

Joint NGO Statement Global Digital Compact Stakeholders Informal Consultation



1st March 2024

Dear Co-facilitators, Excellencies, Distinguished colleagues,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of 10 organizations dedicated to children's rights in the digital environment.

We are uniting to reiterate our [previous call](#) for a Global Digital Compact (GDC) that prioritises the promotion, protection and implementation of children's rights in the digital environment.

We urge that children's rights be a core principle underpinning the commitments and actions of the Compact across all thematic areas.

The digital environment plays an increasingly significant role across most aspects of children's lives, offering opportunities but equally presenting significant risks.

One in three internet users is a child, and, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, children's development, relationships, education and play are increasingly mediated by digital technologies.

Meaningful access can support children to realise their full range of rights. However, certain groups in vulnerable situations, such as girls and children with disabilities, face additional barriers to accessing the internet and being safe.

Children have long-established rights and protections under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and a life mediated by technology must be held to these standards.

How children's rights should be respected, protected and fulfilled in the digital environment is clearly set out in General comment No. 25 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which details the obligations of States as well as the responsibilities of companies to respect, prevent, mitigate and, where appropriate, remedy abuses. This includes children's safe and meaningful participation, freedom of expression, protection from violence, and non-discrimination.

We welcome the human-rights-based approach reflected in the structure of the Compact and the notable mention of “specific measures to protect children to foster an inclusive, open, safe, secure digital space”, however, we emphasize the need for a systematic consideration of children throughout the Compact.

Highlighting the recommendations in the [Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on Child Rights Mainstreaming](#), as well as the recent [UN General Assembly resolution on the Rights of the child in the digital environment](#), it is essential to align global efforts with established human rights frameworks and to ensure that children's existing rights are fully implemented in the digital world, as outlined in the UNCRC General comment No. 25.

We urge you to include an explicit reference to the UNCRC, General comment 25 underpinning the principles of the Global Digital Compact, to emphasise that children's rights must be respected, protected and fulfilled in the digital environment.

We also urge you to integrate children's rights into explicit commitments and actions across all thematic areas, in line with the UNCRC and General comment 25.

We offer the following additional recommendations to shape thematic priorities, commitments and actions:

- Ensure that children's rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled through a holistic and coordinated approach across policies, programmes, government departments, and industry sectors.
- Create a safe and age-appropriate digital environment for children, taking into account their diverse needs and rights, agency, age, maturity, and prioritising their best interests, integrating privacy, safety and security by design and by default.
- Empower children to exercise their rights in the digital environment safely and avoid restricting these rights due to a lack of necessary safeguards by States and businesses.
- Promote safe and meaningful participation of children, ensuring that children's voices in all their diversity are heard and their views are taken into account when developing laws and policies, as well as when designing, developing, operating, and marketing digital products and services. Placing special attention to children and groups of children who are disproportionately affected by intersecting vulnerabilities, to ensure equitable online access and meaningful participation.

The "open, free and secure digital future for all" envisaged by the Compact requires the full implementation of the Rights of the Child in the digital environment.

We urge negotiators and states to embrace these recommendations, which we will share as written contributions by the deadline to translate them into concrete commitments within the Pact.

These inclusions are essential to ensure that the Compact is geared towards a digital future that serves children's best interests, respects their rights, and supports their well-being.