
2019 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 2019* is the European science and innovation policy in the next EU program period 2021 – 2027, and the instruments envisaged to achieve its ambitious goals.
- The *National Innovation Forum* is a platform for exchange of ideas and cooperation among the government, 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 *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.

Innovation and business support

During the year the ARC Fund's team has delivered extensive advisory services to more than 75 Bulgarian companies, which were focused on consulting SMEs on access to finance, the SME Instrument of Horizon 2020 (the EU's strategic program for research, technology development and innovation), innovation management and access to new markets. As Coordinator of Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) – Bulgaria we co-organized key European business events on the Network's calendar and facilitated more than 40 Bulgarian companies in business negotiations, which resulted in 13 international business partnerships, as well as entries on the US, Canadian and Turkish markets. Over 30 SMEs benefited from in-depth analysis of their innovation processes and the follow-up consultations resulted in optimization of their innovation management.

The policy and financial instruments in support to SMEs and innovation were another major focus in 2019. The major achievement of our policy-related work was the endorsement of an Action Plan for improving the efficiency of the National Innovation Fund by Bulgaria's Executive Agency for SME Promotion.

Science, technology and innovation policy

In 2019 ARC Fund engaged in promoting broader understanding of the public implications of the precautionary principle as a governance mechanism to proactively safeguard the environment and human health; continuing development of capacities and expertise in technology assessment by broadening European and international partnerships and networks; further integrating the principles of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) on an organizational level as well as on territorial policy level; building solid capacities of research and innovation actors across the Danube macro-region; supporting households in taking stock of their energy consumption behavior; furthering the organization's strategic

development and outreach by broadening partnership networks, as well as the scope of the joint initiatives to support knowledge generation and better understanding of imminent societal transformations.

Safer Internet

In 2019 the Safer Internet Centre at ARC Fund conducted a large range of activities in the field of protection of children online. In close cooperation with the national law enforcement authorities (LEA) and Interpol, the Centre operates a Hotline for reporting online content that is illegal or harmful to children, and as well supervises a Helpline. The Hotline reports about online sexual exploitation of children are verified and transferred for further legal action to the national Cybercrime Unit. Via the Helpline, trained psychologists consult children, parents and teachers about problems and incidents with children on the Internet.

During 2019, the Internet Hotline for fighting illegal and harmful content and conduct online received and processed 9289 reports of sexual exploitation of children online. Over 1800 teenagers from across the country were trained under its most successful program Cyber-scout. More than 5400 children, 1000 teachers, 5000 parents, 100 university students and 3500 professionals (educational experts, psychologists, social workers, etc.) were involved in training and awareness raising events.

In 2019, for another year in a row, ARC Fund was recognized by the Ministry of Education and Science as being the most successful Bulgarian non-profit research institute, owing to its productive involvement in more than ten research and innovation projects under the *Horizon 2020* program.