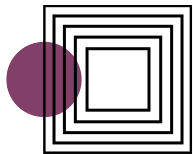# ySKILLS

Realising children's rights in the digital age: The role of digital skills

Principle 5: Responsible

Comply with legal frameworks, provide remedies as needed and conduct a Child Rights Impact Assessment.

Responsible digital governance and innovation means policy makers and businesses should keep up with ethical, rights-based and legal frameworks and guidance so that children's digital lives are enabled and empowered by design.[1]

The principle of responsibility emphasises that relevant stakeholders (or, in child rights language, 'duty bearers') should:

- Know of and comply with laws, regulations, industry standards and other measures to ensure the realisation of children's rights.

- Provide children with accessible and safe pathways to meaningful remedies if things go wrong.

Navigating the complex legal, regulatory and standards landscape applicable to digital products and services can be daunting. A Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) is a commonly used tool in policy-making processes to be sure of anticipating the likely impact of a product or service on children. It follows eight practical steps, and is now being adapted and applied to the digital environment by a growing number of states and businesses (Mukherjee et al., 2021).

"All young people need digital skills so that they can be active citizens. It means that you really know how to use the systems, how to work with officials and government. But you should also be able to participate in society. Be able to write things or use social media or use other media elements." (industry/labour market expert, Finland) (12)

"We are living in some kind of media-augmented reality where we no longer have the possibility of not using digital skills. Maybe we should call it 'competences of the future' or 'competences of continuous learning' rather than digital." (education expert, Poland) (12)

---

[1] UNCRC, Articles 4, 18, 41–42.

Various strands of the ySKILLS research demonstrate that **there is a need for coordinated effort, with responsibility falling on all stakeholders** including governments, educational authorities, policy makers, child rights advocates and industry. Not all dimensions of digital skills are developing at the same or at the optimal pace (14, 18), showing the need for organised educational endeavours to scaffold learning. **For more advanced information, communication and content creation skills, formal support such as education is required.** This necessitates collaboration in the areas of policy, education and industry to provide the necessary tools, processes and outcome evaluations ensuring the development of digital literacy of children. **The considerable cross-country differences in both the level and development of digital skills and literacy demonstrate the importance of the local context, and the necessity of national actions** (14). While beyond the scope of this project, more work is needed in the future to establish why certain country contexts are more beneficial, and which factors make for more favourable pathways towards better digital skills and literacy. More evidence is also needed on how coordination among different agencies can best support the development of longer-term beneficial outcomes from digital skills on children's wellbeing, participation, employability and life-long learning.

ySKILLS measured digital skills through both self-assessment (14) and performance testing (22), providing a rounded understanding of children's digital skills and literacy. **As these methods show different strengths and produce different viewpoints on the results, this can be used as a model for measuring the effectiveness of digital literacy interventions** that should be developed further via the collaboration of different agencies. To justify the investment of public and private sector resources in the promotion of children's digital skills, it is vital to conduct independent evaluations so as to learn from what works (and what has not worked). Also vital is greater clarity regarding the outcomes of gaining digital skills that society desires and expects, so that digital initiatives can be judged against these specific outcomes.

Various strands of the ySKILLS research show that **vulnerable children and young people can be highly skilled and yet still experience risks or harm online** (3, 17, 20) (see also d'Haenens et al, 2023). Hence **digital skills and literacy cannot always guarantee children's wellbeing in the digital world, and joint responsibility from various agencies, including industry, is needed to ensure children's rights are protected**. For example, the work with children and young people experiencing mental health difficulties (17) shows the need for a joint effort to prevent the negative effects of algorithms on children's health in ways that integrate technological innovation, regulation, awareness raising and the provision of timely help and remedy.

As the principle of 'responsibility' in a child rights context emphasises, many of these requirements can be actioned by **conducting a CRIA as part of the design of digital literature initiatives and interventions**. **This would ensure relevant child rights expertise is drawn on**, children are duly consulted, and a mechanism is created by which to conduct a holistic analysis of how digital skills may mediate (and later, have mediated) the realisation of children's rights (Mukherjee, et al., 2021).

Additional data

EU Kids Online findings for 9 to 16-year-olds in 19 countries showed that:

- When children had a negative online experience, between 3% (Italy) and 35% (Poland) of children reported the problem online. This may suggest that platforms need to take greater responsibility for children's online safety, and provide more effective child-accessible forms of support and remedy.

- There is considerable scope for platforms to enhance children's online experiences, both by maximising their opportunities and minimising the attendant risks.