
2020 Highlights

Innovation.bg has been ARC Fund's flagship initiative since 2004. It encompasses the *Innovation.bg* report, the *National Innovation Forum* and the *Innovative Enterprise of the Year* contest.

- The *Innovation.bg* report provides annual assessments of the Bulgarian economy's innovation performance and of the innovation system's current status and development prospects. The leading theme of *Innovation.bg* 2020 is the strategic framework of the European Commission for the programming period 2021-2027 with its priorities and measures for a more innovative and green European economy. The report focuses on the policy of the Bulgarian government for supporting competitive businesses in the context of the growing challenges on the global stage.
- The *National Innovation Forum* is a platform for exchange of ideas and cooperation among the government, the business community and research organizations. It enhances the performance of Bulgarian companies and boosts the innovation potential of the economy by promoting the introduction of new products and technologies and by facilitating business contacts with European partners. The National Innovation Forum in 2020 gathered virtually 180 representatives of the policy, research and business communities in order to share their views on Bulgaria's capacity for resilience through innovation during this challenging year, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The *Innovative Enterprise of the Year* contest is open to participants from all sectors of the industry nationwide. The award acknowledges innovative enterprises which have developed new or have significantly improved their existing products, services or processes over the last three years. Contest finalists also received ARC Fund's *Excellence in Innovation* label.

Innovation and business support

During the year, ARC Fund has adapted to the COVID-19 outbreak by delivering its services to Bulgarian companies through digital channels. The key events on the calendar of Enterprise Europe Network – Bulgaria were performed online or in a hybrid format. Nearly 70 Bulgarian companies and clusters took part in 12 B2B virtual events. As a result, local businesses expanded to new markets in Germany, the Netherlands, Turkey, Spain, Greece, Finland, and the USA. More than 100 Bulgarian companies benefited from the expertise of EEN's team in the areas of access to finance and innovation management, resulting in 20 research partnerships under Horizon 2020, the European Innovation Council and the European Regional and Development Fund.

In 2020, ARC Fund also delivered a series of capacity-building and interregional learning events on improving the efficiency of national and European financial instruments for SMEs and innovations, involving the National Innovation Fund, Vision for Sofia, Green Sofia and the Innovation Fund of Sofia Municipality.

ARC Fund continued working in close collaboration with the Bulgarian public administration in developing the strategic framework for the next programming period 2021–2027 and creating a business environment favourable to innovation. A major success in this regard was the establishment of the State Agency for Research and Innovation, a recommendation ARC Fund had made in several of its *Innovation.bg* reports. ARC Fund also supported the

Agency in developing the new Operational Program *Research, Innovation and Digitalization for Smart Transformation* to be launched in 2021. ARC Fund worked together with the Ministry of Economy on implementing the initiative *Efficient and Transparent Smart Specialization Policy of Bulgaria 2021 – 2027*.

Science, technology and innovation policy

During 2020, ARC Fund focused on further promoting the principle of responsible research and innovation (RRI), contributed to the understanding and the application of the precautionary principle as well as to enhancing responsible energy consumption and energy efficiency measures in households.

ARC Fund engaged in integrating RRI-based practices at the local and regional level by designing a novel approach to the territorial public decision-making process through facilitating collaborations among territorial R&I actors. In 2020, ARC Fund also prepared a comprehensive case study on the relevance of the precautionary principle to the governance of GMOs, focusing on the evolution of Bulgarian parliamentary debates on the *Law on Genetically Modified Organisms* since its adoption in 2005. In the area of sustainable energy use, ARC Fund continued to encourage efficient and more environmentally conscious energy consumption among households in Europe by developing and promoting an e-learning platform, which helps European consumers learn more about the different aspects of efficient energy consumption.

Safer Internet

In 2020, ARC Fund further expanded its activities for protecting children online. The Internet Hotline for fighting illegal and harmful content and conduct online received and processed over 17,000 reports on abuse of children online. In addition to the direct protection and support of children facing online risks, ARC Fund has developed and has been implementing various educational methodologies for the prevention of cybercrimes and online abuse of children as well as for ameliorating children's online literacy.

Quickly adapting to the unprecedented pandemic situation, ARC Fund held numerous webinars on online safety, engaging teachers, parents and children. Guidelines for remote teaching during the lockdown were specifically developed for teacher use. ARC Fund also conducted a survey among Bulgarian students to assess their attitudes to online education during the lockdown.

In 2020, ARC Fund trained 150 teenagers across the country under its most successful program Cyberscout. Overall, more than 1,500 children, close to 560 teachers, about 430 parents and more than 410 professionals were involved in various trainings and awareness raising events, both face-to-face and online.