CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

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Globally, it is estimated that one in three children is an internet user, one-third of internet users are children under 18 years of age,[1] with a child going online for the first time every half second.[2] More than 200,000 children use the internet daily.[3]

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) adopted in 1989, coincides with the launching of the source code for the world's first web browser in 1990.[4] Since then, significant progress has been made regarding the design and implementation of legislation and policies resulting in distinct improvements in the lives of children in the physical environment.

The majority of protections afforded to children have primarily focused on their rights in physical environments and have not progressed with the rapid expansion of the internet and technologies in the digital environment. The design codes written to monetize these commercial interests, predominantly, do not align with children's online safety and wellbeing. To address these gaps in

protection, children should be consulted in the design of tools and platforms, including terms of privacy and use of their personal data, to ensure that their best interests and needs are met as they grow.[5]

Numerous existing online global legislation frameworks and policies are insufficient and require updating or aligning with recent laws in Australia, the United Kingdom, and in the European Union,[6] this gap has left children vulnerable to emerging threats to their online and offline safety and wellbeing.

Digital Divide

In 2020, one-third of children had access to the Internet at home, while two-thirds of children – or 1.3 billion children worldwide – lacked home-based Internet access.[7] An estimated 86 percent of children in high-income countries had home internet access gin 2020, compared to six percent

[1] UNICEF Office of Research, Innocenti (2019). "Growing up in a Connected World." Available at: https://www.unicef-irc.org/growing-up-connected#sectionDownload.

[2] UNICEF (2022). "Protecting Children Online." Available at: www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children-online.

[3] End Violence Against Children, Safe Online (n.d.). Available at: www.end-violence.org/safe-online.

[4] World Wide Web Foundation (n.d.). "History of the Web." Available at: https://webfoundation.org/about/vision/history-of-the-web.

[5] EUROPOL (n.d.) "Child exploitation." Available at: www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-statistics/crime-areas/child-sexual-exploitation.

[6] See Annex 1 for a list of recent legislative protections for children in the digital environment.

[7] UNICEF and ITU (2020). "How many children and young people have Internet access at home? Estimating digital connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic." Available at: https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-and-young-people-Internet-access-at-home-during-covid19/.

of children in low-income countries, and 14 percent in lower-middle income countries.[8] These disparities in accessing the digital environment reflect broader socio-economic divides including by urban-rural location, household wealth, disability status, gender and language, among others.[9]

The most popular device for accessing the internet among children globally is the mobile phone.[10]
The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were far reaching with global school closures and the introduction of online education technology occurring at unparalleled rates. A lack of knowledge around online learning has meant limited guidance and support to ensure the safety of children while engaging in remote learning, social interaction, and entertainment.[11] The pandemic revealed the existing digital divides in access to technologies among children from different countries, contexts, and backgrounds.[12]

However, with equitable access, the digital environment can enable and enhance children's access to high-quality inclusive education, including resources for formal, non-formal, informal, peer-to-peer and self-directed learning.[13] Online education can assist in reducing gender inequalities both on and offline, specifically for girls facing oppression and discrimination. Distance learning platforms should also be used to deliver education to children in vulnerable situations, especially children living in remote areas, and conflict-affected, fragile or humanitarian contexts.[14]

Affordable and reliable access to the internet and technology, coupled with building online skills for children receiving a lower quality experience

will assist in bridging the digital divide. It will create equitable opportunities that benefit the educational, social, and emotional development of children.[15]

Children's Digital Rights

In 2021, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. Comment No. 25 provides a mandate and clearly stipulates the rights of every child to privacy, non-discrimination, protection, education, play and more. It also provides the framework for how to align legislation and policy.[16]

For safe online engagement, digital literacy is critical for children, parents, caregivers, and teachers. This involves the awareness and ability to appropriately use online platforms and tools for different purposes. The ability to communicate with others, while also identifying, accessing, and understanding online resources leads to concrete outcomes such as children's digital citizenship, problem-solving, and assurance of their safety and wellbeing.[17]

Children's right to freedom of expression extends to both online and offline realms. It is critical to listen to both girls and boys, as their views of online experiences and perspectives of solutions often differ. Digital citizenship enables safe online participation in education and learning, social, cultural, and civic engagement. Children are empowered by expressing their ideas, opinions, and views publicly about the issues that matter to them – through blogs, videos, social media, magazines, cartoons,

[8] OECD, Digital Economy Papers, (2021). "Children in the Digital Environment – Revised Typology of Risks." Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9b8f222e-en.pdf?expires=1679867152&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=83A994AED43E5E372DA9C833C6D-FB539.
[9] UNICEF (2017). "State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World." Available at: https://www.unicef.org/media/48601/file/SOWC_2017_Summary_ENG.pdf.
[10] UNICEF and ITU (2020).
[11] International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020). "Guidelines for parents and educators on Child Online Protection." Available at: https://www.itu-cop-guidelines.com/_files/ugd/24bbaa_f8a17ad2a3b94490add9a586ce4b6db8.pdf.
[12] OECD (2021).
[13] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), para. 99.
[14] For an example of the provision of online education, see: World Vision International (2021). "Remote learning paves the way for future dreams." Available at: https://www.wvi.org/stories/lebanon/remote-learning-paves-way-future-dreams.
[15] UNICEF (2017). State of the World's Children 2017.
[16] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021)." General comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. UN." Available at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3906061?ln=en.
[17] UNICEF, Office of Global Insight and Policy (2019). "Digital literacy for children: exploring definitions and frameworks." Available at: https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/1271/file/%20UNICEF-Global-Insight-digital-literacy-scoping-paper-2020.pdf.

hashtags, podcasts, and other modes of expression.[18] These interactions strengthen their sense of identity and foster strong family, peer, and community relationships.

Technology can also support children's right to freedom of association, providing them with valuable opportunities to meet, exchange and deliberate with peers, decision-makers, and others who share their interests.[19] Online opportunities and connections can also contribute to children's offline participation in civic matters, such as the 'Fridays for Future' global climate strike movement.[20]

However, many children are unable to enjoy these rights as they lack the technology, access to the internet, and required skills to engage in online communities. Another obstacle to their participation is the knowledge gap of parents, caregivers, and educators as it relates to digital literacy. A more holistic learning environment whereby children learn about digital citizenship as part of their home learning and in school curriculums will assist in preventing harmful situations and ensure that they are responsible digital citizens.[21] Support and training should be made available for teachers, so that they have the knowledge and expertise to equip children with online skills and literacy. Curriculums, approaches, and training should reduce rather than widen or deepen inequalities among children.

Children's Safety and Wellbeing

While access to digital technology provides opportunities to advance children's rights, it also presents risks to children's wellbeing, safety, and privacy. It has broadened ways to perpetrate violence against children, by facilitating situations in which children experience violence or are influenced to do harm to themselves or others.[22]

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The use of digital technologies has increased the level of risk to children through exposure to harmful content including sexual, pornographic, racist, and bullying, as well as discriminatory or hate speech. Furthermore, children can cause self-harm, often as a result of coercion by another person on social media, messaging platforms, and games. For example, they might carry out an act, or share self-generated, explicit images of themselves privately with another person or by posting the images on social media. This can also be a means of extorting sexual acts, money, or other benefits from the child.[23] Children are vulnerable to mis/disinformation, commercially profiled for misleading online marketing messages, and other financial and security risks such as identify theft and fraud.[24]

Over the past two decades there has been an alarming rise in online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA), including sexual content, sexual harassment, and inappropriate contact from adults for the purpose of grooming and sextortion.[25] There were 29 million reports of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) made in 2021, comprised of 85 million photos, videos and files, which is a 35 percent increase in comparison with

[18] UNICEF (2017). State of the World's Children 2017.
[19] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), para. 64.
[20] Fridays for Future. Available at: https://fridaysforfuture.org.
[21] University of Western Sydney, Livingstone, S., & Third, A. (2017). "Children and young people's rights in the digital age: an emerging agenda." Available at: https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:38531.
[22] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), para. 80.
[23] ChildFund Alliance (2022). "Web Safe & Wise: Creating a better digital world with children." Available at: https://pre2023.childfundalliance.org/resources/publications/4807-web-safe-wise-policy-brief.
[24] Better Internet for Kids (2023), p. 4; OECD (2021). Children in the Digital Environment – Revised Typology of Risks, p. 4-11; UNICEF (2017). State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World. Executive Summary, p. 21-22.
[25] International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020). p. 29-30.

2020.[26] There has been an exponential growth in online child sexual exploitation and abuse, with girls and young children (3-13 years old) more likely to be victims.[27] Online exposure may also lead to offline exploitation or abuse such as child sex trafficking.

Adults have an important role to play in protecting and upholding children's rights - schools and teachers, parents and caregivers, governments, NGOs, and companies and online service providers.

All relevant government departments such as the judiciary, the police, the prosecution services, and authorities at the local, regional, and national levels are obligated to safeguard the rights of children across the territories that they govern.[28]

Governance systems should coordinate existing domestic regulatory and legislative frameworks to harmonise legislation with international human rights standards, strengthen the understanding and capacity of law enforcement, and draft legislation to ensure that companies and organisations are complying. To achieve quality and equitable delivery of child protection services, approaches should be employed in systems strengthening that respond to the local context and are culturally appropriate, and sustainable. This will ensure that children and communities are at the centre of protective systems based on partnerships between governments, communities, and international actors.[29]

In order to implement policy and provide mechanisms that address online and offline violations of children, budgetary resources must be allocated to safeguard the rights of children, including specific provisions for children within the criminal justice system.

Children's Rights to Redress

When children's rights in the digital environment are violated, they must have a means of redress. Legal and judicial systems are complex for children and their parents or caregivers to navigate. Often both children and adults are unaware of the child's rights, or the existence of available support services. Discriminatory treatment and obstruction to participation in proceedings based on a child's age and gender are additional impediments. Furthermore, state actors and personnel working with children often lack the necessary specialized training to facilitate engagement with children in the process. Children also face the barriers of further stigmatization, fear of harassment, and reprisals.[30]

The need remains to establish international standards that will create transparency related to all aspects of online platforms, services and tools for children, as well strengthen the capacity of governments to ensure access to remedies and justice for children.

World Vision's Response

World Vision International has been working around the world for more than a decade to support children's access to and safe use of digital technologies. For example, providing access to internet and technology to children in rural areas, and supporting caregivers with capacity building to help children navigate online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, we worked to equip caregivers, teachers and authorities with tools and best practices to ensure the safeguarding of children from online bullying, exposure to harmful content, and risks of sexual exploitation. We also support children to take the lead in peer-to-peer learning programmes, which allows for their empowerment to learn about safely participating online.

As technology and devices continue to evolve, World Vision's programmes, research, advocacy, and protection of children will also progress with monitoring, evaluation and reporting to

[26] End Violence (2022). "Safer Internet Day: making progress for a safe internet for all children." Available at: https://www.end-violence.org/articles/safer-internet-day.

[27] End Violence (n.d.). "Safe online: Issue and Response." Available at: https://www.end-violence.org/node/7939.

[28] World Vision (2017). Child Protection Policy Brief. Available at: https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/WVI-C_Child%20Protection%20Policy%20Brief_2017-Final-EN.pdf

[29] World Vision International (2020). COVID 19 & Disruptions to Education Policy Brief. Available at: https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/World%20Vision%20COVID-19%20Education%20Policy%20Brief_2020-05-22.pdf.

[30] Human Rights Council, Twenty-fifth session (2013). "Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. Access to justice for children." A/HRC/25/35. Available at: (https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/25/35).

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ensure that the safety, wellbeing, and rights of all children are fulfilled.

In **Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia (including Abkhazia), Jerusalem-West Bank-Gaza** and **Lebanon**, World Vision's Regional Office for the Middle East and Eastern Europe developed and implemented the Keeping Children Safe Online (KCSO) approach to protect children from online bullying, exposure to pornographic and harmful content, and risks of sexual exploitation. KCSO sought to enhance the knowledge, awareness, and skills of children, caregivers, teachers and authorities to build a culture of safe and responsible use of the Internet and mobile devices.

This approach centered on policy changes and behaviour, and prioritized building relevant national laws, policies and procedures so that child protection systems were strong enough to respond to online cyber crimes against children. After two years, KSCO results showed children and youth's capacity to implement safety

measures increased by an average of two thirds. In Armenia, 80 percent of children and 50 percent of parents immediately applied principles and practices they had learned. More than 85 percent of participating teachers in Armenia and over 90 percent in Lebanon reported feeling more confident in teaching, monitoring, and talking to their colleagues about online safety.[31]

In **Lebanon**, World Vision provided online education, which improved skills and presented new learning opportunities for vulnerable children during the COVID-19 pandemic. This programme in partnership with UNICEF, received funding from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), and the governments of France and Canada. World Vision teams created WhatsApp groups with the caregivers of children registered under a UNICEF programme in the city of Tyre. This allowed for implementation of remote basic literacy and numeracy learning modalities during the COVID-19 lockdown.[32]

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[31] World Vision International (2015). "Keeping Children Safe Online." Available at: https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/KCSO%20case%20study%20FINAL.pdf
[32] World Vision International (2021). "Remote learning paves the way for future dreams." Available at: https://www.wvi.org/stories/lebanon/remote-learning-paves-way-future-dreams.

In **Mongolia**, rural schools often faced shortages of necessary equipment and were unable to provide Information Technology (IT) lessons. World Vision Mongolia teamed up with IT Zone, one of Mongolia's leading technology companies, to build a modern computer laboratory at Nomgon Complex secondary school in Bayankhongor province. In this new computer lab nicknamed the 'Wisdom Key,' 300 pupils now enjoy weekly access to high-speed, internet-connected computers. As a result, students once falling behind due to the digital divide now have access to the internet and are learning new IT skills.[33]

In the **Philippines**, student leaders attended a World Vision Anti-Online Sexual Exploitation of Children workshop, where they learned about forms of online abuse and sexual exploitation, and how they could raise awareness at school. The workshop was part of the Child Protection Compact project funded by the United States. Members of one school's Supreme Pupil Government (SPG) visited classrooms and shared information about engaging online safely and responsibly, including where to safely report that a child is being exploited or abused.[34]

World Vision's Recommendations

Governments should:

 1. Promote equitable access to, and affordability of, digital services, devices and connectivity for all children. Working with digital service providers, governmentsshould take all measures necessary to overcome digital exclusion, especially for vulnerable and marginalized children such as children in rural areas, children living in poverty, girls, children with disabilities and children on the move.[35] All children should have affordable access to age-appropriate, inclusive, and high-quality online resources and services in dedicated public locations, educational settings and/or at home.

 2. Review, adopt, update and implement legislation to realize children's rights in the digital environment. Government sshould align national legislation with international human rights standards in order to embed children's rights into all legislation relevant to digital technologies.[36] Legislation should address, inter alia, children's privacy and data security, the protection of children from harmful goods and services, the profiling or targeting of children for commercial purposes, and all forms of violence and crimes against children that occur in the digital environment.[37]

 3. Develop and implement comprehensive policies and action plans for children's rights in the digital environment. Governments should ensure that all national policies that address children's rights specifically address the digital environment and invest in the safeguarding of children by integrating online protections within national child protection policies. Governments should mandate a specific government body to coordinate all policies, guidelines and programmes related to children's use of digital technologies within the government, and to engage with external stakeholders.[38]

 4. Implement General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. Governments should implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child which ensures full compliance with their obligations under the Convention and the Optional Protocols. These recommendations are also applicable to businesses whose operations impact children's rights and protections in the digital environment.[39]

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[33] World Vision International (2015). "Computer learning: The key to wisdom." Available at: https://www.wvi.org/mongolia/article/computer-learning-key-wisdom.

[34] World Vision International (2020). "The Philippines student leaders fighting online sexual exploitation." Available at: https://www.wvi.org/stories/child-participation/philippines-student-leaders-fighting-online-sexual-exploitation.

[35] UNICEF (2017). State of the World's Children 2017: p. 31.

[36] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), para. 23.

[37] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), paras. 70 and 114-116; United Nations (2023). "Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children," para. 68.

[38] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), paras. 24, 25 and 27.

[39] Ibid., pars 35-42, 55 and 56.

5. Regulate the business sector to provide inclusive, age-appropriate, privacy-by-design and child safety-by-design digital products and services to children. Governments should take all measures necessary to ensure that businesses respect children's rights, and prevent and remedy abuse, in particular, by adopting and enforcing modern child privacy and protection laws in relation to the digital environment.[40] Governments should require businesses to undertake child rights due diligence and to implement regulatory frameworks, industry codes and terms of services which adhere to the highest standards of ethics, privacy and safety in relation to the design, engineering, development, operation, distribution and marketing of their products and services.[41]

6. Ensure meaningful child participation in developing and implementing legislation, policies, programmes, services and training in relation to the digital environment.[42] Governments should listen to both girls and boys and give due weight to their views, including vulnerable and marginalized groups, to understand their distinctive needs and diverse experiences in relation to digital technologies. Children's views should be at the centre of all digital policy discussions, including at the global level.

7. Foster digital literacy, citizenship and skills among children, parents, caregivers and educators.[43] Governments should seek to empower children to become confident and competent users of digital technologies, including understanding how the digital environment operates, how to analyze the credibility of online content and contacts, how to recognise, minimize and manage online risks, and how to be responsible users of technology. Parents, caregivers, and teachers should also be equipped with digital skills and literacy so that they can provide appropriate support to children.

8. Provide guidance, training and support to parents and caregivers in their role to help children learn to navigate the digital environment safely. There are numerous existing guidelines, tools and tips for parents, caregivers, and others to empower and support children's safe and effective use of digital technologies.[44] Governments should seek to disseminate these resources widely and provide training and support, including through digital service providers, schools, parents, community associations, and at the point of sale of digital devices intended for use by children.

9. Ensure education policies, programmes and school curriculums address digital technologies for children. Governments should integrate digital skills education, including digital literacy and citizenship, into the school curriculum,[45] while ensuring equitable and accessible education for all children. They should provide support and training to teachers so they have the knowledge, skills, and practice to equip children with digital skills and literacy. Education policies should address the safe, ethical, and effective use of digital technologies among students and staff at school, students engaged in distance learning, and students in non-formal education.

10. Prioritise and invest in protecting children from online harm, including the prevention of all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation in the digital environment.[46] In addition to legislative and policy measures, Governments should increase public investment in cross-sectoral child- and gender-sensitive protection and violence prevention in the digital environment.[47] In particular, Governments should increase funding for evidence-based solutions that keep children safe online, especially those that focus on preventing online child sexual

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[40] Ibid., para. 35.
[41] Ibid., paras. 38-39.
[42] Ibid., para. 17.
[43] International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020). "Guidelines for parents and educators on Child Online Protection," p. 55.
[44] International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020); World Vision International (2014). "Keeping Children & Youth Safe Online: Tips for Parents." Available at: https://www.wvi.org/cambodia/publication/keeping-children-and-youth-safe-online-english.
[45] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), para. 104.
[46] United Nations (2020). "Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Report of the Secretary-General," para. 92; United Nations (2021). "Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Report of the Secretary-General," para 58; Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), para. 82.
[47] United Nations (2023). "Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children," para. 23.

exploitation and abuse (OCSEA), including offender prevention.

11. Develop, strengthen, and enforce comprehensive laws that criminalize OCSEA. This includes, but not limited to sextortion, online grooming, and livestreaming of child sexual abuse. Online crimes against children should be investigated and prosecuted.[48]

12. Provide access to justice and support for survivors of children's rights violations in the digital environment. Governments should ensure there are strong and effective monitoring, complaint, investigation, enforcement, and redress mechanisms for violations of children's rights in the digital environment. This includes strengthening and resourcing child protection systems to provide services to all child survivors of online exploitation and abuse.[49] Information should be made available to parents and other persons acting as legal representatives of children.[50] Complaint and reporting mechanisms should be widely known, free of charge, safe, confidential, responsive, child-friendly and available in accessible formats.[51]

13. Promote and invest in research and data collection to improve knowledge and understanding of children's access to and nature of experiences in the digital environment. Governments should invest in generating disaggregated data from government regulators and departments,[52] collecting evidence and high-quality research – in partnership with children – to inform actions to realize children's rights in the digital environment. Priority areas for research and data include the experiences of vulnerable and marginalized groups; different forms violence against children online;[53] the impact of digital technologies on children's health and wellbeing;[54] and the impact of connectivity on children's cognition, learning and social emotional development.[55]

14. Strengthen global cooperation, coordination and knowledge sharing to address the challenges facing children in relation to the digital environment. International collaboration is essential given that the challenges children face cross national borders and jurisdictions.[56] Through facilitation of knowledge sharing and alignment between governments, for example, internet governance development of child-centred regulations, such as the EU's GDPR[57] and DSA,[58] or the UK's Age-Appropriate Design Code.[59] In particular, Governments should engage in multi-stakeholder partnerships including the WeProtect Global Alliance,[60] and the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-based Online Harassment and Abuse.[61]

Technology Industry Leaders should:

1. Prioritize the wellbeing of children when designing products with consideration of the age of users in all development, coding,

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[48] ChildFund Alliance (2022). "Web Safe & Wise: Creating a better digital world with children." Available at: https://pre2023.childfundalliance.org/resources/publications/4807-web-safe-wise-policy-brief.

[49] United Nations (2023). para. 81.

[50] Council of Europe. Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Child-Friendly Justice, article II.a. Available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016 804b2cf3; Human Rights Council, Twenty-fifth session (2013). A/HRC/25/35.

[51] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), para. 44.

[52] 5Rights (2017). "Digital Childhood: Addressing Childhood Development Milestones in the Digital Environment." Available at: https://5rightsfoundation.com/static/Digital_Childhood_report_-_EMBARGOED.pdf.

[53] United Nations (2023). paras 52 and 61.

[54] OECD (2021). "Children in the Digital Environment – Revised Typology of Risks," p. 4-5 and 18-19.

[55] UNICEF (2017). State of the World's Children 2017.

[56] OECD (2022). "Companion Document to the OECD Recommendation on Children in the Digital Environment," p. 5.

[57] European Commission (2018). "The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Regulation (EU) 2016/679. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-topic/data-protection/data-protection-eu_en.

[58] European Parliament (2022). "The Digital Services Act, REGULATION (EU) 2022/2065 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL. Available at: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package.

[59] Government of the United Kingdom (2019). the UKs Children's code, known as the Age-appropriate design code. Available at: https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/childrens-information/childrens-code-guidance-and-resources/.

[60] The WeProtect Global Alliance (n.d.). "Model National Response." Available at: https://www.weprotect.org.

[61] The Global Partnership for Action on Gender-based Online Harassment and Abuse works to advance policy, increase programming and expand the evidence base to improve prevention of and response to technology-facilitated gender-based violence across the life course (n.d.). Available at: https://techfordemocracy.dk/action-coalitions/action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/.

design, and communications. This should include easy options for the protection of their information, including restriction of the sharing their geolocation and providing notice regarding the tracking of a minor. Mandatory switch off or opt out of features that 'prime,' deliberately extend use, or make algorithmic recommendations.[62]

2. Invest in the creation and usage of a children's security pack for installation on home desktop and laptop computers. The private sector, including Internet service providers, should create new applications and devices to ensure children's online safety. Features should provide content filtering, time limits, internet usage monitoring, frequent safety updates, and direct links to websites that are age-appropriate for children.

3. Provide annual, transparent, public reporting on children's safety in the digital environment. Governments should require social media platforms to make public a report identifying the foreseeable risks of harm to Children (minors) based on an independent, third-party audit conducted through reasonable inspection of the platform and present the findings, and prevention and mitigation measures taken to address such risks.[63] Businesses to provide children, parents, and caregivers with prompt and effective remedies to violations of children's rights.

Annex 1

Legislative protections for children in the digital environment

In 2007, the European Council developed the European Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, known as the Lanzarote Convention. Entered into force in July 2010.[64]

In April 2019, the United Kingdom's Children's code, known as the Age-appropriate design code, was adopted, and is the first statutory code of practice for children's data in the world. It contains 15 standards that online services including websites, apps and games must follow to comply with privacy protections for children, including the establishment of a default setting for the highest level of privacy protection for children. Entered in forces September 2021.[65]

In 2020, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) updated its Guidelines on Child Online Protection.[66]

In 2021, the Committee on the Rights of the Child published General comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment.[67]

In 2021, Australia introduced the Online Safety Act 2021, broadening the scope of the Broadcasting Services Amendment Act 1999, which allows for the issuing of removal notices, link deletion notices and app removal notices in relation to child sexual exploitation and abuse material. It also requires online businesses to develop new e-safety codes.[68]

In July 2022, The European Union adopted the Digital Services Act (DSA), requiring companies to institute new policies and procedures to remove flagged child sexual abuse material (CSAM), hate speech, terrorist propaganda and other material defined as illegal by countries within the European Union. Enters into force in January 2024.[69]

In July 2022, the European Union adopted the Digital Markets Act (DMA), was designed to protect user privacy, and provide control over data usage, as well as to counter anti-competitive behaviour. Entered into force in May 2023.[70]

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[62] 5Rights Foundation (2017); USA 117th Congress (2021-2022). S.3663 - Kids Online Safety Act. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/3663/text.

[63] Ibid (2021-2022).

[64] Council of Europe (2007). "Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)." Available at: https://rm.coe.int/protection-of-children-against-sexual-exploitation-and-sexualabuse/1680794e97.

[65] Government of the United Kingdom (2019).

[66] International Telecommunication Union (2020).

[67] Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021).

[68] Government of Australia (2021). "Online Safety Act 2021" Available at: www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2021A00076.

[69] European Parliament (2022). "The Digital Services Act, REGULATION (EU) 2022/2065 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL. Available at: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package.

[70] European Parliament (2022). Digital Markets Act, REGULATION (EU) 2022/1925 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL. Available at: https://digital-markets-act.ec.europa.eu/index_en.

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Definition of Key Terms

Child-friendly Justice
Creation of a justice system which guarantees the respect and the effective implementation of all children's rights, giving due consideration to the child's level of maturity and understanding and to the circumstances of the case. It is accessible, age appropriate, speedy, diligent, adapted to and focused on the needs and rights of the child, respecting the rights of the child including the rights to due process, to participate in and to understand the proceedings.[71]

Child Protection Systems
Formal and informal structures, functions, and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children. Most important are the relationships and interactions between and among components and actors within the system. A child protection system is generally agreed to comprise the following components: human resources, finance, laws and policies, governance, monitoring, and data collection, as well as protection and response services and care management. It also includes different actors – children, families, communities, those working at subnational or national level and those working internationally.[72]

CSAM
The term "child sexual abuse material" (CSAM) refers to material that represents acts that are sexually abusive and/or exploitative to a child. This includes, but is not limited to, material recording the sexual abuse of children by adults; images of children included in sexually explicit conduct; and the sexual organs of children when the images are produced or used for primarily sexual purposes.[73]

[71] Council of Europe (2013).
[72] A Better Way to Protect all Children, UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children, World Vision: https://fecongd.org/pdf/crianca/BetterWayProtectChildrenUNICEF2012.pdf
[73] International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020).

Digital Citizen

A person using information technology in order to engage in society, politics, and government. Effective digital citizenship is being responsible, safe, and effective on the internet and digital devices.[74]

Digital Divide

Significant disparities for children from rural areas, poorer households, children with disabilities, girls, and children belonging to linguistic minorities, among others, and their access to the digital environment between and within countries. This includes children's access to the internet, connection via mobile phones rather than computers, limited or slow access, and those who lack digital skills.[75]

Digital Literacy

The ability and the skills one needs to live, learn, and work in a society where communication and access to information is increasingly through digital technologies like Internet platforms, social media, and mobile devices. It includes clear communication, technical skills, and critical thinking.[76]

Grooming

Grooming (or the solicitation of children for sexual parties) as the intentional proposal, through information and communication technologies, of an adult to meet a child who has not reached the legal age for sexual activity, for the purpose of committing acts of sexual abuse or producing child sexual abuse material. The solicitation does not necessarily result in a meeting in person. It may remain online and nonetheless cause serious harm to the child, for example through production, possession, and transmission of child sexual abuse material.[77]

OCSEA

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) refers to situations involving digital, internet and communication technologies at some point during the continuum of abuse or exploitation. OCSEA can occur fully online or through a mix of online and in-person interactions between offenders and children.[78]

Online Bullying

It is repeated behaviour that takes place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. Online bullying can include sending hurtful, abusive, or threatening messages about a child. Also, the spreading of lies, posting of embarrassing photos or videos with the intent to scare, anger or shame those who are targeted.[79]

Personal Data

Information relating to an individual child that allows them to be directly identified from that information or indirectly identified in combination with other information.[80]

Sexting

Sexting is commonly defined as the sending, receiving, or exchanging of self-produced sexualised content including images, messages, or videos through mobile phones and/or the Internet. A concern with sexting is that children and young people may be creating illegal child sexual abuse material, which could lead to serious legal sanctions.[81]

Sextortion

Sextortion describes "blackmailing of a person with the help of self-generated images of that person in order to extort sexual favours, money, or other benefits from her/him under the threat of sharing the material beyond the consent of the depicted person (e.g. posting images on social media)."[82]

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[74] University of Western Sydney, Livingstone, S., & Third, A. (2017).
[75] UNICEF (2017). State of the World's Children 2017.
[76] International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020).
[77] Ibid (2020).
[78] Interpol (2021). "The Disrupting Harm in Kenya report." Available at: https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2021/Ground-breaking-insights-into-the-risk-of-online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-in-Kenya.
[79] UNICEF (n.d.). Cyberbullying: "What is it and how to stop it. What teens want to know about cyberbullying." Available at: https://www.unicef.org/end-violence/how-to-stop-cyberbullying.
[80] Digital Futures Commission and 5Rights Foundation (2021). Available at: https://digitalfuturescommission.org.uk/ publications/.
[81] International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020). p. 31 and 57.
[82] International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020).

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

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