

## Safer Internet Program

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ARC Fund has been the coordinator of the **Bulgarian Safer Internet Center (SIC)** for 17 years. The organization operates a Hotline for reporting online content that is illegal and harmful to children and supervizes a Helpline, operated by its partner Parents Association. The Center is a member of the International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE) and of the European Network of Safer Internet Centers (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). A member of the Safer Internet Center's Youth Panel represents Bulgaria in the Children's Council of the Eurochild 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 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. 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.

In 2021, the Safer Internet Center performed a wide range of activities in the field of protection of children online despite the unprecedented pandemic situation. The program's team provided a number of trainings and awareness raising events online and, when it was possible, some face-to-face events and trainings in strict compliance with all anti-pandemic prevention measures and requirements. SIC's Hotline reported about online sexual exploitation of children and verifies and transfers cases for further legal action to the national Cybercrime Unit at the General Directorate for Combating Organized Crime. Via the Helpline, trained psychologists consult children, parents and teachers about problems and incidents with

children on the Internet.

In 2021, the Hotline received and took action on 15,694 reports, 15,276 of them being reports, related to child sexual abuse materials, 8 – on erotic or nude content, involving children, and 24 – on child grooming. 2,540 of the reports were directed to the law enforcement authorities (the mentioned Cybercrime Unit), 13,046 were referred to other INHOPE member Hotlines, 3 were directed to other Bulgarian institutions, and in 2 cases the Center asked for the removal of the online content. During the year, the Helpline provided 256 consultations on various issues ranging from cyberbullying through security settings to the use of the

Internet and digital devices by minors. Of those consultations, 11 concerned online content potentially harmful to children, 5 concerned privacy settings, 9 were related to data privacy, 5 – to online reputation issues, 25 – to various aspects of digital and media literacy, 28 reported cases of cyber bullying, 2 concerned sexual harassment, 1 was on sexting, 7 – on sextortion, and 9 were on e-crimes.

In addition to the direct protection and support of children facing online risks, as well as the involvement in research, concerning online safety and victimization of children and young people, ARC Fund has developed and has been implementing various **educational methodologies** for the prevention of cybercrimes and online abuse of children. 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 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's experts participate 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.

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 a Trusted Flagger of Google. Intervention and support in cases of incidents and risks for children online are important priorities, but the Safer Internet Center also places a major focus on prevention.

In 2021, ARC Fund published a **methodology guide** for training young people for peer trainers on topics, related to the prevention of sexual exploitation of children online. The methodology was presented to stakeholders at an online conference, organized by the Know-How Center of the New Bulgarian University, as well as to the members of the Learning Action Partnership for Prevention of Child Sexual Exploitation Coalition during its summer meeting. ARC Fund 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, a peer-to-peer methodology and a storytelling guide. The tools help young people to develop their critical thinking and express their opinion and ideas for solving social problems.

A teaching methodology guide on the development of critical thinking and **fostering tolerance through the improvement of digital and media skills** in high schools was also published in 2021. The methodology incorporates the perspective of professional teachers, including feedback from an online meeting with teachers who had piloted lessons from the draft guidebook at their schools. It consists of 10 lessons on the various types of digital and media skills (communication skills, information assessment skills, etc.) related to emotional intelligence and critical thinking as prevention mechanisms to far-right messages online and far-right radicalization among youth. In 2021, ARC Fund's experts also upgraded and completed three 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 anti-Roma manipulation in particular;

- 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.

Aproximately 1,500 children, 200 teachers, 270 parents and 1,160 professionals (educational experts, teachers and school psychologists, social workers, health mediators, Roma and pro-Roma activists, among others) were involved in trainings and awareness raising events, both in person and online.

Between May and July 2021, strictly adhering to the anti-pandemic measures, ARC Fund's experts provided five face-to-face trainings on how to detect and tackle fake news, disinformation and manipulation, addressing in particular anti-Roma manipulation, for Roma leaders, activists, mediators, Roma and pro-Roma NGO's. Two trainings were provided (in Varshets) for a group of trainees from Northern Bulgaria and another two (in Hisarya and Bansko) for another group of trainees from Southern Bulgaria. Another practical training on how to cooperate with each other on raising awareness about fake news and misinformation for both groups took place in Bansko as well.

In 2021, ARC Fund also provided two trainings for teachers from all over the country on how to detect and tackle fake news, disinformation and manipulation and how to help students develop information assessment skills – the first one was provided online and

the second three-day training was delivered live in October in Bankya.

A model for improving the digital and media literacy of students of all age groups through the existing curriculum through a holistic approach focused on competences, developed by SIC's team, had been applied at High School No 90 in Sofia. The model included modules on systematic work with parents and on 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's experts supervised the lessons, the majority of which were conducted online because of the lockdown, and provided feedback. In 2021, a guide for teachers on how to develop digital and media literacy in students through the holistic model was published. In November 2021, a face-to-face training for more than 60 teachers on the holistic model for development of the digital and media literacy of students was provided.

Since 2010, the Bulgarian Safer Internet Center has been working actively on youth participation through maintaining its **Youth Panel** – a team of young volunteers, aged 14–18. The Youth Panel planned and hosted the main event for the Safer Internet Day in Bulgaria on 9 February 2021, which was dedicated to the topics of fake news, disinformation and misinformation. The event took place online and was livestreamed for the general public, reaching more than 20,000 viewers. The online event engaged children and professionals who provided recommendations on the ways to recognize fake news, disinformation and misinformation online.

An ARC Fund expert was invited as a panelist at the Voice It 2021 Youth Forum, organized by the National Network for Children and the Megaphone Youth Network in November. The forum included live discussion with a small number of participants, which were livestreamed to broaden the outreach. In 2021, the Voice It Forum was dedicated to fake news, misinformation and ecology.



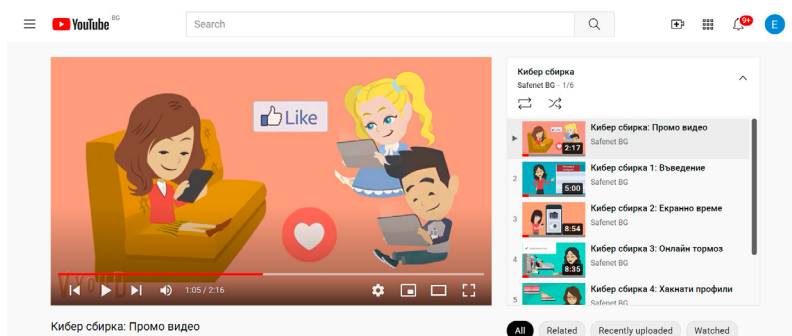
The main online event of the Safer Internet Day in Bulgaria reached more than 20,000 people, 9 February 2021

In 2021, two members of the Bulgarian SIC's Youth Panel, who are also part of the Megaphone Youth Network, maintained by the National Network for Children, as well as the Network's Reporters Initiative, completed the two-year Megaphone program successfully and were certified by the NNC. One of them also represents Bulgaria in the Eurochild Children's Council as she has been elected with the majority of the votes of the young people, involved in the Reporters Initiative. In 2021, the elected girl participated in a number of international online forums.

In 2021, ARC Fund had a representative on the team, created by the Coalition for Media Literacy at School (of which it is a found-

ing member) to compile a guide for teachers, developing media literacy in students through online teaching. ARC Fund experts participated in two online teacher trainings on the topic and two other relevant conferences, organized by the Coalition.

Adapting to the unprecedented pandemic situation, ARC Fund held numerous webinars on online safety issues, engaging audiences of teachers, parents and children. The Safer Internet team also created a series of five educational animation videos for children on online safety topics, which have more than 2,100 viewers on the Bulgarian SIC's [YouTube channel](#).



The Safer Internet Program's team created a series of animation educational videos for children on online safety topics