

BiH Child Protection Consortium: comprising UNICEF Bosnia & Herzegovina, Save the Children and International Forum of Solidarity – Emmaus

Written by: Jasmina Hadžikarić

Theme: Donation of high-tech forensic equipment to the Ministry of Interior of Republika Srpska

Societies around the world, as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are relying more and more on information and communication technologies, increasingly dependent on them. Due to a large number of users, the Internet has become a vulnerable and insecure place. Its openness is an ideal hiding place for criminals of various types, and as such it is becoming dangerous, especially for young people, since adequate mechanisms for their protection are missing.

Despite appropriate material and human resources, investigating and protecting children from exploitation and abuse in the digital environment represents a permanent challenge. On the one hand, this challenge arises from the dynamics of the virtual space, the daily change of perpetrators' methods of creating, sharing, distributing and exchanging materials of abused children, which makes it difficult to identify and prove the crime. On the other hand, it is necessary to mention the insufficiently regulated legal framework, more specifically, its part which refers to the procedures of collection, analysis, storage, keeping and presentation of evidence, primarily the Criminal Procedure Codes of the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska, as well as legal regulations governing activities of service providers in the country and abroad, international exchange and storage of data, information and evidence. Because of this, various institutions, agencies, judges, prosecutors and members of law enforcement agencies must be ready to efficiently, effectively and appropriately collect evidence in the electronic form to detect lawbreakers in the digital environment.

The fight against cybercrime depends on the training of professionals in high-tech crime departments and adequate equipment in our country's ministries of interior. To protect children from exploitation and abuse in the digital environment, as well as to improve the capacity of Republika Srpska institutions in the field of child safety in the digital environment, within the Project “End Violence Against Children (EVAC): Preventing and Tackling Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, funded by the Global Fund to End Violence against Children, IFS-Emmaus, Save the Children and UNICEF donated high-tech forensic equipment to the High-Tech Crime Department of Crime Police Administration of Republika Srpska.



The equipment was donated to a specialized organizational unit within the Crime Police Administration of Republika Srpska, which works on detecting, finding evidence for and preventing crimes in the field of violence against children. The equipment will be used to conduct investigations, collect, process, analyse, store, keep and present digital evidence necessary to identify and prosecute perpetrators of the crimes in question. Also, one part of the equipment is intended for continuous training and education of police officers for prevention, i.e. for education and informing children, parents, teaching staff and all other entities involved in the process of child protection in the digital environment.

The donated equipment is used by professionally trained individuals who have, among other things, attended training organized by educators from the European Union, based on internationally harmonized programs. Experts also participate in specialized victim identification task forces (VIDTF - Victim Identification Task Forces) organized by EUROPOL, together with representatives from Europe and the world. They are trained to use specialized databases such as ICSE DB (International Child Sexual Exploitation Database).

“The donation of the technological equipment provides an opportunity for more efficient access to identifying, collecting and processing information and evidence, as well as to faster and more efficient exchange of information between institutions that jointly fight cybercrime. In that way, we continue to follow trends and possibilities for more appropriate forensic analysis using modern technology”, said Olivije Zimonja, Head of the Unit for Combating Cyber Crime in High-Tech Crime Department, Republika Srpska Crime Police Administration. Mr Zimonja pointed out that the donated forensic equipment gives him personal satisfaction: „It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to cooperate with IFS-Emmaus, Save the Children, and UNICEF. Such a significant donation will greatly improve the capacity and facilitate the organisational unit's work, while also stimulating the feeling of partnership and joint action. It is very important that there are secure and up-to-date mechanisms and digital tools for mitigating the risk of high-tech crime for the availability of information and further investigations into dealing with such cases”, concluded Zimonja.