

Prevent to protect

The Slovak Republic's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Robert Kalinak reports on the projects aiming to prevent the sexual exploitation of children...

The sexual exploitation of children is one of the most serious crimes in Slovakia and it may be punishable by prison sentences up to 20 years. Such a strict penalty can not, however, compensate for the pain an innocent child had to suffer and, unfortunately, it does not deter mentally ill people from crime, although they know the risk. However, the most tragic aspect is that wounds inflicted on a child may last for a lifetime, affecting their future relationships or in their family.

Even though the sexual exploitation of children is a topic that the media increasingly deals with, most people think it is a subject that does not really concern them. On the contrary, this topic concerns all of us because if we do not talk about it, our children will never learn how to protect themselves against sexual deviants or against other people who will try to abuse them. We want to draw special attention to the prevention projects aimed at children. We want to teach them to distinguish between normal and suspicious behaviour of adults, to warn them against risk situations in which they may find themselves if they trust too much, and, in any case, our aim is to encourage them to talk every time they have a problem.

On 24th November 2008, a pilot project on the prevention of sexual exploitation of children and the production of child pornography was launched in co-operation with a non-profit organisation 'Seclusion – Spring Of Hope'. In November and December 2008, this project was launched in several elementary and high schools in the Slovakian town of Nitra, and from January 2009, more schools in Slovakia are planning to get involved. The project aims to highlight the seriousness of this issue and to break the taboo of sexual exploitation of children. The information about pitfalls that children can fall into that may put them at risk from paedophiles and what to do in the case of sexual exploitation can be found on billboards, posters in schools, glass boards in the streets and on the website www.stoppedofilom.sk. The project includes lectures for children and training for education advisors in schools. The President of the Police Force Ján Packa and the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family Viera Tomanová are the senior project sponsors. The website, with the possibility of an anonymous login for exploited children, was launched recently and six children have used it to contact Seclusion. These complaints are under investigation by the police.



Another project partly dealing with child pornography, paedophilia and sexual harassment, in particular through the internet and mobile phones, is 'Zodpovedne.sk (Responsibly.sk)'. The project has been in operation in Slovakia since 2007 and is based on the EU community programme Safer Internet Plus, which is currently under way in almost all the EU countries. The programme is aimed at raising awareness of the safe and responsible use of internet and, in this way, to ensure the prevention of internet crime.

Child pornography is most widespread on the internet; a place where potential offenders lurk waiting for their new victims. Therefore, we try to explain to children how important it is to pay attention to photographs or videos they upload onto the internet, to the people they chat with and to the personal data they disclose. We talk to children directly in schools, through leaflets and in workbooks, and



Projects like *Zodpovedne.sk* and the *Safer Internet Day* raise awareness of the important issues with children and young people through school, workshops and events

also through television. Last year, during the summer holidays, TV advertisement 'Kde je Miro?' (Where is Miro?) was broadcast. It was inspired by its German version 'Wo ist Klaus?', which even won an international award. The topic of paedophilia was dealt with when an older man started to talk kindly to a little girl, gave her a hand and took her away.

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A show called 'Cookie' was dedicated not only to internet pitfalls but also featured entertainment and news and was broadcast for a few months by the national television. One of the topics the show dealt with was the use of the internet for the sexual harassment of children. A telephone line 'Pomoc.sk' (Help.sk) was created, offering children psychological consultation regarding the dangers on the internet of bullying, victimisation, meeting strangers, etc. We also have our own 'Safer Internet Day', as do other European countries, which this year fell on 10th February. On this day we tried to raise awareness of the project itself and of the issues it deals with, through events

for children and young people, such as competitions and music performances.

Currently, we are working on another project 'Stopline.sk', which will develop the previous project 'Zodpovedne.sk'. It will be aimed at the possibility of reporting illegal internet content through an internet portal that will cooperate with the competent police forces. We want to advertise the project to children in order to let them know that any suspicious emails or chats they receive may be reported on this website.

We consider prevention as a key factor for the protection of children and young people against sexual exploitation. The law and police activity are not sufficient in this matter because they usually come after the crime was committed. But this can be too late for a child that will suffer from the consequences all their life.



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