fund also conducted a training, during which 20 professionals from various non-profit organizations acquired Cyberscout trainer skills and knowledge.



*The Centre produced 20 awareness videos on the main Internet risks for teens, teachers and parents*

Since 2010, the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre has been working actively on youth participation through maintaining its Youth

Panel – a voluntary structure of young people aged 14–18. The Youth Panel planned and hosted the main event for the Safer In-

ternet Day in Bulgaria in February 2020. The event engaged children and professionals who participated in order to provide recommendations on online safety for parents. The members of the Youth Panel also planned and hosted numerous other events of the Bulgarian SIC and its partners, such as the Voice It Youth Forum, which, in 2020, was dedicated to countering discrimination. The forum was organized by the National Network for Children and the role of the Youth Panel was to create a special video for the event. Two of the panel members were involved in the planning and hosted an event with a small number of participants which was livestreamed to reach a wider audience in the pandemic situation.

Since 2019, two members of the Youth Panel are also part of the Megaphone Youth Network maintained by the National Network for Children, as well as the network's Reporters initiative. One of them was also elected with the majority of the votes of the young people involved in this initiative to represent Bulgaria in the Eurochild Children's Council. The elected girl participated in a number of international online forums. She was also given a key speaker role at the annual event of the European Parliament on the Universal Children's Day which was an opportunity to discuss important topics concerning children with high-level European politicians. In 2020, the girl was also selected by The Washington Post as one of 12 global kids whose activities

have made their communities and the world a better place. Her international recognition was widely covered in Bulgarian media.

In February 2020, the Coalition for Media Literacy at School founded by ARC Fund, among others, which already has 17 member organizations, conducted the third Media Literacy Days campaign on the Safer Internet Day. During the campaign, SIC distributed a package of school aids containing lesson plans for various age groups of students, guidelines for teachers, plans for meetings with parents, etc.

Quickly adapting to the unprecedented pandemic situation, the ARC Fund held numerous webinars on online safety issues engaging audiences of teachers, parents and children. ARC Fund experts developed online safety quizzes for the popular Kahoot game and guidelines for safe Internet use, which were disseminated through the channels of the Bulgarian Red Cross during the first lockdown. A number of educational videos on online safety topics were also created, some which have proven useful in teacher practice. Guidelines for remote teaching during the lockdown were also specifically developed for teacher use. Along with its partners from the Coalition for Media Literacy at School, ARC Fund also conducted a survey among Bulgarian students to assess their attitudes to online education during the lockdown.