
2021 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 main theme of *Innovation.bg 2021* is "Building Innovation Recovery and Resilience in Bulgaria". The report analyses the policy of the Bulgarian government for supporting competitive businesses.
- The *National Innovation Forum* showcases the performance of top Bulgarian innovative companies. In its 2021 virtual edition, the Forum gathered more than 270 representatives of the policy, research and business communities to share views on Bulgaria's capacity for recovery and resilience through innovation over the second year in a row, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The *Innovative Enterprise of the Year* contest acknowledges innovative enterprises, which have developed new or have significantly improved their existing products, services or processes over the last three years. All contest finalists receive ARC Fund's *Excellence in Innovation* label.

Innovation and business support

The Enterprise Europe Network at ARC Fund continued its support to Bulgarian SMEs to become more innovative, sustainable and resilient. Bulgarian companies entered into more than 260 negotiations on business, innovation and R&D partnerships across 27 B2B events. Local businesses expanded to new markets in the United Kingdom, Spain, the Philippines, Germany, Greece and Portugal. EEN advice led to granting European Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) to BG clients.

Throughout 2021, ARC Fund delivered a series of capacity building and interregional learning events to boost the efficiency of national, municipal and European financial instruments for SMEs and innovations. As a recognizable partner to national and regional authorities, ARC Fund elaborated measures and recommendations for leveraging the efficiency of the National Innovation Fund, the Sofia Green Program and Sofia Municipality's Program for Sofia 2021–2027.

Tangible impacts in the SME support and policy improvement were achieved in the areas of green transition, smart technologies, urban farming, and digital transformation.

Science, technology and innovation policy

In 2021, ARC Fund kept promoting the principles of responsible research and innovation (RRI), contributed to the application of the precautionary principle in public participation activities, enhanced responsible energy consumption and energy efficiency measures in households and contributed to increasing the resilience of enterprises in Bulgaria through fostering workplace innovations.

ARC Fund's activities were focused on the promotion and uptake of the RRI-AIRR¹ approach at the territorial policy level by enabling territorial actors to develop a more citizen-centered, open, transparent, responsible and inclusive governance. They engaged in a Europe-wide study to enhance scientific understanding and provide a robust monitoring system for RRI in research and research-funding organizations.

During the year ARC Fund worked for a more conscious and responsible energy consumption by households and for encouraging active energy citizenship as a tool for supporting the clean-energy transition process across Europe.

ARC Fund also assisted Bulgarian SMEs in introducing workplace innovation practices to improve business results and create a more satisfying and motivating environment for their employees.

Safer Internet

In 2021, 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 15,000 reports on abuse of children online. The Safer Internet team developed and implemented a number of educational methodologies for the prevention of cybercrimes and online abuse of children as well as for ameliorating children's online literacy.

Adapting to the unprecedented pandemic situation, ARC Fund held numerous webinars on online safety, engaging teachers, parents and children, as well as several live trainings for teachers and relevant professionals.

The Safer Internet team developed and implemented a number of educational methodologies for the prevention of cybercrimes and online abuse of children as well as for ameliorating children's online literacy. Approximately 1,500 children, 200 teachers, 270 parents and 1,160 professionals were involved in various trainings and awareness raising events, both face-to-face and online. The international Safer Internet Day event attracted over 20,000 viewers.

¹ RRI-AIRR - Responsible Research and Innovation – Anticipation, Inclusiveness, Reflexivity and Responsiveness