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| Contribution by Ministry of Digital Transformation of North Macedonia (Republic of) |
| NORTH MACEDONIA SAFER INTERNET CENTRE |
| **Purpose**The purpose of this document is to inform on the significant strides in digital transformation through comprehensive policy frameworks, public-private partnerships, and initiatives aligned with international standards.**Action required**This report is transmitted to the Council Working Group on child online protection for **information**. |

Over the past two years, our government, under the guidance of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, now the newly formed Ministry of Digital Transformation, has made significant strides in this area through comprehensive policy frameworks, public-private partnerships, and initiatives aligned with international standards.

Achievements in 2023 and 2024

1 **Establishment of the National Safer Internet Centre (MkSafeNet)**: One of the most significant achievements during this period is receiving a grant for the establishment of the MkSafeNet project, co-funded by the EU's Digital Europe Programme. This centre will become the cornerstone of our national strategy for child online protection, focusing on awareness-raising, education, and providing concrete resources for both children and parents.

– The MkSafeNet Centre will provide new or updated online resources specifically targeting children, parents, and educators, to raise awareness about cyber risks, online safety, and how to report harmful content.

– The centre will reach over 2 500 individuals through events and training activities, aiming to build digital resilience and empower young users.

– Special focus has been placed on vulnerable groups, with 500 awareness-raising activities directly targeting children in marginalized communities.

2 **Helpline and reporting mechanisms**: In 2023, we will launch a dedicated helpline service within the MkSafeNet Centre to assist children, parents, and educators in dealing with online safety issues such as cyberbullying, online harassment, and inappropriate content. The helpline shall handle 215 requests in its first year of operation, offering timely guidance and assistance to those in need.

This helpline is integrated into broader EU-wide initiatives, contributing to the overall objective of handling 63 000 requests per year across the EU co-funded helplines.

3 **Youth participation and digital literacy initiatives**: In order to ensure sustainability and peer-driven engagement, we will introduce a program to actively involve youth in digital safety initiatives. In 2025, we plan to onboard 12 youth participants, who will be trained to serve as ambassadors for online safety within their communities. They will play a crucial role in spreading awareness among their peers about the risks of online exposure and the importance of maintaining digital security.

These young ambassadors represent a key component of our national child online protection strategy, helping to create a culture of online responsibility and resilience.

4 **Public awareness campaigns and educational programs**: For 2024 and 2025 with the implementation of the MkSafeNet project, we have planned extensive awareness campaigns in schools and communities, partnering with NGOs and private sector stakeholders. These campaigns are aimed at educating parents, teachers, and children about the dangers of the internet, such as cyber predators, grooming, and exposure to harmful content.

As part of this effort, we will distribute digital literacy materials, organized workshops, and trained teachers on the safe use of technology in education.

We will also work closely with the Ministry of Education and Science as well as the Bureau for Development of education to integrate online safety into the national curriculum, making digital literacy an essential skill for all students.

5 **Partnerships with International Organizations**: Recognizing the global nature of online threats, North Macedonia has strengthened its collaboration with international organizations such as the ITU, UNICEF, and EUROPOL. These partnerships have enabled us to adopt best practices, tap into global expertise, and ensure that our policies are aligned with international standards.

6 **Cybersecurity measures**: In parallel to our child online protection efforts, the Ministry of Digital Transformation will ramp up cybersecurity protocols in schools and public institutions. We will implement stricter data protection policies, introduce content filters, and strengthen monitoring to prevent children from accessing harmful online material.

As we reflect on 2023 and 2024, it is evident that child online protection has become a central priority for the Republic of North Macedonia. Through the establishment of the MkSafeNet Centre, collaboration with international bodies, and active youth engagement, we are building a safer digital environment for future generations. While we are proud of these accomplishments, we recognize that this is an ongoing battle, and we remain committed to continuous improvement.

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