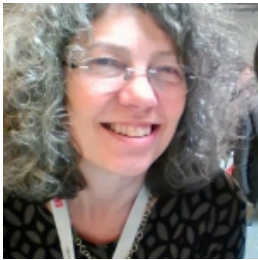


Children's rights apply in the digital world!



Today the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is publishing its [General Comment 25](#) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, along with versions for [children](#) and [young people](#), [explanatory notes](#) and the results of the [global children's consultation](#) conducted to inform the drafting. [Professor Sonia Livingstone](#), who is speaking today at the [launch event](#), explains the significance of the General Comment adopted on the 4th February 2021 and why it is a game-changer for realizing children's rights in a digital world.

To some, this is obvious: human rights apply online as offline, and children are people, *ergo* children's rights apply in the digital world. To others, this is a problem. I've heard it said that children should not be on the internet. That parents should keep children away from everyone else online. Or, while acknowledging that children are [one in three](#) of the world's internet users, that governing the internet in [their best interests](#) is too difficult, expensive and impractical.

In February the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child [adopted General Comment 25](#) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. This is an exciting opportunity to make *real* the claim that rights apply online as offline, and it has been [long in the making](#).



In relation to the digital environment, it's a game-changer. The General Comment will land on the desk of every government in the world. It clarifies what the digital environment means for children's civil rights and freedoms, their rights to privacy, non-discrimination, protection, education, play and more. It also explains *why* States and other duty bearers must act and, within the limits of 10,700 words, *how* they should act.

To explain a little, as the primary duty bearer, the State is accountable for the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)) and it must report periodically on how it has met these obligations to the Committee as [the treaty body](#). States are also obliged to ensure that all duty bearers within their jurisdiction meet their responsibilities to children's rights – [including businesses](#) and others whose activities significantly impact on children.

A General Comment is an [authoritative document](#) which sets out how the UNCRC should be interpreted and implemented by States – in this case, in relation to the digital environment. Like the Convention itself, a General Comment must apply in wealthier and poorer nations, to governments of all political stripes, and for all children whatever their abilities or circumstances.

Article 12 of the UNCRC is the child's right to be heard in matters that affect them, and to honour this, [the drafting team](#) consulted children around the world, especially in the Global South. Children had a lot to say, and many insights to contribute, and these were carefully considered in preparing the General Comment. On behalf of the Committee, [Amal Aldoseri, Olga Khazova and Philip Jaffé thanked the 700+ children](#) from 27 countries for their consultation responses.



Many [challenges lie ahead](#) and these were also signalled in [the expert consultations](#) which informed the drafting of the General Comment. They may be less aware of the many and vocal calls for *more to be done* to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights in the digital world. These were expressed strongly in both the children's consultation and also the expert consultations held during 2020.

Of course, [now the real work begins](#). But it's good to have our bearings, and our mandate, in terms of what, why and how.

Notes

This text was originally published on the [Media@LSE blog](#) and has been re-posted with permission and small amendments.

This post gives the views of the authors and does not represent the position of the LSE Parenting for a Digital Future blog, nor of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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