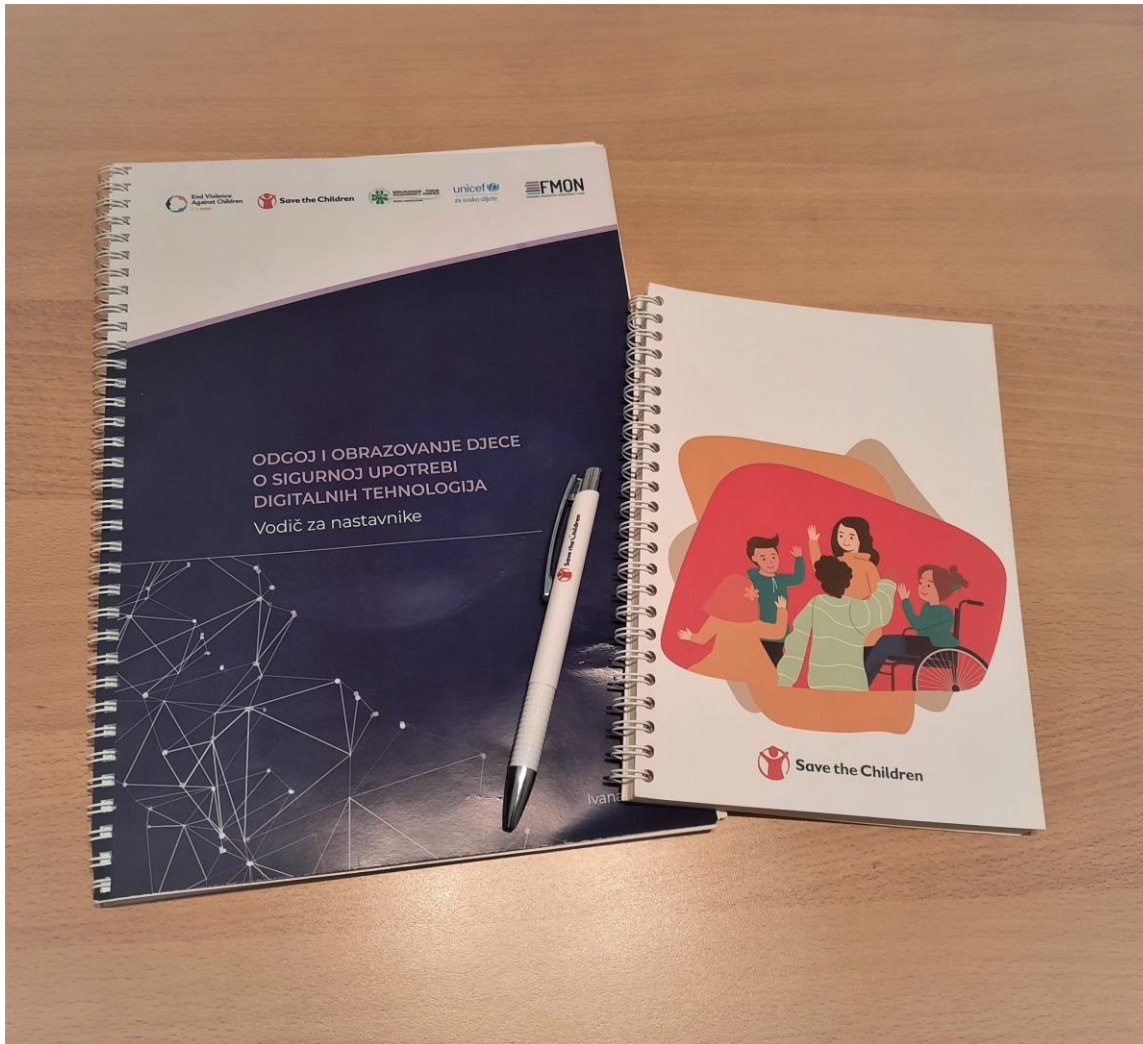**SAVE THE CHILDREN IN NORTH WEST BALKANS (SCNWB)**

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Themes: Digital environment, education of children and teachers

Title: Educating children on the safe use of digital technologies

The Internet allows children to communicate faster, socialise with peers from any part of the world at any time of the day. Children use it to connect, especially through social networks, games or various websites depending on their interests. The Internet allows them instant entertainment, because, with the help of search engines, it is possible to find content that is fun and suitable for all ages at any time of the day. In addition to the above mentioned benefits of using the Internet, there are potential risks. The Internet allows greater anonymity for users, which can lead to a reduction in behavioural inhibitions that are present in live interactions, which means that people who communicate via the Internet are freer than ever, making it easier for them to contact strangers and misrepresent themselves. Reduced behavioural inhibitions and the possibility of misrepresentation are good prerequisites for violent behaviour towards children. It is precisely because of these characteristics of digital communication that children are more exposed to contact with ill-intentioned people on the Internet, and therefore are at an increased risk of being harmed. In extreme cases, children can become victims of sexual violence, human trafficking and other illegal activities.

Children, therefore, need to be educated and properly recognise the dangers lurking on the Internet, and their parents and guardians as well as educational institutions must help them in this. For this reason, the publication "Education of Children on the Safe Use of Digital Technologies – A Teachers' Guide" was developed for all teaching staff in the Federation of BiH, in which the organization Save the Children participated through the project "EVAC - Prevention and Work on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children in the Digital Environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina" and the FBiH Ministry of Education.

The purpose of this Guide is to help teachers to educate their pupils/students in primary and secondary schools about the safe use of digital technologies, developing their digital and social and emotional competencies. "Namely, we realised that young people and children spend a huge amount

of time in an online environment and that they, unfortunately, are exposed to different types of pressure in such an environment. When it comes to education, the primary goal is prevention and I think that our children should know exactly what is allowed and what is not allowed in the online environment", says the Assistant FBiH Minister for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education, Nadija Bandić.

The advantage of this Teachers' Guide is that it does not refer to only one subject included in the curricula for primary and secondary schools, but is applicable in all subjects and thus has an effect on the development of digital, economic and emotional knowledge and skills in children to recognise and resist digital violence.

The Guide focuses on the concept of violence, the causes of violence and the consequences of violent behaviour through digital technologies, and lists ways to prevent such violence. The Guide also addresses the role of teachers and parents in the fight against digital violence against children, and

points to the need to establish a partnership between family and school, explains Mrs Bandić and adds: "We are primarily focused on developing digital literacy in educational institutions, and, considering PISA and TEAMS researches stating that our children absolutely do not possess this functional literacy in general, we have put special focus on developing and strengthening digital literacy not only of children but also teachers and, of course, parents. Parents are very important to us in this process, and thus the complete approach to solving this problem is a holistic approach involving the family in all these activities from the very beginning. The school, as an educational institution with the wealth of content that it offers, must become a protective and supportive environment for every child, in the true sense of the word."

Nadija Bandić especially emphasises that there is no person in the family and in school who is exclusively responsible for the development of digital, social and emotional competencies in a child regarding digital environment, but conducting various activities in different subjects can teach a child to recognise and react to violence: "One of the probably most important programmes we have set as

a priority is the introduction of systemic prevention of unacceptable forms of behaviour in educational institutions, which is based on the fact that as soon as a child deviates from typical behaviour and first consequences of violence it suffered become apparent, an individual support plan and an individual care plan are created and, again, the entire family, the child, the pedagogical-psychological service in schools are included. In addition, every teacher who comes into contact with a child must be educated on how to react if they notice the first signs of violence. This is a completely innovative approach, there is a whole list of indicators that specify what the first signs are, i.e. in the first phase of recognising that a child may have suffered violence in a digital environment."

The publication "Education of Children on the Safe Use of Digital Technologies – A Teachers' Guide" will be distributed in all educational institutions in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, so that it is easily accessible to all their employees and pupils/students. In addition to the publication, links will be placed on the websites of educational institutions and relevant ministries referring to support resources for the child if he or she has been subjected to violence in the digital environment.

"I think that the development of the Teacher's Guide is now happening at the right time, because we are all suffering the huge consequences of online teaching caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and I believe that this publication will significantly contribute to young people strengthening their knowledge of what is acceptable and what is not in the online environment. We all have the same goal, and that is that every child, in every reach of this country, feels safe, protected and aware of all the resources that can help him or her grow into a competent and responsible person", concludes Nadija Bandić.

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