
Safer Internet for Children

Marking its 10th anniversary as the coordinator of the **Bulgarian Safer Internet Center (SIC)**, ARC Fund continued to actively work for the improvement of the safety of children and young people using information and communication technologies. The Bulgarian Safer Internet Center is a member of the International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE) and of the European Network of Safer Internet Centers Insafe.

A very prominent recognition of the work conducted by the Bulgarian Safer Internet Center occurred on 29 December at the annual “Policeman of the Year” ceremony. The Center and its Hotline received a special award of the Ministry of Interior for civic contribution to the work of the police. The coordinator Georgi Apostolov received the award on behalf of the SIC team from the Sofia Mayor Yordanka Fandakova in the presence of the Minister of Interior Rumyana Bachvarova, as well as previous Ministers, General Secretaries and Directors of Police Directorates.

This year, the **Hotline for fighting illegal and harmful for children content and conduct in Internet has received 2,463 reports** about potential illegal and harmful for children content and conduct online. The processing of the reports revealed that 96 of them referred to websites featuring illegal content or conduct (Child pornography – 52 cases; Child nudism – 2; Sexual grooming

of children – 3; Promotion of racism and xenophobia – 7; and Promotion of violence against the individual – 32). 20 of these reports were transmitted to the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior, 40 were forwarded to INHOPE Hotlines in other countries, while in 36 cases, the content owners were notified and asked to remove the illegal content.

No less important is the Center’s **Helpline for online safety** (operated by a partner organization Association Parents). **322 children, teenagers and parents** have contacted the Helpline to seek consultations and advice about problems related to children’s use of internet and digital technologies. Most enquiries dealt with the issues like online bullying, abuse of online identity, technical and security settings, illegal or harmful content, and unwanted contacts from strangers.

Towards the end of the year, the Bulgarian Safer Internet Center launched **its new website** – www.safenet.bg. It united both services of the Center (Hotline and Helpline) in one place, making it more convenient and straightforward for the users to submit reports or ask for consultations. The website provides information about the most common risks children can encounter online, and presents the initiatives, trainings and resources of the Center, aimed at developing the digital literacy of the young Internet users.



The SIC coordinator Georgi Apostolov receiving the award from the Sofia Mayor Yordanka Fandakova

Prevention – resources and trainings

Prevention is essential for the protection of children online. Developing new materials and resources, as well as providing trainings, are therefore among the priorities of ARC Fund. On the occasion of the **International Safer Internet Day 2015**, the team of the Safer Internet Center provided a set of materials to the Bulgarian schools. The set included posters, presentations and lesson plans on the topic “Together for Better Internet” and was designed to help schools organize initiatives, workshops and lessons for pupils from the 1st to the 12th grade. Another handy resource developed by the Center is the guide for teachers “Online Life of Children and Teenagers.” The guide helps teachers to engage in a constructive dialogue with parents about the advantages and challenges the Internet represents for their children.

Like in previous years, training courses remained one of the Center’s trademarks. In April, the Safer Internet Center started a joint effort on fighting **cybercrimes against minors and the human trafficking** with the Varna Municipality. Over 40 young people from the municipal Prevention Clubs took part in two training seminars and four online sessions. The participants learned about the new tendencies in the computer crimes targeting children and young people. A handbook “Risky Behavior on the Internet

and Human Trafficking” was presented and distributed during the seminars. The seminars also improved the peer-to-peer training skills of the participants, who can use the handbook to instruct their peers or younger pupils.

In the frame of the same effort, a training session with professionals (members of the Local Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, and of the Municipal and Local Commissions for Combating Juvenile Delinquency) was also conducted. ARC Fund’s experts presented the online risks for children and young people, as well as the ways to protect them from becoming victims of human trafficking.

Another important and successful training program was the **Cyberscout initiative**. The program was financed by Telenor Bulgaria and was carried out with the assistance of the Ministry of Interior. Two-day trainings were conducted in five Bulgarian towns (Smolyan, Vidin, Shumen, Pleven and Targovishte) with the participation of a total of 126 children aged 10-14. During the trainings, the participants deepened their knowledge about the most common risks children face online and the ways to avoid them. The Cyberscouts were also trained to pass on what they have learned to



Homepage of the new Bulgarian Safer Internet Center website



A team of Cyberscouts has received their certificates after successfully completing the training.

their peers. During parallel sessions, their teachers were introduced to the program and told how they could assist the students in organizing various awareness activities with their peers. Having completed their training, the Cyberscout teams entered a competition, during which they had to organize an event to raise the awareness of the young people about the online dangers and the ways of addressing them. On 9 February 2016, when the International Safer Internet Day is marked, the three best initiatives will be awarded.

Throughout the year, numerous one-day trainings and lessons were held for children in various schools. The topics included online safety, cyberbullying and young people between real and virtual worlds. Professionals working with children and youth in education, prevention and intervention areas were trained how to apply in their work a methodology for prevention of online and offline violence, developed by the SIC.

International cooperation

The Safer Internet Center was among the 180 civil and non-governmental organizations from 20 countries, which laid the foundations for the **European Youth Network against Violent Extremism** on 4 June in Oslo. The Network was formed as a reaction to the growing numbers of young people aged 13-17, who support or participate in radical movements. During the event, ARC Fund presented its work on the prevention of hate speech and discrimination through the interactive training “Children, Parents and Teachers against the Hate Speech and Discrimination.”

The Safer Internet Center also participated in the third global conference #CATS2015 (Children as Actors in Transforming Society) in Switzerland. The event brought together over 300 participants from 45 countries in an effort to actively involve children and young people in decision-making processes that concern them. In addition to the experts, the Center’s delegation included also two young women, who have participated in different initiatives and programs of the Center since 2013. One of them was chosen to be among the four young

people, who presented their experiences and impressions from CATS2015 at the special event in the European Parliament in November 2015.

Other important events in which the SIC experts took part, include:

- A working meeting of the European research network EU KIDS ONLINE to discuss emergent topics and exchange expertise with other European organizations working in the area of safer Internet (January in Brussels);
- A Conference on safeguarding teenagers' intimate relationships – topics such as sexting, abuse of partners' accounts and revenge porn were discussed (February in London);
- Insafe Steering Committee meeting (May in Prague);
- EuroDIG 2015; a session on Youth Empowerment was moderated by SIC (June in Sofia);
- Bursary visit by Dora Sheridan, analyst at Internet Watch Foundation, UK (July in Sofia);
- An international Hackathon for fighting trafficking in persons (September in Tallinn);
- A meeting of the Swiss-Bulgarian working group against human trafficking (November in Sofia).

On 18 November, the **European Day on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse** was marked for the first time. A coalition of 30 organizations, including ARC Fund as the coordinator of the Safer Internet Center, have signed a declaration, insisting on effective measures and a zero-tolerance policy against child sexual exploitation and abuse online. They called for an expanded focus and understanding of exploitative imagery, which falls into a “grey area” and remains outside the legal definition of child pornography (images and video materials depicting children in provocative or erotic positions).

To celebrate the International Human Rights Day (10 December), the Council of Europe and the Bulgarian Chairmanship to the Council of Europe, in partnership with the ARC Fund and the Center for the Study of Democracy, hosted the international conference **“Human Rights of the Internet users.”** The event was opened by Eva Paunova, member of the European Parliament, and Grigor Porozhanov, Director of the Foreign Economic Relations Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Distinguished Bulgarian and international experts from various institutions and organizations, representatives of business organizations, human rights activists and journalists discussed trends, developments and perspectives in the field of protection of fundamental human rights of Internet users.

Initiatives

Like in previous years, the marking of the **International Safer Internet Day** was an important occasion for drawing the public attention to the work and goals of the Safer Internet Center. A public discussion **“Is there a national policy on protection of children from the online sexual exploitation in Bulgaria?”** was held in the Information Office of the Representation of the European Commission and the European Parliament in Sofia. The participants included representatives of relevant state institutions – State Agency for Protection of Children, Ministry of Interior, Ministry

of Youth and Sports, Cybercrime Unit of the State Agency for National Security, as well as teachers and students.

During the year, the Center continued its work on the project **“Children, Parents and Teachers against the Hate Speech and Discrimination,”** financed by the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism. In cooperation with a group of teachers, pedagogical counselors and experts, a special methodology for children from 1st to 4th grade was developed in order to encourage the development of tolerance and acceptance of difference among

them. It includes 10 work modules, which can be applied during the lessons of various subjects. In addition to the work in class, children have a homework, which they should accomplish together with a parent. The methodology also foresees an extracurricular activity with participation of children, their parents and teachers. The methodology is presented in a school textbook *Children, Parents and Teachers against Hate Speech*. The textbook has already been used in several schools in various Bulgarian cities and the teachers provided feedback and ideas for improvement of the methodology. The approval of the Ministry of Education and Science is pending.

At a press conference on 17 September, ARC Fund and its partners from Association Parents announced the beginning of the **National campaign against gender-based violence**, financed by Norway Grants. The campaign turns public attention to the issues such as early sexualization, the lack of parental control over the child's Internet use, and the increasing exposure of children to online content unsuitable for their age. These phenomena consolidate the stereotypes about the roles of the two sexes. Reinforced by the sexualized media and information environment, these stereotypes lead to the adoption of models and behavior in which gender-based violence is perceived as something normal. The campaign, including a variety of awareness raising materials, is being developed in active cooperation with a youth panel, consisting of 12 volunteers aged between 15 and 17. Methodological materials and a detailed 40-minute lesson plan "I want to be popular like the others" were developed through cooperation with the young volunteers and with teams of

psychologists and representatives of the law-enforcement bodies.

In 2015, the competition "**Teacher – leader in a virtual space**," which the Safer Internet Center organizes each year, was linked to the campaign against gender-based violence and early sexualization. Teachers from fifth to twelfth grades were invited to test the developed lesson plan and related methodology and to apply them in their classes, providing feedback and suggestions to the Center.

A very successful and attractive initiative, which the Safer Internet Center launched in 2015, is the "**Mobile clinic for digital devices used by children**" in which experts "examine" the smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices of children and determine whether they are well protected. The mobile clinics were set up in the warmer months of the year in Sofia parks, in Serdica Mall, or during events like Sofia Breaths Festival. The examinations consist of 10 questions. Nine of them are related to the security settings of the mobile devices, while the last one establishes whether the children know who to turn to (apart from their parents) in case they experience an online problem. The Mobile Doctors have established that roughly half of the "patients" were ill. To remedy this situation, they talked with the families and the youngsters about the measures they need to take in order to fix the flaws. Over 200 families participated in the examinations. Undoubtedly, many more will visit the clinic in the future. The original idea for the initiative came from the Luxembourg Safer Internet Center, which approved its adoption in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian rendition of the Mobile clinic was financed by Telenor Bulgaria.



The mobile doctors in front of the clinic for digital devices used by children

Continuing a successful initiative from the previous year, which brings together a parent and a child in an activity involving **creative use of technology**, several **CoderDojo events** were organized. CoderDojo are programming courses for young Internet users, aged between 7 and 17, during which they learn how to write code, how to develop websites,

applications, programs and games. The events, which were organized on the premises of the Center for the Study of Democracy, took place in an informal and creative atmosphere, and the youngsters and their parents shared knowledge and information about different aspects of technology and learned many new things while having fun.

National cooperation and media appearances

The Safer Internet Center's experts participated in:

- Working group "Prevention of violence and abuse of children" at the National Council for Child Protection (13 January, Sofia);
- A seminar with juvenile crime police officers dedicated to the prevention and reaction to online crimes against children (11 May, Razlog);
- Conference on protection of children online, presenting the SIC activities (Hotline, Helpline, awareness node) (18 May, Sofia);
- Conference "Assessment of youth participation in Bulgaria" (26 May, Sofia);
- National youth forum VOICE IT, orga-

nized by the National Network of Children (20 November, Sofia).

The Center's experts have made numerous appearances in print and electronic media, providing comments and opinions on issues like intimate violence in teenage relationships; online safety of young people; popularization of events like Safer Internet Day and Familathlon; risks for young children using Facebook and ways to prevent them; prevention activities of the Center; place of mobile devices in schools; cyberbullying among minors; online radicalization, extremism and hate speech; and what parents and schools could do to protect children online.