
March 2021



In our own words – children’s rights in the digital world

Did you know?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most ratified agreement in history: 196 countries

Over 30 years ago (1989) the United Nations wrote the Convention on the Rights of the Child to set out the freedoms and protections that countries must give children and young people under 18 years old. That was the same year as the world wide web was invented. This means that the people who wrote the Convention had no idea of the change that digital technology would bring to young people's lives.

Now the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, who look after the Convention, have written down how children should be treated in the digital world. This shorter version was written by young people between the ages of 11-17 to make it easier for other young people to understand.

Children around the world want and need to use the internet and digital services for school, entertainment, to get information and to be in contact with families and friends. They want it to be fair and keep them safe.

Not all children are the same. At different ages children need different supports and freedoms. As they get older they have more understanding and experience so should be able to do and see a broader range of things – experts call this evolving capacities. The digital world must take this into account.

The digital world must take children’s ages into account when providing for their needs.

There are four principles of children’s rights:

1. Non-discrimination

Children must be protected from discrimination, and treated fairly whoever they are.

2. Survival and development

Children must be supported to grow up into what they want to be without harmful interference.

3. Best interests of the child

When making any decision, adults – including governments and businesses – must do what is best for children rather than themselves.

4. Respect for children’s views

Children have opinions that must be taken into account in all the things they care about.

How this should be done:

Protect children's rights online.

Make rules that **support** children's rights online.

Ensure that **everyone** understands the rules, including government officials, businesses, parents, teachers and children themselves.

Listen to children when they have a problem.

Stop businesses putting profit above children's rights.

Make sure that there are **consequences** for organisations or people who break the rules.

Make sure children know and understand what **action** has been taken.

Children have the right to information, freedom and privacy

Accessing information

Information that children find online should be true, relevant and easily available, unless it is likely to cause harm.

Freedom of expression

Children should be able to say what they think, but children, companies and other people should not spread lies or attack others.

Freedom of thought

Companies and other people must not push children to do things for money or at the request of others.

Freedom of association

Children want to meet and spend time with their friends and enjoy being part of their community in every environment. Governments or businesses should not interfere with that, except for reasons of safety.

Privacy

Children must have privacy to act and grow in the way that they wish; this includes privacy from parents, school, governments, businesses and each other.

Birth registration

Children may need to prove who they are online in order to be part of their community. Online identities should not be used in ways that are unfair or attack a child's privacy or other rights.

**Children have the right to
information, freedom and privacy**

Violence against children

Children have the right to protection from violence, including political violence, encouragement to self-harm, eating disorders and suicide, bullying and images of sexual violence or sexual contact with adults. Children need to have helplines and places to get help when they need it.

Family life

Governments should not assume that all children have families or support. They should make sure that the digital world looks after children's needs from the start and that families and caregivers are supported to support children.

Children with disabilities

Governments and businesses should make sure that children with disabilities are able to join the digital world. Subtitles and voice support, and any other help they might need, should be the normal settings, rather than children with disabilities having to find them and turn them on.

Children have the right to information, freedom and privacy

Health and wellbeing

Health information must be accurate and health services must be private and confidential. No digital service should be allowed that interferes with a child's wellbeing. Governments should make sure that children are not exposed to health misinformation.

Education, play and rest

Digital Tools can make education more fun and effective, but they must respect children's privacy and support education properly. Children want to understand how the digital world works and who is benefitting from it.

Children want to play in the digital world and see people face to face.

Businesses and governments

Businesses online must be fair, clear and be held to the same standards as offline businesses. Children should not have their personal information, including their photos, private conversations, or videos and comments, used by others to make money.

Children of different ages in different situations from all over the world deserve the same protections. Digital services should be accessible to all children and available in all the languages that children speak. Governments should make sure that all children and adults know about children's rights in the digital world.

Technology is very important, and it will continue to be in the future... The world is moving forward, and we must do the same. **Girl, 12, Croatia**

If we apply these rules and respect it I think we are going to protect the majority of the children in the digital world. **Girl, 15, Morocco**

Digital technology plays a role because with [its] help... we can connect ourselves to the world and we can make an identity in the world. **Boy, 13 Pakistan**

Over the last year 5Rights Foundation has supported the Committee on the Rights of the Child to set out how children's rights should be seen online.

This has involved taking advice from hundreds of experts, from many countries, and has taken many months. It also involved asking the opinion of hundreds of children and young people from 27 countries.

At the same time as setting out children's rights for governments in the *general comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment*, we thought it important for children to have a version in language that they like and understand. All of their thoughts and suggestions are in this document but they particularly wanted to make the following points.

- **Children** need and want access to the digital world.
- **Governments** should be responsible for protecting children's rights online.
- **Parents** should be supported in understanding the digital world.
- They also said that it was fantastic that there was a version of something that was about them written **by and for young people** and suggested that this should be done more often.

5Rights is very grateful to the children and young people who helped write this document – we are very proud of it and hope you are too.

We usually know *most of* our rights in real life but we don't talk much about our rights in the digital world.

Girl, 17, Morocco

Nowadays we have to live in a virtual reality and we should know how to deal with it.

Girl, 16, Georgia

By the means of digital technology we can get the information from all around the world by sitting in the one corner of the room.

Boy, 13, Nepal

About 5Rights Foundation

5Rights' mission is to build the digital world young people deserve. We develop new policy, create innovative projects and challenge received narratives to ensure governments, the tech sector and society understand, recognise and prioritise children's needs and rights. Our work is pragmatic and implementable, allowing us to work with governments, intergovernmental institutions, professional associations, academics, and young people across the globe.

The 5Rights General Comment Steering Group

supported the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in the development of the *general comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment*. The Steering Group members are: Professor Sonia Livingstone OBE, Baroness Beeban Kidron OBE, Professor Amanda Third, Gerison Lansdown and Jutta Croll.

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Building the digital world that young people deserve