

Safer Internet Program

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In 2018, the Safer Internet Program enlarged the scope of its activities in the field of protection of children online. The Internet Hotline for fighting illegal and harmful content and conduct online received and processed more than 6200 reports on sexual exploitation online and was granted a Quality Certificate by the International Association of Internet Hotlines INHOPE. Over 2000 teenagers from across the country were trained under its most successful program Cyberscout. More than 3000 children, 1500 teachers, 1200 parents, 300 social workers and 250 university students were involved in training and awareness raising events. The Ministry of Education and Science joined the working group of ARC Fund experts, professional teachers and university professors, set up to develop a methodology for teaching digital and media skills in primary schools. ARC Fund's active and successful work for promoting children's safety online raised its international visibility making it Trusted Partner of Facebook and Trusted flagger of Google.

ARC Fund has been implementing the EC Safer Internet Program in Bulgaria for 14 years as coordinator of the Safer Internet Centre with its three components: Awareness node, Internet Hotline for reporting illegal and harmful to children online content and conduct, and the national Helpline for consulting children, parents, teachers, social workers and other professionals on issues concerning children's safety online. The Centre is member of the International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE) and of the European Network of Safer Internet centres (Insafe) and is Bulgaria's representative in the EU Kids Online and Global Kids Online research networks. An ARC Fund expert was invited by UNICEF Innocenti to co-author a global report about children on the Internet.

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 Hotline reports about online sexual exploitation of children are verified and transferred for further legal action to the national Cybercrime Unit. Via the Hel-

pline, trained psychologists consult children, parents and teachers about problems and incidents with children on the Internet.

In 2018, the Hotline received and took necessary actions on more than 6,200 reports, while the Helpline provided close to 400 consultations on various issues ranging from cyberbullying to security settings and use of the Internet and digital devices by minors. In 2018, the Internet Hotline was awarded INHOPE's Quality Certificate for its successful work and cooperation with the other INHOPE member hotlines, the national LEA and Interpol.

Besides the direct protection and support of children facing online risks and involvement in a number of research projects in the field of online safety and victimization of children and young people, ARC Fund has developed and has been implementing various educational methodologies for 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 set up to

develop a methodology which also includes 10 modular lessons for teaching digital and media competences to primary school children based on the formal curricula. The lessons were piloted in dozens of schools and based on the feedback collected and the evaluation of the program the working group developed a holistic concept for teaching digital and media literacy from 1st to 12th grade for the Ministry of Education and Science.

In the last 4 years, ARC Fund has been running the Cyberscout training program which was ranked 9th in Europe by the European Crime Prevention Network in 2017. Being recognized as a center of excellence in the field of child protection on the internet, 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 a regular basis training of children, teachers, parents, care givers, and social workers and is involved in various awareness raising activities. Experts from ARC Fund 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 preven-

tion of crimes against children. ARC Fund participates on a regular basis 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 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. To this end, in 2018 it trained over 3000 children, 1500 teachers, 1200 parents, 300 social workers and 250 university students.

The Cyberscout training program for children aged 11-12 has become highly popular in schools. In 2018, the ARC Fund trained over 500 children from 28 schools in 16 cities and towns. The trained children were invited to participate in a national competition among all trained cyberscouts by organizing various activities and initiatives among their peers to transfer the newly acquired knowledge and skills. Through these activities supported by a teacher they could reach to more than 2000 other children. The program's outreach was proved by more than 50 requests for trainings for 2019 from



Certification of cyberscouts in the city of Dobrich



Pupils in 55 schools across the country participated in the lessons on digital and media literacy in February and March 2018

all over the country. The results of the training are acknowledged by teachers and pupils alike. As one teacher put it: “Our trained pupils are very enthusiastic and put a lot of effort in the preparation of various awareness raising activities targeting their peers. They feel very proud to be cyberscouts and to teach other children how to prevent risks on the Internet”.

As the age of first-time use of the Internet has been constantly decreasing, ARC Fund started developing a methodology for primary schools for early development of digital and media literacy. The dedicated working group first developed a handbook for teachers with lesson plans based on the obligatory curriculum with a special emphasis on interactive work and specific digital and media skills. The methodology was presented at the national conference “How to Teach Media Literacy at School – Methods and Practices”, which took place in Sofia on 10 November 2018 and gathered representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission. More than 80 teachers from all over the country took part in interactive workshops and, as a follow-up, developed their own lesson plans based on the methodology.

In 2018, ARC Fund enhanced its cooperation with universities to train future teachers

and social workers on online risks for children and ways and methodologies for prevention. Students from universities in Sofia, Ruse and Blagoevgrad were trained and a formal cooperation agreement was signed with the Sofia University.

In February and March 2018, ARC Fund and the Coalition for Digital and Media Literacy at Schools launched the Media Literacy Days 2018 campaign, raising awareness about the concept of a continuous development of digital and media literacy from 1st to 12th grade. ARC Fund started the coalition in late 2017 and since then it has expanded to 15 member organizations. During the campaign teachers from 55 schools in 36 towns, cities and villages in Bulgaria conducted lessons on digital and media literacy using lesson plans and presentations developed by ARC Fund. A total of 4259 students participated in the campaign. Many of the schools also organized meetings with parents in order to familiarize them with the five main components of digital and media literacy: online safety, information assessment, communication and cooperation, content creation and problem solving. “The students were very proactive. They were enthusiastic that they could write the principles of digital competence on their own”, said Elka Radeva, a teacher at Sofia’s Zahari Stoyanov Primary School, also com-

mending the campaign for being related to children's everyday practices. They shared their own experiences with Internet-related problems and recognized the importance of knowing more about online safety.

All activities aimed at children's online protection were widely covered by the media.

During the year, ARC Fund raised public awareness and gave advice for online risks prevention through more than 70 publications, 20 interviews and 16 live radio and TV appearances. The weekly program Liter@te broadcast on Bulgaria's popular bTV featuring ARC Fund experts attracted large audiences.