

UNCRC General comment No. 25 Fifth Anniversary

2 March 2026

Five years ago, the world made children a promise with the adoption of UNCRC General comment No. 25. It affirmed that the rights enshrined in the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history – the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – apply fully in the digital environment.¹ Today, one in three internet users is a child,² and digital technologies increasingly mediate all aspects of their lives – from the classroom to the playground, from first friendships to how they see themselves.

UNCRC General comment No. 25 reflects the global consensus that all children hold the same rights and opportunities online as offline,³ recognizing that specific measures are required to close digital divides and ensure existing inequalities are not exacerbated, including on the basis of gender and origin.⁴ It makes clear that children’s rights are non-negotiable and must be the foundation of the digital world, not an afterthought.

Significant progress has followed. Across every continent, multilateral, regional, and national institutions have begun enshrining age-appropriate design standards and holding tech companies accountable for respecting children’s rights by design and default.⁵

Yet, children around the world are still growing up in a digital environment designed without their distinct rights, needs, and vulnerabilities in mind. Worse, tech companies frequently continue to deliberately design digital products and services to maximize profit at children’s expense by systematically amplifying content, contact, conduct, and contract risks.⁶ This commercial exploitation is further exacerbated by the rapid spread of AI,⁷ EdTech,⁸ and emerging technologies.

At a time when international cooperation on children’s digital safety is more important than ever, recommitting to implementing the standards set out in UNCRC General comment No. 25 is an opportunity to build on global support and UN Member States’ unanimous commitment to protecting the rights of the child in the digital space.⁹

We call on governments, regulators, and legislators worldwide to hold businesses accountable for ensuring that technology impacting children is rights-respecting and age-appropriate by design and default. General comment No. 25 is unambiguous: this responsibility lies squarely with tech companies.¹⁰ The era for voluntary promises has

¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, para. 4.

² Livingstone, S., Carr, J., & Byrne, J. (2015). *One in Three: Internet Governance and Children’s Rights*.

³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, para. 4.

⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, para. 11.

⁵ Sylwander, K & Livingstone, S. (forthcoming). *Mapping the global impact of UNCRC General comment No. 25 on children’s rights in the digital environment*.

⁶ Amnesty International. (2023). *“I Feel Exposed”: Caught in TikTok’s Surveillance Web*; OECD. (2021). *Children in the Digital Environment: Revised typology of risks*.

⁷ 5Rights Foundation. (2025). *Children & AI Design Code*.

⁸ Human Rights Watch. (2022). *“How Dare They Peep into My Private Life?”*;

⁹ United Nations. (2024). *Global Digital Compact*, paras. 23(c) and 31(b).

¹⁰ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, para. 35; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2013). *General comment No. 16*, paras. 8, 26, 28, 42, and 82.

passed, States must ensure businesses fulfil this duty,¹¹ and companies must proactively identify and mitigate negative impacts upstream and embed privacy and safety by design.¹²

Five years of implementing UNCRC General comment No. 25 have built a solid evidence base demonstrating that embedding age-appropriate design delivers concrete, measurable improvements to children’s experiences.¹³ The global frameworks are in place, and international best practices provide a blueprint for their implementation.¹⁴

What remains is the political will to act and deliver the digital world we promised children – one designed to protect and uplift them, not exploit them.

To that end, we urge States to fulfill their obligation to protect children’s rights in the digital world by:

1. Explicitly protecting children as every individual below the age of 18,¹⁵ recognizing their diversity and evolving capacities.
2. Protecting children across all digital spaces they are likely to access or be impacted by.¹⁶
3. Making children’s best interests a primary consideration.¹⁷
4. Requiring age assurance to provide age-appropriate digital experiences.¹⁸
5. Mandating Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs).¹⁹
6. Embedding privacy and safety by design and default.²⁰
7. Prohibiting practices likely to contribute to known harms.²¹
8. Ensuring published terms, reporting mechanisms, and access to remedy are available, age-appropriate, and upheld.²²
9. Mandating responsible business conduct, including meaningful child participation.²³
10. Establishing effective enforcement mechanisms.²⁴

¹¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, paras. 35-39.

¹² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, paras. 38, 70, and 110; OECD. (2024). *Towards digital safety by design for children*.

¹³ Wood, S. (2024). *Impact of regulation on children’s digital lives*.

¹⁴ 5Rights Foundation. (forthcoming). *Towards a Digital Environment Designed with Children in Mind: An international best practices blueprint*.

¹⁵ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, art. 1

¹⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, para. 4.

¹⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, paras. 12 and 41.

¹⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, para. 114.

¹⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, para. 38.

²⁰ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, paras. 38, 70, and 110.

²¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, para. 96.

²² Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, paras. 39, 44, 49, and 70.

²³ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, paras. 35-39.

²⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25*, paras. 37, 82, and 114.

Signatories

Organizations

1. 5Rights Foundation
2. Aldeas Infantiles SOS España
3. Alza Tu Voz
4. Breaking the Silence, Bangladesh
5. Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children
6. ChicosNet
7. Child Helpline International
8. Child Rights Coalition Asia
9. Child Welfare League Foundation (Taiwan)
10. ChildFund Alliance
11. ChildFund Australia
12. ChildFund International
13. ChildFund México
14. Children and Young People Living for Peace
15. ChorogUsan for children
16. COFACE Families Europe
17. ColibrIA
18. Digital Child Rights Foundation
19. Digital Futures for Children centre
20. ECPAT Germany
21. ECPAT International
22. Eurochild
23. Fundación Datalat
24. Global Youth-Led Movement on Ending Violence Against Children
25. Group Development Pakistan
26. Instituto Alana
27. Kids Play Tech Lab at McGill University
28. Kids PlaySafer
29. Kindernoithilfe
30. LAB-XXI
31. Media Monitoring Africa (Moxii Africa)
32. MediaSmarts / HabiloMédias
33. Missing Children Europe
34. Mtoto News
35. Network for Children's Rights
36. PKPA (Center for Child Study and Protection)
37. Plan International
38. Protección Digital Argentina
39. Red PaPaz - Vigúías
40. Save the Children
41. SEJIWA Foundation
42. SOS Children's Villages International
43. Stiftung Digitale Chancen
44. Terre des Hommes Netherlands
45. Voice of Children Nepal
46. World Vision International
47. Youth in the Loop

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