

The [General Comment No. 25 \(2021\) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment](#) is the result of a two-year consultation with States parties, inter-governmental organisations, civil society, national human rights institutions, and children themselves. Over 700 children and young people, aged between nine and 22-years-old in 27 countries, were asked how digital technology impacts their rights, and what actions they wished to see taken to protect them. UNICEF's own inputs to this consultation emphasized that all the rights of all children must be respected, protected and fulfilled in the digital environment.

In highlight, some key elements of the GC are shared here below.

In its GC, the Committee emphasizes that **meaningful access to digital technologies** can support children to realise the **full range of their civil, political, cultural, economic, and social rights**. For example, digital technologies can facilitate access to health services and information and improve diagnostic and treatment services for maternal and child physical and mental health, and nutrition. Similarly the digital environment can greatly enable and enhance children's access to high-quality inclusive education, including reliable resources for formal, non-formal, informal, peer-to-peer and self-directed learning, and enable distance or remote learning. This is especially true when reaching children in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations, in remote communities, and in situations of public emergency or humanitarian crises.

The GC also establishes that children should have **equal and effective access to age-appropriate and empowering digital content and information** from a wide diversity of trusted sources. During consultations for the development of the guidance, children themselves reported that the digital environment afforded them crucial opportunities for their voices to be heard in matters that affected them, and the GC calls on States Parties to ensure that the use of digital technologies can help to realise children's participation at the local, national and international levels, as well as provide support to child-led activism and child human rights defenders.

While offering up opportunities for growth, development, and empowerment, the digital environment **also presents challenges and risk for children**. For example, it may also open up new ways to perpetrate violence against children, by facilitating situations in which children experience violence, and/or may be influenced to do harm to others. Sexual offenders may use digital technologies to solicit information for sexual purposes and to abuse children, for example, by the live-streaming, production and distribution of child sexual abuse material and through sexual extortion. The guidance recommends that States take robust legislative and administrative measures to protect children from harmful, hateful and misleading content, and that children should be protected from all forms of violence that happens in the digital environment, including child trafficking, gender-based violence, cyber-aggression, cyber-attacks, economic, sexual and other forms of exploitation, and information warfare.

Of critical importance, the GC recognises that digital innovations such as those related to artificial intelligence, and algorithms and data analytics, affect children's lives and their rights even when children are not online themselves. The importance of **protecting children's privacy** at all times is highlighted and the GC calls on States parties to take legislative, administrative and other measures to ensure that children's privacy is respected and protected by all organisations, and in all environments that process their data.

Through the issuance of the GC the Committee also establishes that States should ensure that **businesses respect children's rights** and prevent and remedy abuses of their rights in relation to the digital environment. This includes requiring the business sector to undertake child rights due diligence, and requiring a high standard of cybersecurity, privacy-by-design and safety-by design in digital services and products. As Luis Perdenera, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child states, "Businesses should not profile or target children for commercial purposes on the basis of the children's digital records." The GC also specifically recommends that State Parties should encourage the use of digital technologies to promote healthy lifestyles, including physical and social activity and that they should regulate targeted or age-inappropriate advertising, marketing and other relevant digital services to prevent children's exposure to the promotion of unhealthy products, including certain food and beverages, alcohol, drugs and tobacco and other nicotine products.

The guidance makes a number of **additional recommendations** to States on a wide range of child rights issues including: the development of national policies on children's rights that specifically address the digital environment; specific attention to the effects of technology on children in the earliest stages of life; the support needed by parents and care-givers and teachers to develop 'digital literacy' - the technological understanding, capacity and skills necessary to assist and protect children in the digital environment; and the need to ensure that appropriate and effective remedial judicial and non-judicial mechanisms for child rights violations relating to the digital environment are widely known and readily available to all children and their representatives, including across national borders. The cross-border and transnational nature of the digital environment necessitates strong international and regional cooperation.

The Committee's analysis also stresses and cautions that if **digital inclusion** is not achieved, existing inequalities are likely to increase, and new ones to arise. The guidance makes for example specific recommendations to address the 'digital divide' including in relation to gender equality and disability inclusion, and for those children in the most disadvantaged contexts.