

Safer Internet for Children

In 2011, ARC Fund considerably expanded the scope of its activities aimed to encourage positive, responsible and safe use of the Internet and mobile technologies among children and young people. All three of the Safer Internet Centre (SIC) services are already available in Bulgaria – the Awareness node, the Internet Hotline for reporting illegal and harmful for children online content and conduct, and a national Helpline acting as a consultation call-center which responds to the questions and concerns of young people, parents and teachers linked to minors' experiences online, which went fully operational since April 2011. Due to the good cooperation between ARC Fund and the three Bulgarian mobile operators, the Helpline telephone number 124 123 has a very low charge of

0.07 per call notwithstanding its duration. The SIC activities during the year have been following the traditional priorities of the program – raising awareness among children, parents, teachers and professionals regarding the positive and safe use of Internet and mobile technologies by:

- Developing educational materials;
- Implementing information and awareness raising campaigns and trainings;
- Monitoring the emerging trends in technology use among young people;
- Supporting cooperation between various stakeholders.

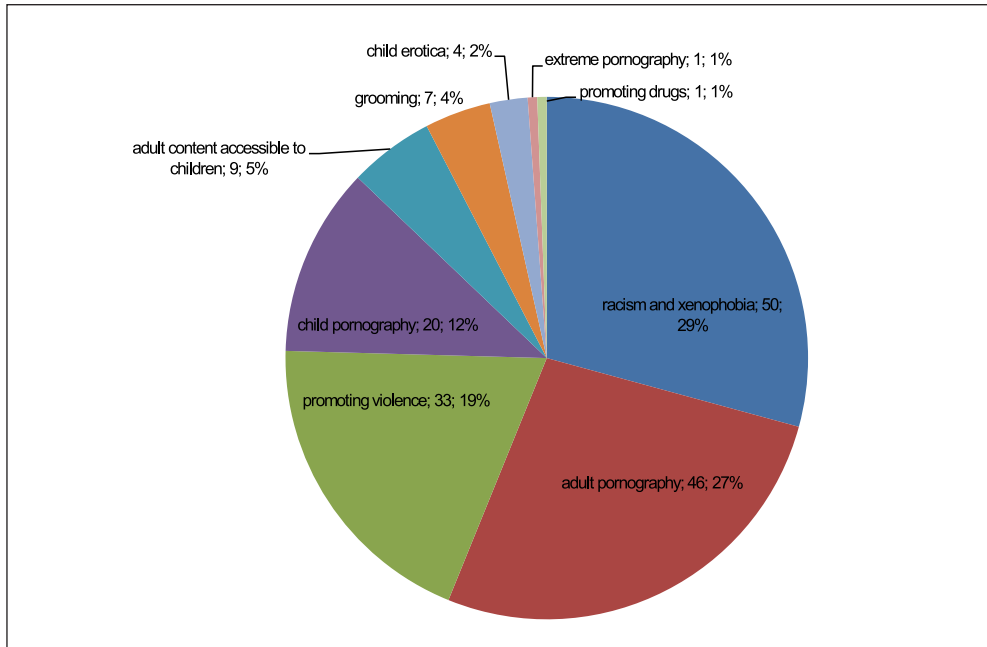
The newly launched Helpline showed a steady popularity rise due to the visibility

The Help Line's website.

of the SIC in Bulgaria, so more and more children, parents and teachers have been reaching out to the consultants for advice and support. In order to raise awareness among stakeholders, SIC organized and participated in a number of events throughout the year. SIC teams visited schools in three cities where open lessons on safer Internet use for students, teachers and principals took place. A special guest in Sofia and Varna was Yavor Kolev, head of Cybercrime Unit of the General Directorate for Countering Organized Crime at the Ministry of Interior who participated in the discussions by sharing real-life experiences.

Experts from SIC and Cybercrime Unit officers participated in a 3-day training of pupils from around the country, organized by the Centre for Inclusive Education within the framework of a joint project with Save the Children – Norway. Pupils learnt about methods of peer research

in order to conduct surveys among their classmates about their habits of Internet use. The results of the surveys were published in a special booklet entitled “Being safe in Internet”. In 2011, ARC Fund and the Parents Association continued training educators to implement the “Real and Virtual Violence Prevention by Interactive Education” methodology in schools. This year, an additional 18 teachers were trained to use the methodology in the schools in the city of Dimitrovgrad. Annual supervision was organized for 50 school counselors in the city of Varna who had already implemented the methodology in their schools. They were further introduced to the recently published second educator’s manual, aiming to deepen the education in emotional intelligence and social skills that are considered an important protective factor preventing children victimization. In the city of Ruse, 16 teachers and professionals from the Prevention Directorate



Number and share of reports to the Hotline, by type

at Ruse Municipality also passed the training in the “Real and Virtual Violence Prevention” methodology and started its implementation in schools.

At the initiative of and cooperation with the Varna Municipality, ARC Fund started developing an online distance learning course on safer Internet use for pupils. 70 students between 16 and 18 years of age volunteered to participate in the pilot phase of the project. The course has three levels and prepares the trainees to become peer educators on safer Internet use. Lessons at Level 1 introduce the basic Internet user skills such as web browsing, viruses, information search, and communication and security settings. Level 2 aims to enrich the understanding of these topics through more detailed information on types of malware and online scams as well as on the positive and safe use of social services that

exist online. Level 3 introduces the concept of peer support through research and education. All levels include presentations, demonstrations, and additional helpful materials to facilitate learning. Trainees who fulfill the requirements of all three levels will be awarded an Expert Safer Internet Certificate.

Nowadays, children start using Internet at a very young age. Therefore, one of the new priorities of SIC activities was designing and developing awareness and educational materials to meet the needs of the youngest users of the Internet. The activity book “Play and learn: Being online” released by the European Network of Safer Internet Centers (INSAFE) targets children from 4 to 9 years old was transformed in collaboration with Dechica.com into an online tool. The more than 20 activities included in the booklet are now freely available for kids



Flashboy playing with kids

to play on the website. Based on that, an interactive presentation was designed to be used by elementary school teachers in the classroom.

In order to promote the SIC Helpline, various awareness and visibility raising activities were organized. In May, for the third time in Bulgaria, a whole day openair event of family sports and healthy living – Famillathlon, was organized. Flashboy, a fictional character created as a symbol of the National Safer Internet Centre, was part of the celebration. He is always ready to help and knows everything about safer use of Internet and mobile communications. Flashboy introduced to more than 2,500 children and their parents the new initiative of the National Safer Internet Centre – the safer Internet Helpline. During the Famillathlon, children experimented with various sports and leisure activities and won plenty of awards including educational board games “Flashboy in the Land of Spammies”, magic folding cubes and memory cards game with the same SIC hero – Flashboy, aimed teach them basic online safety rules. The Helpline experts distributed booklets and brochures to parents and consulted them on issues that they are facing with their children’s Internet use habits. For the first time a Famillathlon event was organized in the city of Kozloduy. Besides on cardboard, the game “Flashboy in the Land of Spammies” was printed at a large-scale on vinyl, measuring 3 meters x 4 meters in size, so players can move as real pawns. The game proved to be a success as more than 200 children played in various events including “Sofia Breathes”, “Children’s Sofia”, and European Mobility Week. They learned more about safety on the Internet in a funny and engaging way, while their parents were given a brief consultation on the risks and opportunities online.

An Android application for smartphones was developed to help kids contact the helpline experts with ease. Besides the opportunity to look at the contents of the Helpline website and its Facebook page, the application provides easy one-touch access to the short number 124 123, and the possibility to compose and send reports by email. It is expected that going mobile would give an additional incentive to the teenagers and children to contact the helpline consultants. From October through November, SIC and the Network of Teachers Innovators organized a national competition for teachers who were asked to develop innovative lessons and methods for teaching online safety to their pupils. The teacher had to choose one or more of the eight basic digital skills and to explain it to students in a way that is appropriate and engaging for the children at that particular age. Pupils of the top 10 rated teachers were further tested online. The first prize was a laptop.

SIC developed 5 lectures as part of an online training course, which aimed to increase the digital competencies of teachers. This was organized by the Network of Teachers Innovators. The module “Online safety for pupils and teachers” covered the topics: prevention of online abuse of children; risks and opportunities for children online, prevention of real and virtual violence through personal growth, digital literacy and emerging technologies, and online safety: “good” and “bad” messages. The first lecture took place in December and was attended by more than 350 teachers.

The culmination of SIC activities throughout the year was the celebration of the Safer Internet Day on February 8th. In 2011, the focus was on “our virtual lives” around the slogan “It’s more than a game, it’s your life”. The main event took place at the “Elisaveta Bagriana” school in So-

fia, where three deputy-ministers attended including, Ms. Milena Damianova of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, Mr. Todor Chobanov of the Ministry of Culture and Mr. Parvan Rousinov from the Ministry of Transportation, Information technologies and Communications. Also in attendance was the Deputy-Chairman of the State Agency for Child Protection, Mr. Kalin Kamenov at the launch of the new Safer Internet campaign. Safer Internet Day was celebrated in more than 100 schools in 14 cities and towns around the country including Sofia, Varna, Kozlodui, Dimitrovgrad, Gotze Delchev, Vratza, Novi Pazar, Madan, Magarovo, Veliko Tarnovo, Kazanlak, Sliven, Rousse, and Biala. The Bulgarian SIC and Parents Association sent more than 3,000 “Flashboy” games, posters and badges to the participating schools to use in the events and initiatives they had planned.

ARC Fund also organized a number of safer Internet initiatives aimed at profes-

sionals. In August, the International conference “Say NO! to cyberbullying” took place in Sofia, co-organized by Madara-Bulgaria Foundation, the Department for Information and Qualification of teachers at Sofia University and the SIC team. School principals and teachers from 9 cities and towns and representatives and experts from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgaria presented their experience and methods for prevention in coping with cyber-bullying among minors – the most frequent threat that young people face online.

Continuing on from last year, experts of Safer Internet Centre (SIC) participated in the last training of police and magistrates as part of a project on capacity raising of law-enforcement, prosecution and courts in combating computer-related crimes, led by the International Academy for Cybercrime Investigation Training. In Velingrad, 12 judges, 16 prosecutors and 7 police officers from Plovdiv



At the International Conference “Say NO! to cyberbullying”

Appeal District were trained. Altogether the 5 trainings in all 5 judicial districts of the country involved more than 260 law enforcement officers and magistrates.

During the year ARC Fund experts participated in a number of international events and initiatives. The SIC team hosted a visit by 5 representatives of NGO organizations from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The visiting experts were acquainted with the objectives of the Safer Internet Program of the EC, the activities of the INSAFE and INHOPE networks and of the expertise of the Bulgarian SIC. They were trained how to establish and maintain a hotline and awareness center, acquainted with various tools and methods for awareness raising and for training the target groups. Additionally, SIC took part in training sessions of 15 experts from Serbian NGOs in Novi Sad, invited by B92 Fund and Save the Children – Norway Sarajevo Office. In November SIC accepted 2 members of the Polish Safer Internet Centre, who came to Bulgaria on a bursary exchange visit. They were introduced with SIC activities in Bulgaria and the working procedures of the helpline and the hotline. Additionally, members of SIC took part in 4 INSAFE and IN-HOPE meetings and in the annual Safer Internet Forum in Luxembourg, where SIC presented its experience and initiatives about ensuring a safer online environment for minors in Bulgaria.

In July, ARC Fund organized, for the second year in a row, the participation of two representatives of the SIC Youth Panel in an international summer EU youth camp in Moeciu, Romania. The camp was organized by the Romanian Safer Internet Centre. The two youngsters completed training on different topics ranging from online safety to development of projects and peer training

and their team won second prize in a project contest. A pupil from the Youth panel represented Bulgaria at the European Youth Panel meeting in Luxembourg and presented a video of hers on “Online Reputation”. ARC Fund organized also her father’s participation in the European Parents Panel.

In order to monitor the trends in Internet use among children and teenagers, SIC initiated focus groups with pupils and teachers and an online survey for pupils, teachers and parents. The research agenda was to assess participants’ perception of youth aggression online. Participation in the focus group included 12 teachers and 24 children aged 12-18 years old. The opt-in online surveys on several popular websites were filled by 213 children, 33 parents’ and 1033 teachers. The surveys’ results demonstrated that most of the students don’t engage in intentionally harmful behavior online. Even when they act mean, in the majority of cases the assault is perceived benign by both the victim and the perpetrator. This phenomenon was named “Hate for Fun online culture” to convey the idea that Internet serves as an environment where children feel they may experiment “safely” with identities, norms and boundaries. The model was presented at the Fifth International Conference “Keeping Children and Young People Safe Online” on September 20th-21st, 2011 in Warsaw.

In 2011, the Bulgarian Safer Internet Hotline received over 620 reports of illegal and harmful content and conduct online. Of these, 12 of the reports were transferred to the appropriate authorities, 28 reports were transmitted to partner hotlines in other countries, and replies to 25 inquiries were provided. The Helpline team consulted over 320 clients since the launch of the service in April.