



The impact of General comment No. 25 in the UNCRC review process

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Executive summary

General comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, adopted by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2021, marked a landmark development in recognising that children's rights apply fully and equally in the digital age. It clarifies States' obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and calls for comprehensive action across legislation, policy, regulation, education and corporate accountability. This report examines how the general comment was taken up and applied within the UNCRC review system between 2021 and July 2025, analysing the 79 State Party reviews since its adoption.

Key findings

1. The work of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Since 2021, the Committee has progressively integrated the general comment into its reviews of States' implementation of children's rights, shifting from sporadic mentions of digital topics to a systematic monitoring framework. By 2025, the general comment was directly referenced, or the digital environment was addressed in every set of Concluding observations issued by the Committee.

Over time, the Committee's approach evolved from general awareness raising to concrete recommendations on legislation, implementation and remedy systems. At the top of the digital agenda is protection from online violence, sexual exploitation, and abuse (Articles 19 and 34). Next, the Committee prioritises access to information (Article 17), privacy and data protection (Article 16), digital literacy and inclusion (Articles 2, 28, and 29), and the accountability of State and private actors. The dominant framing is protective and equity focused. The right to be heard in digital governance processes and design, as well as the rights to play, freedom of expression, and freedom of association, are infrequently mentioned.

Emerging trends in the Committee's work highlight growing attention to artificial intelligence (AI) and automated data processing, as well as increased references to regional instruments such as European Union (EU) regulations and heightened concern over state censorship and privacy

infringements. This signals a shift toward a more comprehensive agenda for children's rights in relation to the digital environment, including emerging challenges.

2. State Party engagement

State Party engagement with children's rights in the digital environment remains uneven. The analysis shows diverse progress: countries like France and Brazil have enacted advanced laws on privacy, data protection and online safety, but continue to struggle with enforcement and institutional coherence, while countries like the Gambia exemplify early-stage engagement hindered by structural and resource constraints. Despite these differences, common barriers persist, including fragmented governance, limited capacity, protectionist bias, corporate resistance and minimal child participation. Ultimately, meaningful progress depends on laws and regulations that are also accompanied by political will, institutional strength, robust enforcement and inclusive policymaking that translates the general comment's framework into lived rights for all children. Four case studies also reveal the general comment's role in advocacy and how it has guided legislative processes and been taken up in final legislation, as in the case of Brazil.

3. Influence of other reporting entities

Civil society, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), UN agencies, and children's organisations play a crucial role in the UNCRC monitoring process, including the implementation of general comments. Many alternative reports explicitly cite it or draw on the general comment's principles, shaping the Committee's focus on privacy, data protection, AI governance, and corporate accountability. Such advocacy, particularly from the activist third sector, has strengthened both the specificity and normative reach of the Committee's recommendations. However, despite excellent examples of child-led (e.g., Save the Children Romania) or child-informed submissions (e.g., UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein), children's own perspectives remain under-represented.

4. Limitations

General comment No. 25 has helped the Committee establish an increasingly coherent and replicable monitoring lens. In 2025, emerging challenges are prompting a broadening of the Committee's focus, notably

regarding AI. Nonetheless, the precision of the Committee's recommendations relies on the quality of the information provided in the State Party and alternative reporting. Civil and cultural rights, including participation, remain limited in the Committee's Concluding observations, with rights often framed predominantly through a protection lens. Although an increasing focus, corporate accountability measures and mechanisms also remain to be more fully addressed.

Conclusions and recommendations

This report has identified that since the general comment's adoption, the Committee's and States' framing of children's rights in the digital environment in the monitoring process has been transformed. The Committee has raised concerns about privacy, access and corporate accountability in global monitoring, inspiring national policy and legislative reform. Yet the balance between protection and participation remains unsettled, and the transformative potential of children's participation in digital governance processes is far from realised.

To realise the general comment's potential and to strengthen children's rights in the digital environment within the UNCRC monitoring process, the Committee could:

- Require States to report systematically on provision and participation, not only protection.
- Extend its List of issues to include private sector accountability, digital inclusion and remedies.
- Encourage child-led and child-informed reporting to ensure children's perspectives shape reviews.
- Support the development of a set of structural, process and outcome indicators to monitor the realisation of children's rights in the digital environment, which cover the protection, provision and participation rights of children in relation to the digital environment.

General comment No. 25 provides an authoritative framework for reinterpreting children's rights in the digital age. Indicators could provide a measurable roadmap, now that the challenge lies in ensuring the guidance of the general comment results in real-world change for children.

Establishing children's rights in the digital environment

Adopted in 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter, UNCRC) is the most ratified human rights treaty, establishing its global authority within international human rights law. Conceived in a pre-digital era, the UNCRC did not anticipate the profound ways in which digital technologies would transform children's lives.

The UNCRC is a living document, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child's (hereafter the Committee) general comments illustrate the evolving interpretation and application of children's rights.¹ Since 2001, the Committee has published 26 general comments, covering topics such as HIV/AIDS, unaccompanied children, climate change and the rights of children with disabilities, as well as procedural matters on implementation and interpretation. In 2021, with the adoption of General comment No. 25 (hereafter the general comment) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, the Committee affirmed that children's rights apply fully and equally in the digital environment.² The general comment clarifies how State Parties should implement the UNCRC with respect to digital technologies, guiding relevant legislative, policy and other measures to ensure full realisation of their obligations under the Convention.

To recognise the multidimensional and fast-changing nature of the digital environment, it begins with the following definition:³

The digital environment is constantly evolving and expanding, encompassing information and communications technologies, including digital networks, content, services and applications, connected devices and environments, virtual and augmented reality, artificial intelligence, robotics, automated systems, algorithms and data analytics, biometrics and implant technology. (General comment No. 25, para. 2)

In preparing the general comment, the Committee held a Day of General Discussion on Children and Digital Media in 2014. This prompted researchers and advocates,

¹ Freeman (2009). There are nine United Nations treaty bodies responsible for monitoring how States implement the main international human rights conventions. Each treaty has its own expert committee that reviews the progress made by countries that have ratified it, known as "States parties." The Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee) is the treaty body responsible for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is composed of 18 independent experts who monitor how States implement the Convention and its Optional Protocols on specific issues such as the involvement of children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

² UN OHCHR (2021).

³ See Livingstone et al. (2024).

supported by the Children's Commissioner for England, to call for a new general comment on children's rights in the digital environment.⁴

In 2016, the Committee's General comment No. 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence was the first general comment to recognise the central role of the digital environment in children's lives.⁵ Around this time, the Committee had already made multiple recommendations to States regarding children's rights in relation to the digital environment, including to:

- Prohibit the marketing of tobacco and alcohol to children online.⁶
- Include digital literacy in school curricula to protect children online.⁷
- Implement legislation to protect children's rights in the digital environment.⁸
- Implement systematic training programmes for the police, social workers and other actors to protect children from cyberbullying and online harassment.⁹
- Follow up on the implementation of agreements made with social media platform service providers to ensure that online hate is taken down.¹⁰

The drafting process for the general comment began in 2019 and was distinctive in its scale, diversity and participatory approach. Building on the Committee's experience of reviewing States Parties' reports and responding to calls from UN agencies, civil society and experts for authoritative guidance regarding digital technologies for both States and businesses, the general comment drew on emerging evidence and the work of other human rights treaty bodies, including recommendations from the Human Rights Council and its special procedures. Recognising the need for specialised expertise, the Committee worked with a core drafting team coordinated by the 5Rights Foundation, engaging an international, intergenerational and multistakeholder community (see Figure 1).¹¹

⁴ Livingstone et al. (2024).

⁵ The importance of the digital environment had previously also been recognised, yet its significance in the lives of children was not fully recognised. Examples include the Optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC)(2001) and the Committee's General comment No. 6 on the implementing child rights in early childhood (OHCHR, 2005) which stated in para. 35: "Rapid increases in the variety and accessibility of modern technologies, including Internet-based media, are a particular cause for concern."

⁶ Sri Lanka (2 March 2018) CRC/C/LKA/CO/5-6, para. 33; Seychelles (5 March 2018) CRC/C/SYC/CO/5-6, para. 33; Angola (27 June 2018) CRC/C/AGO/CO/5-7, para. 30.

⁷ Spain (5 March 2018) CRC/C/ESP/CO/5-6, para. 20.

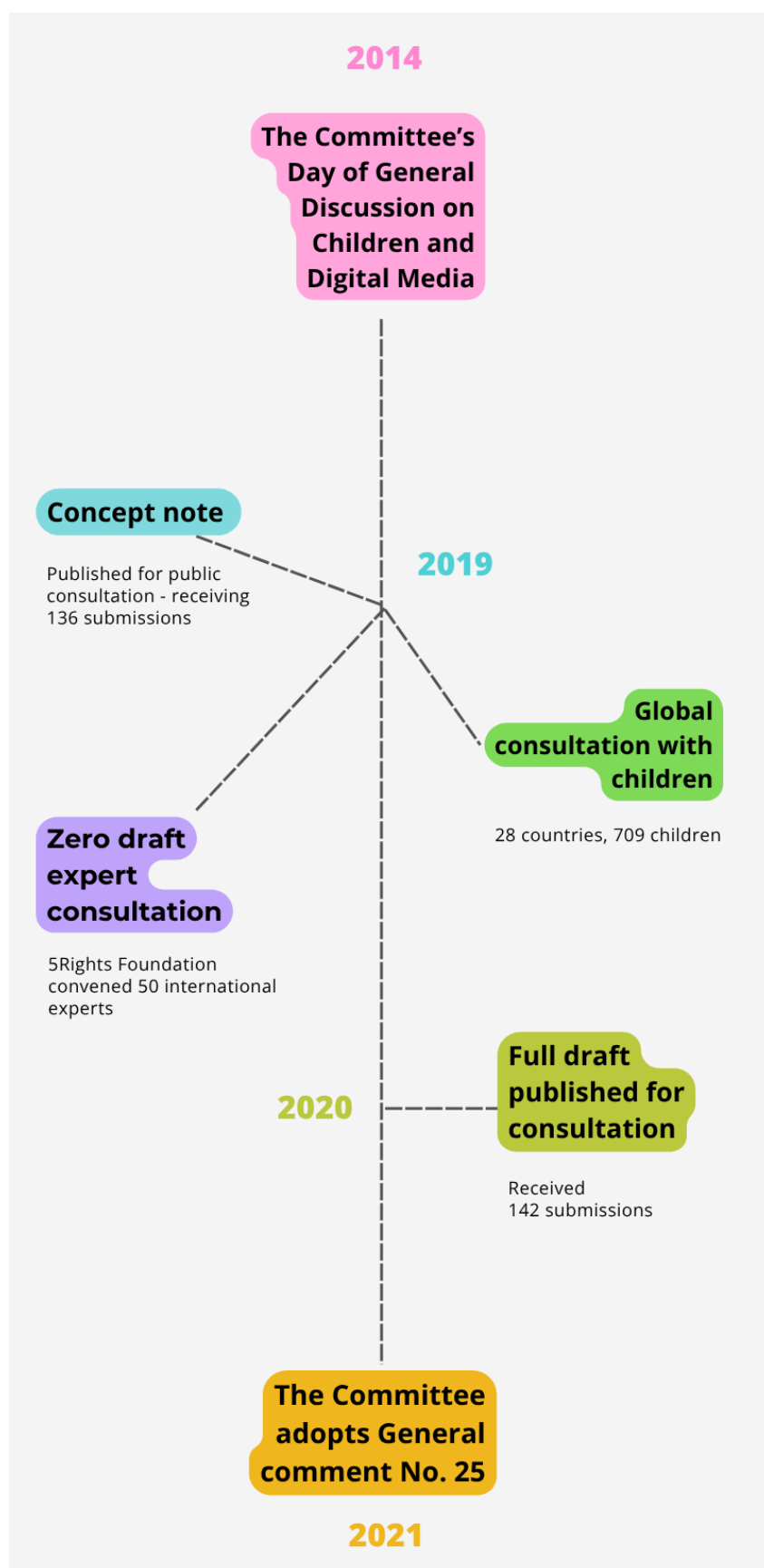
⁸ Portugal (9 December 2019) CRC/C/PRT/CO/5-6, para. 22(c).

⁹ Austria (5 March 2020) CRC/C/AUT/CO/5-6, para. 25(b), 25(c).

¹⁰ Austria (5 March 2020) CRC/C/AUT/CO/5-6, para. 25(d).

¹¹ The drafting group comprised Professor Sonia Livingstone (LSE), Baroness Beeban Kidron (House of Lords and then Chair of 5Rights Foundation), Professor Amanda Third (Western Sydney University), Gerison Lansdown (independent child rights expert) and Jutta Croll (Chair of Stiftung Digitale Chancen). It supported the Committee's working group chaired by Olga Khazova and Amal Al-Dossari.

Figure 1: Timeline for the adoption of General comment No. 25



The process included a public consultation on the concept note that drew 136 submissions across continents, states and stakeholders, an international consultation with 709 children in 28 countries¹² and expert meetings synthesising findings from States, regional bodies, NHRIs, civil society and the private sector. The full (Zero) draft received 142 submissions from six UN regions, again including many states, human rights organisations and other stakeholders. This inclusive approach not only informed the substance of the general comment but also exemplified its principles, ensuring that children's perspectives help shape a rights-respecting digital environment.

The Committee formally adopted General comment No. 25 on 4 February 2021. This report examines its subsequent impact, focusing on the Committee's work in engaging with states and NGOs worldwide. We examine how the general comment has been incorporated into the formal treaty body monitoring process for the UNCRC.

This report analyses 79 State Party reviews held between 2021 and 2025 to assess how the general comment has shaped the Committee's work and its Concluding observations. It also analyses the role of civil society in shaping the Committee's recommendations, maps state-level reporting related to children's rights in the digital environment and presents four illustrative country case studies (Appendix 2). The report concludes with recommendations to strengthen the Committee's monitoring and review and, ultimately, the realisation of children's rights in the digital environment.

General comment No. 25 (GC25)

The Committee's general comment provides an authoritative interpretation of the UNCRC in relation to the digital environment.¹³ It acknowledges that the digital environment was not designed with children in mind, yet it profoundly shapes their lives, and therefore requires States to ensure that, in all matters of regulation, design and provision, the best interests of the child are a primary consideration.¹⁴ It provides a rich foundation for understanding that children are not merely to be protected online, but also entitled to privacy, freedom of expression, information and meaningful participation. Indeed, it addresses the full range of children's rights, including civil and

¹² Livingstone et al. (2024); UN OHCHR (2021, para. 5).

¹³ To guide States in understanding and applying the Convention, the Committee adopts general comments. These documents provide authoritative interpretations of the Convention's provisions and explain how they should be implemented in practice (Hanson and Lundy, 2017; Gerber, Kyriakakis and O'Byrne, 2013). Although general comments are not legally binding, they are law-making instruments which carry significant interpretive weight (Alston, 2021; Kelly and Grover, 2012). They shape the interpretation, application and development of international human rights law, and are used by States, UN agencies, courts, and civil society organisations to clarify how the rights of children should be realised in national laws, policies, and practices, frequently citing them in judicial decisions and legal analyses, thereby shaping policymaking worldwide. In short they are both important points of reference for the treaty bodies and cited by other international legal institutions and in domestic legal proceedings (Lesch & Reiners, 2023, p. 383).

¹⁴ UN OHCHR (2021, para. 12).

cultural rights and freedoms as well as protective rights, such as protection from abuse, exploitation and harmful content.

Recognising that children have the right to be heard in matters that concern them, the general comment includes quotes from the children consulted in its introduction.¹⁵ In paragraph 1, children expressed that the digital environment was central to their lives and their futures:

By the means of digital technology, we can get information from all around the world... [Digital technology] introduced me to major aspects of how I identify myself... When you are sad, the internet can help you [to] see something that brings you joy.

The general comment is structured around the four general principles of the UNCRC, as recognised by the Committee: non-discrimination (Article 2), best interest of the child (Article 3.1), the right to life, survival and development (Article 6), and children's right to be heard and have their views taken into account (Article 12). The text of the general comment reflects the Committee's commitment to a holistic approach to children's rights,¹⁶ encompassing children's civil rights and freedoms, as well as their specific vulnerabilities and the right to protection.¹⁷ It recognises children's evolving capacities as an 'enabling principle that addresses the process of their gradual acquisition of competencies, understanding and agency', while also calling for appropriate protection and support.

The general comment sets out an ambitious agenda, asserting that children's rights apply equally online as they do offline, and clarifying States' responsibilities as well as the necessary infrastructure needed for an internet governance system that delivers on the full range of children's rights in the digital environment.¹⁸ It requires a wide range of general measures, including: national legislation, comprehensive policy and strategy that specifically addresses children's rights in the digital environment, including to ensure access to justice and remedies, and the regulation of business practices (e.g., through industry codes and design standards). Coordination across government and industry actors, resource allocation (including for research and data collection), independent monitoring and training and awareness raising is also important.

¹⁵ Livingstone et al. (2024): this included instances where the children's opinions were at odds with those of some adults and State Parties, such as the children's call for high-quality health information.

¹⁶ Freeman ([1994]).

¹⁷ General comment No. 25 builds on earlier general comments, such as General comment No. 16 (2013) on business and No. 20 (2020) on adolescence, and on the Optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, to ensure children's rights are respected, equally protected and fulfilled in the digital environment as they are offline (Livingstone et al. 2024).

¹⁸ Livingstone et al. (2024).

The general comment provides comprehensive guidance on the implementation of the UNCRC in relation to the digital environment, and is organised as follows:

- Introduction (I)
- Objective (II)
- General principles (III) including the four general principles of the Convention
- Evolving capacities (IV) and its particular significance in the digital environment
- General measures of implementation by States Parties (V) on the broad range of legislative, administrative and other measures needed to realise children's rights in the digital environment
- Children's civil rights and freedoms (Articles 12-17), including access to information; freedom of expression; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of association and peaceful assembly; right to privacy; and birth registration and right to identity) (VI)
- Violence against children (Section VII) in the digital environment
- Family environment and alternative care (VIII)
- Children with disabilities (IX) and the rights of vulnerable children
- Health and welfare (X), ensuring and promoting equitable health and welfare through information and service provision
- Education, leisure and cultural activities (XI)
- Special protection measures (XII) are also required:
 - Protection from economic, sexual and other forms of exploitation
 - Administration of child justice
 - Protection of children in armed conflict, migrant children and children in other vulnerable situations
- International and regional cooperation (XIII), which addresses the transnational nature of the digital environment
- Dissemination (XIV) of the general comment.

The general comment includes restrictions on harmful commercial practices such as exploitative advertising and profiling. It insists that safety-by-design and privacy-by-design must become standard in digital products and services. It recognises that the digital environment is transnational, requiring strong international and regional cooperation. It calls for States to ensure its dissemination to policymakers, educators,

civil society, businesses and the judiciary, and to provide child-friendly versions to children themselves.

State accountability encompasses obligations related to the private sphere and cross-border contexts, affirming that private businesses must respect and ensure the rights of children. In this regard, General comment No. 16 is particularly important for the interpretation of General comment No. 25, as it clarifies State obligations regarding business enterprises' impact on children's rights. Its principles of due diligence, remedy and regulation of private actors anticipate many of the concerns later developed in General comment No. 25, where corporate responsibility, technology design and the regulation of platforms are central.

Research questions

This report examines how General comment No. 25 has been incorporated into the UNCRC review process by the Committee, State Parties and other reporting entities, such as civil society organisations, NGOs, UN agencies and NHRIs. We ask:

1. How has the Committee on the Rights of the Child taken up General comment No. 25 in its review practice since 2021?
2. In what ways do State Parties reference, prioritise or neglect children's rights in the digital environment in their reports and replies, and how does this align with or diverge from the Committee's framing in the general comment?
3. How do other reporting entities, including civil society, NGOs, NHRIs, UN agencies and children themselves use the general comment in their alternative reports to the Committee, and to what extent does this shape the Committee's concluding observations?
4. What do country case studies reveal about how children's rights are being implemented into advocacy, law and policy on a national level, and what impact has the general comment had in these contexts?

The UNCRC State Party review process

Under Articles 43 and 44 of the UNCRC, States Parties are required to report to the Committee every five years on the measures they have taken to implement children's rights. This State Party reporting and review process forms the backbone of how the Committee monitors progress and holds governments accountable. The following steps are included in the process:

- **The pre-session:** the Committee meets with children's rights organisations, UN agencies and other actors to prepare the review of a particular State that. This normally occurs six months prior to the session.
- **List of issues prior to reporting:** the Committee then prepares a List of issues prior to reporting with targeted questions about developments, challenges and progress in realising children's rights and requests for specific data.
- The State then responds to the List of issues through a **State Party report or State Party response to the List of issues**.¹⁹
- **Alternative reports** are submitted by civil society organisations, NHRIs, UN agencies, academics and children's groups. These independent submissions provide additional perspectives that inform the Committee's review.
- **Pre-sessional working group:** selected actors are invited to discuss their submissions more in-depth with the Committee ahead of the State review.
- **The formal session:** the Committee engages in constructive dialogue with the State delegation, asking questions and requesting clarification about laws, policies or practices that affect children's rights.
- **Concluding observations:** after the session the Committee adopts Concluding observations, which present its assessment of the State's progress and include recommendations for improving the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols. States are expected to act on these recommendations and to report back on progress during their next review cycle.

¹⁹ There are currently two procedures: the traditional reporting procedure and the simplified reporting procedure. Under the traditional approach, a State submits a comprehensive report explaining how it is implementing the Convention. The simplified reporting procedure, now used by most States, streamlines this process. Rather than a lengthy national report, the Committee first prepares a List of issues prior to reporting with targeted questions about developments, challenges and progress in realising children's rights. The State's written reply to this list constitutes its official periodic report and the basis for the dialogue.

Methodology

Systematic research on the impact of general comments in international law is limited.²⁰ Researchers have found that the Committee's application of the UNCRC's four general principles can clarify, extend or at times weaken their meaning, depending on how rigorously they are applied.²¹ However, Hanson and Lundy²² observe that the Committee's approach lacks coherence over time across both general comments and Concluding observations, including in the Committee's interpretation of the best interest of the child,²³ evolving capacities²⁴ and the principles of provision, protection and participation.²⁵

In the work of the Committee, their Concluding observations are crucial in ensuring the realisation of children's rights in national contexts.²⁶ The Concluding observations 'present an independent evaluation of policy and practice against an agreed framework of international standards',²⁷ although their practical limitations, the purpose and their audience need to be considered in any analysis.²⁸

Mapping the general comment and related topics in the review process enables us to assess how the Committee, States and other reporting actors frame the rights of children in the digital environment.²⁹ The publicly available documents generated during the Committee's work provide a valuable and dynamic basis for analysing how children's rights in the digital environment are being addressed by States, non-state actors and the Committee itself. Note that the analysis is limited by the partial nature of State Party and other reporting entities' submissions. However, triangulation among the sources helps to identify emerging trends and gaps.

²⁰ Khazova (2021).

²¹ The principles of non-discrimination, the best interest of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and the right to be heard.

²² Hanson & Lundy (2017).

²³ Sormunen (2020); Sutherland (2016).

²⁴ Varadan (2019).

²⁵ Lundy (2012, 2019); Sormunen (2020); Varadan (2019).

²⁶ Sormunen (2020).

²⁷ Lundy (2019, p. 16).

²⁸ In particular, in drafting its Concluding observations, the Committee relies on input from State Party reports and the complementary information provided by alternative reports. Note that these do not provide a comprehensive evidence base. Limited resources and time create barriers to seeking additional information or conducting independent research. Further, State Parties' reports are drafted to demonstrate the State's successes in implementing the UNCRC. Also, not all country reviews include alternative reports on diverse child rights matters, and so do not provide equally robust evidence to support the Committee's review. These observations have been informed by discussions with academics and consultations conducted in November 2024 with experts including members of the Committee.. See also Creamer & Simmons (2020); Khazova (2021); Lundy (2012).

²⁹ Our method was informed by Lundy (2012, 2019).

Research methods: main steps

In **Step 1**, we identified all documents published during the UNCRC State Party review process since the adoption of the general comment in 2021, up to July 2025. This encompassed 79 State Party reviews and included the Committee's List of issues to States, the Committee's Concluding observations, State Party reports and alternative reports from civil society, NGOs, NHRIs, UN agencies and others.

In **Step 2**, we searched each published document for these keywords: general comment no. 25; CRC/C/GC/25; digit*; internet; online; cyber*; virtual; harm*; communication; technol*; media; web*.

In **Step 3**, each explicit mention of the general comment was coded as a direct reference. Additional discussions related to children's rights in the digital environment, some of which reflected the wording of the general comment or its themes, were coded as references to CRDE (children's rights in the digital environment). These included technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse or online violence, cyberbullying, and privacy online. We coded as 'no reference' when the Committee's List of issues, the Concluding observations or State Party reports made no mention of the general comment or the digital environment.

In **Step 4**, the text was read in full for all documents where the general comment or CRDE references were found. Relevant sections of these documents were compiled into a table, creating a searchable data corpus. This provided the basis for quantitative and qualitative analyses. A thematic analysis was conducted on the entire data corpus to identify, interpret and count the main themes.

For each of the 79 countries, we assessed the realisation of children's rights. Based on the information provided in the State Party reports (coded as: no information reported; express plan to implement law, policy, mechanism or measure; a reported policy or programme with no specific measures, mechanism or allocated resources; a specific law and enforcement through resourced mechanisms and established institutions), we calculated an indicative score.

In what follows, we first address the Committee's List of issues and Concluding observations to explore the Committee's approach to children's rights in the digital environment, and their requirements of States parties. Next, we map the extent to which State Parties have prioritised children's rights in the digital environment and followed the guidance of the general comment in law, policy and practice, taking into account information provided to the Committee in the alternative reports. Finally, four diverse case studies into how States adopt the principles, standards and measures of the general comment enable deeper insight into the drivers and barriers to implementing children's rights in the digital environment (see Appendix 2).

Reports by the Committee

General comment No. 25 and the Committee's List of issues to States

The List of issues prior to reporting are the Committee's first interventions within the review process. These lists build on previous Concluding observations as well as pre-session submissions by civil society, NHRIs, NGOs and others.

The findings for the List of issues published before and after the general comment show that, while the digital environment is increasingly frequently mentioned, the general comment itself is rarely cited. The Committee's List of issues for Romania³⁰ in 2023 includes one of the few explicit references we identified among the 79 reviews. Instead, issues such as digital inclusion, technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), privacy and digital literacy appear without direct reference to the general comment.

In its List of issues to the Republic of South Africa on 4 March 2021, just days after the publication of the general comment, the Committee referred to children's right to appropriate information (para. 16(b)).³¹ It also addressed the risk of technology-facilitated CSEA, requesting that the State Party respond to issues related to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC).³²

In the case of Andorra, the Committee made explicit mention of the right to privacy in the digital environment in the List of issues.³³ Kyrgyzstan³⁴ is an example where the List of issues makes no reference to the rights of children in the digital environment, yet where the State Party reply references e-governance and digitalisation, as well as a cybersecurity strategy for 2019-23, even though it does not clearly outline how these particularly address the human rights of children. In its Concluding observations, the Committee invoked the general comment in relation to the case raised in an alternative report by Equality Now International Coalition of child rights organisations,³⁵ calling for Kyrgyzstan to protect children's freedom of expression online.

³⁰ Romania (22 June 2023) CRC/C/ROU/QPR/6-7.

³¹ South Africa (11 March 2024) CRC/C/ZAF/CO/3-6.

³² UN OHCHR (2000).

³³ Andorra (17 October 2023) CRC/C/AND/Q/3-5, para. 6.

³⁴ Kyrgyzstan (18 October 2023) CRC/C/KGZ/RQ/5-6.

³⁵ Equality Now International Coalition (2023).

These examples show that the general comment is not systematically referenced at the List of issues stage.

General comment No. 25 and the Concluding observations

Since the general comment took effect in March 2021, and until July 2025, the Committee has published 79 Concluding observations (see Appendix 1). Of these, 54 (two-thirds) expressly refer to the general comment, 13 do not directly reference the general comment but do, in some way, address children's rights in the digital environment, and 12 refer neither to the general comment nor to children's rights in the digital environment.

Among those that address the rights of children in the digital environment without referencing the general comment, the Committee does on occasion refer to other relevant general comments – referring to General comment No. 13³⁶ (on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence) regarding children's right to protection from violence, bullying and sexual exploitation, General comments No. 19³⁷ (on public budgeting for the realisation of children's rights) and General comment No. 16³⁸ (on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights) and as well as routinely referencing the OPSC.³⁹

Figure 2 shows the number of direct references to the general comment made by the Committee in its Concluding observations, as well as other references to children's rights in the digital environment, and instances where no mention is made. There seems to be an initial enthusiasm for referring to General comment No. 25 in the year of its adoption, which was reduced in 2022. However, thereafter, the Committee has progressively integrated explicit mention of the general comment into its Concluding observations for States, as well as making more references to the digital environment overall. By 2025, every Concluding observation either cited the general comment directly or addressed children's rights in the digital environment in relation to specific topics. These findings suggest a growing familiarity, and likely also a growing concern, among Committee members regarding the digital environment.

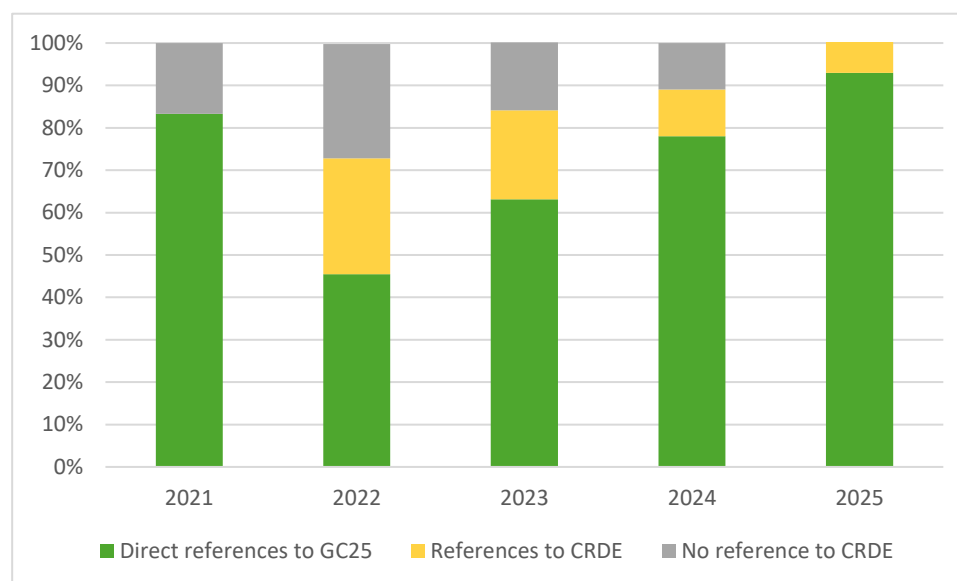
³⁶ Committee on the Rights of the Child (2011).

³⁷ UN OHCHR (2016).

³⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013).

³⁹ UN OHCHR (2000).

Figure 2: References to General comment No. 25 (GC25) and children's rights in the digital environment (CRDE) in Concluding observations, by year



The Committee addresses children's rights in the digital environment in two main ways. First, it routinely addresses the OPSC, which also applies explicitly to online contexts in many of its Concluding observations, relating to sexual exploitation, trafficking and the circulation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM). Second, through its interpretation of Articles 13 and 17 of the Convention, it has come to evoke the general comment to address children's rights in the digital environment more broadly.

Based on our textual analysis of the Committee's Concluding observations, we can also discern the consolidation of a consistent approach. Indeed, something of a standard formula has emerged for recalling the general comment under the umbrella of the right to privacy and the right to information in the Committee's Concluding observations:

Right to privacy and access to appropriate information.

Recalling its general comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, the Committee recommends that the State Party...

This format integrates the recommendations of the general comment in relation to substantive UNCRC rights – in this case, the right to privacy (Article 16) and the right to access information (Article 17). Using these rights as the overarching point of entry to specifically address the general comment, the Committee renders recommendations that link these to interrelated rights, such as the right to freedom of expression including to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds (Article 13); the right to freedom of discrimination (Articles 2, 23 and 28); the best interest of the child (Article 3); the right to be heard (Article 12); the right to protection from all forms of

violence (Article 19); the right to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (Article 34); and the right to protection from all forms of exploitation (Articles 32 and 36). Also included is the principle of children's evolving capacities (Article 5).

Under the umbrella of Articles 13 and 17, the Committee engages with the following topics and related rights, in order of frequency:

1. **The right to access information** (Article 17): as an overarching right, this was addressed in 49 Concluding observations. The Committee frames 'access to appropriate information' as an entry point for children's access to the internet, encompassing a broader understanding of access to information, including protection from harmful information and content, as well as the provision of information from diverse sources and languages, including those in minority languages.⁴⁰
2. **Online safety, or the right to protection from all forms of violence** (Article 19): this was addressed in 45 Concluding observations, broadly referencing online violence, cyberbullying and ensuring safe digital environments.
3. **Protection from harmful content** (under Articles 17 and 19): this was directly addressed in 45 Concluding observations; measures to protect children from harmful or inappropriate material online, under Article 17(e) include information and material injurious to children's wellbeing.
4. **The right to privacy** (Articles 8 and 13): this was addressed in 40 Concluding observations calling for legal safeguards, regulation of the use of children's data, the right to be forgotten and stronger privacy protections for children online.
5. **Digital literacy and skills, as part of the right to education** (Articles 28 and 29); and linked to the right to access information (Article 13); the right to be heard (Article 12); and the right to development (Article 6) (General comment No. 25, paras 11, 21, 32, 84, 104): this was addressed in 38 Concluding observations encouraging states to strengthen digital literacy

⁴⁰ We note that the Concluding observations refer to 'access to appropriate information', which extends the language beyond Article 17 on the right to information. Their framing in the Concluding observations remains primarily protective and equity focused. 'Appropriate information' is interpreted as safe and age-appropriate information and content, that is not harmful to children's wellbeing. There is less emphasis on providing online sources of information that promote children's social, spiritual, and moral well-being and mental health (Article 17). We note that harmful content differs from Article 17(e), which encourages the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of children from information and material 'injurious' to their well-being.

programmes for children, parents and caregivers, as well as teachers and other professionals.

6. **Digital inclusion and accessibility, under the right to non-discrimination** (Article 2) (General comment No. 25, paras 4, 9, 11, 16, 28): this was addressed in 26 Concluding observations, including tackling the digital divide and equal access and protection, particularly for children living in rural areas, children with disabilities, disadvantaged children and/or children from minority groups (e.g., Roma children, Indigenous children and refugees). It also addresses the affordability of services to ensure an affordable and equitable digital infrastructure.
7. **Accountability and enforcement** (Articles 2, 6, 12, 13, 17, 19, 32, 35) (General comment No. 25, paras 35-39): this was addressed in 23 Concluding observations, including mechanisms for ensuring sanctions or prosecution for violations of children's rights in the digital environment.
8. **Education technologies and distance learning, under the right to education** (Articles 28 and 29): this was addressed in 9 Concluding observations. This includes the use of children's data in educational technologies, access to education through distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond, and ensuring schools are equipped with adequate digital infrastructure, such as computers and internet connections.
9. **Artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies**: this was addressed in 7 Concluding observations. The Committee engaged in elaborating on safeguards towards ensuring children's rights in the use of AI, prohibiting the use of children's data by AI systems, and adopting laws against AI-generated CSAM.
10. **Freedom of expression** (Article 13): this was addressed in relation to the digital environment in 6 Concluding observations.
11. **Access to justice and remedies**: this was addressed in 6 Concluding observations, specifically calling for child-friendly mechanisms for reporting incidents of violence in the digital environment (such as an online portal), and integrating specific components on online offences into the training of relevant professionals, particularly law enforcement officials and those working in specialised units to enable effective investigation and prosecution, sustainable funding for such infrastructures.

- 12. Other topics raised by the Committee relating to the general comment and children's rights in the digital environment included:** parental controls; gambling; age verification; data minimisation and proportionality (General comment No. 25, paras 55, 69); disinformation; disinformation and fake news; age verification; right to be heard; access to sexual and reproductive health information online; censorship; commercial exploitation; protection of minorities online; harmful products; excessive screen use; advertising.⁴¹

The Concluding observations routinely address State responsibilities under the OPSC under its 'General measures of implementation' or 'Main areas of concern and recommendations', urging States to ensure the realisation of children's rights in 'accordance with the Convention, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.'⁴²

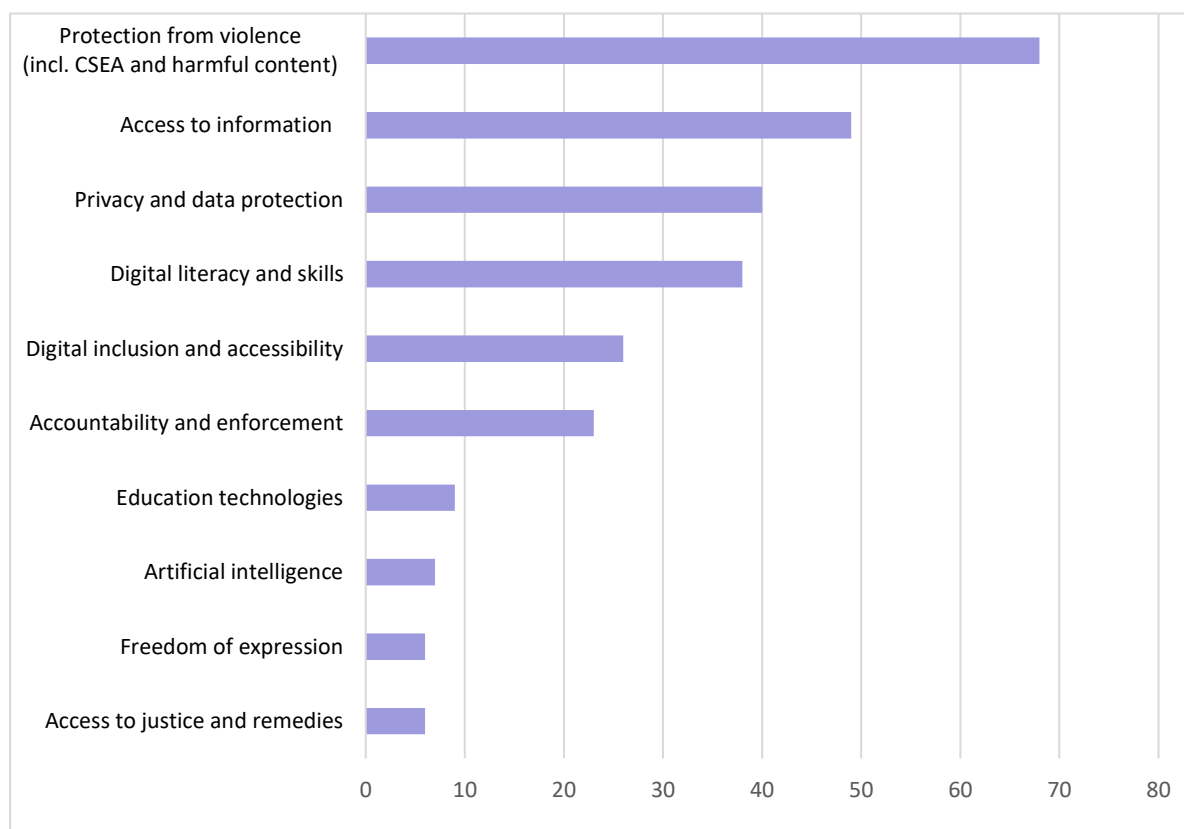
Most Concluding observations also make specific recommendations linked to the OPSC. These range from broad to more specific. In its preamble, the OPSC recognises the role of the internet and digital technologies in the dissemination of CSAM, and beyond this, its text encompasses all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, which includes such acts facilitated by digital technologies. Our analysis shows that the Committee routinely addresses State obligations under the Optional Protocol relating to sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), **linking these obligations to the digital environment in 50 of the 79 Concluding observations.**

When considered with the Committee's references to online safety more broadly, a total of **68 Concluding observations address online safety and protection, including protection from harmful content and information.** Indeed, of the full range of children's rights, our analysis reveals that the Committee prioritises children's protection from harm (including sexual exploitation and abuse) (Articles 19 and 34), children's right to access information (Article 17), the right to privacy (Article 16) and the right to education (Article 26), and the responsibilities of States (Article 4, and other), when it comes to the digital environment. The Concluding observations thus reflects an agenda that prioritises protection (see Figure 3).

⁴¹ By necessity, and inevitably the general comment covers a lot of issues, which means that no single Concluding observation can address all issues in detail. To some degree, the particular references made relating to the general comment speak more to the Committee's and State Parties' areas of expertise or issues surfaced in alternative reports rather than a reflection of children's experiences of the digital world in reviewed countries.

⁴² There are exceptions like Cyprus, where the OPSC is not addressed.

Figure 3: Number of text references in Concluding observations to children's rights in relation to the digital environment (N=79)



Currently, less addressed in the Concluding observations with relation to the digital environment are rights such as the right to rest, leisure and play (Article 31), despite the general comment's attention to culture, leisure and play in the digital environment (General comment No. 25, paras 106-111). We have not identified any reference in the Concluding observations to the right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly (Article 15) with regard to the digital environment, despite digital spaces being integral to children and youths' political and cultural engagement.⁴³ Although the Committee routinely calls for States to meaningfully engage children in the 'design, implementation of policies and programmes aimed at achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals', the right to be heard (Article 12) and participate in decision-making processes regarding particularly digital policies, design or governance, remains sparse.

Only addressed in a few Concluding observations, the right to remedy and redress with regard to online rights violations, more broadly, could more fully be addressed in relation to the digital environment and the specific requirements for training of police and prosecutors as well as funding online reporting mechanisms and specialised investigation units. This relates to the broader need to hold companies accountable, as highlighted across many Concluding observations, and can be applied more routinely to

⁴³ In the Committee's List of issues to Viet Nam (17 November 2020, CRC/C/VNM/Q/5-6) the right to freedom of association is explicitly cited, yet not in its Concluding observation (21 October 2022, CRC/C/VNM/CO/5-6).

ensure businesses meet their responsibilities under General comment No. 25 and General comment No. 16 on business and children's rights.

Finally, although protection is a dominant theme, our analysis reveals that since the adoption of the general comment, the Committee's approach is increasingly broadening beyond only protection and toward the broader remit of the general comment.

Emerging challenges in the digital environment

Artificial intelligence

In its introduction, the general comment acknowledges the ever-evolving and expanding digital environment, listing areas where such developments are likely to occur, such as virtual and augmented realities, artificial intelligence (AI) and more. AI is addressed in the general comment through provisions on the automated processing and filtering of children's data (para. 10), requiring that recommendation systems (para. 53) and other AI-driven technologies do not prioritise commercial interests over children's rights, distort or manipulate information (para. 60) or influence children's behaviour or emotions (para. 62). Any automated processing of data must fully respect the child's right to privacy (paras 74-75).

On AI, the Committee first addresses the issue in its Concluding observation on Estonia,⁴⁴ urging the State Party to:

Elaborate safeguards with a view to ensuring the rights of children in the use of artificial intelligence.

In its Concluding observation for St Kitts and Nevis⁴⁵ as well as Slovakia⁴⁶ (issued on the same day), the Committee reiterates the same recommendation, indicating an unfolding standard recommendation. Following these recommendations, in its Concluding observations to Brazil⁴⁷ in July 2025, the Committee welcomed the preliminary ban on using personal data for AI development, and while recalling the general comment, urged the State to strengthen its legal framework for children's data protection, fully implement Brazil's Resolution 245/2024 on children's rights in the digital environment, and prohibit the use of children's personal data in AI systems.⁴⁸

Similarly, the Concluding observation on Romania from July 2025 also acknowledges the national campaign for the digital education of children and young people, 'including

⁴⁴ Estonia (18 June 2024) CRC/C/EST/CO/5-7, para. 22(c).

⁴⁵ Saint Kitts and Nevis (26 February 2025) CRC/C/KNA/CO/2.

⁴⁶ Slovakia (26 February 2025) CRC/C/SVK/CO/6.

⁴⁷ Brazil (25 July 2025) CRC/C/BRA/CO/5-7.

⁴⁸ Brazil (25 July 2025) CRC/C/BRA/CO/5-7, para. 25(a), 25(b).

with respect to artificial intelligence, and the measures taken to implement European Union regulation 2022/2065.⁴⁹

Based on these developments, it is likely the Committee will continue to develop its position on AI as countries, regional organisations such as the EU, intergovernmental organisations and others formulate policy, legislation and regulation related to AI. This indicates that Committee's developing interpretations and recommendations are linked to broader international developments beyond the general comment and the UNCRC, connecting its practice to more concrete and enforceable legal norms.

Referencing regional regulation

EU regulation specifically has been referenced by the Committee in several Concluding observations related to both the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)⁵⁰ (on data protection and privacy) and the Digital Services Act (DSA)⁵¹ (which focuses on online safety and consumer protection on online platforms). For instance, in the case of Lithuania⁵² the Committee recommends the implementation of GDPR, both in the List of issues and the Concluding observation, through the law on legal protection of personal data from 2018, urging Lithuania to 'adopt regulations for media to protect children's privacy and safety in the digital environment' (para. 25a).⁵³ As national and regional regulation develops on topics like privacy, data protection and protection from harms in the digital environment, and specifically on challenges like AI, it can be expected that this will also be reflected in the Committee's practice.

State censorship and infringement of children's right to privacy

The general comment urges States Parties to protect children from 'harmful and untrustworthy content and ensure that relevant businesses and other providers of digital content develop and implement guidelines to enable children to safely access diverse content' (para. 54). Children's rights to access information and freedom of expression are extensively addressed in Section VI of the general comment on civil rights and freedoms, intrinsically linked to the right to seek and impart information and ideas while recognising the possibilities the digital environment provides children to express themselves.

From the Concluding observations, we can see that the right to freedom of expression and to access appropriate information in the digital environment is approached by both encouraging States to ensure children's access to information and by recognising when

⁴⁹ See Official Journal of the European Union (2022); Romania (28 July 2025) CRC/C/ROU/6-7, para. 19.

⁵⁰ Official Journal of the European Union (2016).

⁵¹ See Official Journal of the European Union (2022).

⁵² Lithuania (7 March 2024) CRC/C/LTU/CO/5-6, para. 25(a).

⁵³ Although limited in number, these references indicate that the Committee can refer to state responsibilities under EU regulation, if these are aligned with the purposes of the general comment such as relating to matters of data privacy and protection, as well as online safety.

State Parties' legislative or judiciary practices may be actively impeding children's rights and freedoms. For example:

- **Viet Nam:** the Committee recommends the government 'amend the Cybersecurity Law to prevent unlawful and arbitrary interference with children's privacy and to ensure that any interference upholds the principle of data minimisation and is proportionate and in accordance with the UNCRC'.⁵⁴
- **Eritrea:** the Committee raised concerns about restrictions on the freedom of expression and online censorship, encouraging the State Party to ensure an independent media without undue restrictions, enabling children to be able to freely and safely express themselves, 'free from censorship, surveillance, intimidation, harassment and bullying, including in the digital environment'.⁵⁵
- **Russia:** the Committee recommends taking immediate action 'to end the persecution of children for expressing their views, in particular regarding in the digital environment, and ensure that no child is arrested, charged with criminal or administrative offences or sentenced for expressing such views and revoke such charges with immediate effect'.⁵⁶
- **Turkmenistan:**⁵⁷ the Committee found that, despite formal legal guarantees, children in Turkmenistan face systematic restrictions on freedom of expression and access to information due to traditional social norms, lack of implementation measures, state censorship and blocking of international websites and media. It urges the State Party to end censorship, enable independent media, expand access to diverse online and offline information, and strengthen digital literacy in line with the general comment.

These recommendations reflect the Committee's recognition of the importance of the internet for children to access diverse and valuable information, including from international sources, as essential for their development, participation and freedom of expression and thought. In the case of Turkmenistan, it points to the impact that censorship and the limiting of children's access to diverse and international sources may have on children's learning and development as 'severely restricting children's opportunities for learning and development in the digital era'.⁵⁸

While States often prioritise shielding children from harmful content, they are less consistent in guaranteeing children's right to access plural and diverse forms of information and to exercise freedom of expression. The Committee's work highlights that overemphasis by states on protective measures, through censorship, surveillance

⁵⁴ Viet Nam (21 October 2022) CRC/C/VNM/CO/5-6, para. 26(a).

⁵⁵ Eritrea (5 March 2025) CRC/C/ERI/CO/5-6, para. 20.

⁵⁶ Russian Federation (1 March 2024) CRC/C/RUS/CO/6-7, para. 22.

⁵⁷ Turkmenistan (9 October 2024) CRC/C/TKM/CO/5-6.

⁵⁸ Turkmenistan (9 October 2024) CRC/C/TKM/CO/5-6, para. 20(e).

or disproportionate restrictions, can violate children's rights, undermining their agency, evolving capacities and opportunities for participation.

The right to be heard in decision-making processes relating to the digital environment

Children's right to be heard is one of the UNCRC's general principles, rooted in Article 12, and guiding the interpretation of all other rights. While widely endorsed, it is often treated tokenistically or subordinated to protection.⁵⁹ The general comment recognises that the digital environment is a unique space for participation, enabling children to express themselves, exercise autonomy and develop their agency. It requires States to consult children in the development of laws, policies and programmes concerning the digital environment, and expects digital service providers to engage with children when designing their products and services, ensuring their views are considered and their rights safeguarded (paras 16-18).

The general comment frames participation both as a right and an opportunity uniquely enhanced by the digital environment. States and private actors are expected to enable meaningful participation that is inclusive and safe and free from exploitation. In practice, the Committee's Concluding observations approach participation mainly through access to information and online safety and less frequently, but nonetheless also, freedom of expression, an approach that allows children the possibility of participating in the benefits of the digital environment while being protected from the risks and harms. References to children's involvement in policymaking or product design remain rare.

The Committee's List of issues for Romania urges States to ensure safe and meaningful online participation and to build media capacity to support children's voices.⁶⁰ Similarly, in its Concluding observations to Romania, it called for improved internet access and digital literacy, with particular attention to vulnerable groups, to ensure inclusive media spaces.⁶¹

In Finland's review, an alternative report⁶² points out that: 'Participation of children in designing services is very limited and should be strengthened'. This concern, linked to the right to be heard, was not reflected in the Concluding observations. More broadly, there is little evidence that children are being systematically consulted in decisions on digital regulation or product design. Some promising examples include initiatives such as Safer Internet Centres and the involvement of children in consultation processes linked to certain legislative processes.⁶³

⁵⁹ Collins (2017).

⁶⁰ Romania (22 June 2023) CRC/C/ROU/QPR/6-7, para. 17 (d).

⁶¹ Romania (28 July 2025) CRC/C/ROU/CO/6-7.

⁶² *Alternative report on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additions, comments and proposals by NGOs and other actors in Finland* (28 June 2022).

⁶³ For instance, in the UK.

Echoing wider critiques of international child protection efforts,⁶⁴ the Committee's treatment of participation continues to centre on access to information and safe use of digital spaces. Without stronger requirements for States and industry to embed children's perspectives in policy and design, participation risks being confined to protective measures rather than realised as a transformative right.

Impact of General comment No. 25 on the Committee's Concluding observations

The analysis of the Concluding observations and List of issues reveals a gradual but marked evolution in how children's rights in the digital environment are addressed. Before 2021, digital topics appeared piecemeal, mainly framed around CSEA, protection from harmful content, digital literacy in education or responses to cyberbullying. The general comment introduced a more coherent framework that has since guided a more structured and consistent monitoring approach. References to the digital environment now appear regularly, mostly under the right to privacy and access to information, reflecting a standardised formula in the Committee's Concluding observations.

In 2025, this approach has become more focused on implementation as Concluding observations consistently address and explicitly reference the general comment while requiring concrete legal and regulatory action,⁶⁵ further developing its equity-driven approach to digital inclusion for rural, Indigenous, other minority and disabled children.⁶⁶ The Committee's concern for privacy rights and data protection are updated with explicit AI safeguards.⁶⁷ Overall, the general comment has clearly shaped the Committee's digital agenda, bringing the rights of the child in the digital environment into sharper focus. Yet, despite developing a more structured approach, its application has been uneven. Some States receive detailed recommendations on online safety, digital inclusion, literacy, privacy and data protection, while others receive only brief mentions of online safety. The Committee's work also reflects broader tensions, for instance between safeguarding from harm and enabling participation, and between national sovereignty, regional legislation (e.g., EU legislation) and the global nature of digital platforms.

This protectionist-focused approach can overlook other important cornerstones of the civil and cultural rights of children in the digital environment, leaving gaps. For instance, the right to play and leisure are not mentioned, despite the millions of children who use the internet for play and leisure, such as through digital gaming. Although participation is often framed solely as safe access to digital spaces, the right to be heard requires States and private actors to actively consult children in policy and design processes.

⁶⁴ Collins (2017).

⁶⁵ Ecuador: resource and empower authorities; Iraq: adopt cybercrime law.

⁶⁶ See Ecuador; Slovakia; Honduras; Peru; Eritrea.

⁶⁷ See Brazil's ban on using children's data for AI; St Kitts and Nevis; Norway.

Emerging challenges, such as AI, algorithmic profiling, targeted advertising and state surveillance, have only recently begun to surface in recommendations, often in response to regional or national developments (e.g., the EU GDPR, DSA, and AI Act).

Challenges remain in mainstreaming children's rights in relation to the digital environment across all State reviews, in expanding beyond a primarily protective framing, ensuring that children's own voices are meaningfully integrated into governance and design processes as well as effectively addressing business accountability for violations of children's rights caused by or perpetrated through their digital products and services.

Alternative reports

We analysed the alternative reports during the same years, 2021-25, to map how reporting actors such as civil society, NHRIs and UN bodies reference and use the general comment to advocate to the Committee that it should address topics related to the digital environment. Alternative reporting reflects the engagement and infrastructure of child rights actors in different countries. In some countries with multiple child rights, civil society and NGOs, the Committee is provided with plentiful alternative reports offering detailed and reliable information, greatly facilitating the monitoring process. In smaller or low-income countries where civil society is under-resourced, the Committee receives few alternative reports.

Our analysis revealed that high-income countries with more developed tech regulations and digital infrastructure tend to generate more alternative reports related to children's rights in the digital environment. Large middle-income countries with a more significant civil society and NGO presence also generate many alternative reports, including on topics relating to the digital environment. Across the alternative reports, civil society organisations and NHRIs increasingly reference the general comment as a normative framework to advocate for stronger state accountability relating to topics such as online safety, privacy, digital literacy and inclusion. Most references to the digital environment remain concentrated on protection from technology-facilitated CSEA (referencing the general comment and the OPSC).

Here we illustrate how alternative reports refer to the general comment in ways that are reflected in the Committee's subsequent Concluding observations.⁶⁸

From Norway, ECPAT Norge (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking Norway) explicitly cites the general comment to argue that Norway's proposed minimum age of 15 for social media use breaches children's rights under the general comment.⁶⁹ It warns that blanket restrictions undermine rights to access, expression and participation online, urging instead that protection be balanced with empowerment. Drawing on the general comment, ECPAT calls for legislation requiring platforms to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated CSEA, enforce duties of care and provide effective redress for non-consensual image-sharing. NIM's (Norges institusjon for menneskerettigheter [Norwegian Human Rights Institution])⁷⁰ 2023 submission and its 2025⁷¹ alternative report explicitly invoke the general comment in relation to children's rights to privacy in the digital environment, highlighting gaps in Norway's legal protections, which included removing the 'best interest' clause from the 2018 Personal Data Act. NIM also pointed to ambiguity around parental surveillance and weak remedies for online violations of

⁶⁸ Overall, there were few examples across alternative reports that referenced the digital environment, and even fewer referenced General comment No. 25 explicitly. We present here some of the examples we identified.

⁶⁹ ECPAT Norway (2024).

⁷⁰ NIM (2023).

⁷¹ NIM (2025).

children's rights. It urges the State to reinstate the safeguard and ensure enforceable complaint mechanisms across public and private contexts. The recommendations by the Committee reflect clear influence from ECPAT and NIM's general comment-based submissions. The Committee recalls the general comment, urging stronger privacy safeguards, remedies and regulation of harmful content and advertising, echoing NIM's concerns.⁷² It also mirrors ECPAT's advocacy by addressing technology-facilitated sexual exploitation, sextortion and digital violence, calling for improved detection, training and prevention.

Brazil's supplementary reports depict a fragmented but mobilised landscape of actors rallying around children's rights online. Civil society highlights legislative gaps like a lack of LGBTQIA+ protections and weak platform accountability, as well as weak responses to identified harms such as cyberbullying, hate speech, extremism and rising incidences of technology-facilitated CSEA. Other topics raised include mental health impacts and limited public services. The Alana Institute⁷³ anchors its advocacy explicitly in the general comment, publishing a translated and annotated version to support dissemination. The Committee's Concluding observations⁷⁴ to Brazil in 2025 mirror Alana's general comment-based advocacy as it recalls the general comment and advances Alana's key recommendations on stronger data protection for children, the adoption of a national policy on children's rights in the digital environment and prohibitions on using children's data to train AI, paired with recommendations for stronger accountability of tech companies and remedies.

Honduras' alternative reports depict a high-risk digital environment with pervasive online CSEA, online hate/discrimination and tech-facilitated gang recruitment. COIPRODEN⁷⁵ (a network of child rights organisations) invokes the general comment, urging the regulation of platforms and service providers, accession to the Budapest Convention, priority investigations and social protection for at-risk families. COPRODEN's children's report highlights children's requests for increased internet access in schools and in their communities. Cattrachas⁷⁶ (an LGBTQIA+ NGO) documents online hate, non-consensual image-sharing and punitive school responses harming LGBTI adolescents (although not explicitly referencing the general comment).⁷⁷ CPTRT/OMCT⁷⁸ (anti-torture organisations) note technology-enabled recruitment and the absence of digital safety programmes. Cross-cutting concerns align with the remit of the general comment, addressing topics such as platform accountability, data privacy safeguards, expanded digital literacy, stronger evidence systems, accessible remedies, and better-coordinated victim support. The Committee's Concluding observations recall the general comment and echo the recommendations made in the alternative reports

⁷² Norway (22 July 2025) CRC/C/NOR/CO/7.

⁷³ Alana Institute (2024).

⁷⁴ Brazil (25 July 2025) CRC/C/BRA/CO/5-7.

⁷⁵ Red de Instituciones COIPRODEN por los derechos de los Ninez (2023).

⁷⁶ Red Lésbica Cattrachas (2020).

⁷⁷ Red de Instituciones COIPRODEN por los derechos de los Ninez (2023).

⁷⁸ CPTRT (Centro de Prevencion, Tratamiento y Rehabilitacion de las victimas de la tortura y sus Familiares) y OMCT (la Organizacion Mundial Contra la Tortura). Informaciones adicionales para el examen de Honduras.

on expanding digital inclusion (CPTRT/OMCT), ensuring access to information while also ensuring protection from harmful content and enabling prosecution (COIPRODEN), embedding digital literacy in school curricula and adopting regulations and policies for online safety. This exemplifies how the Committee both responds directly to civil society's general comment-informed recommendations and also incorporates its own analysis to frame recommendations related to the digital environment.

There are several examples of the influence of alternative reports in the Committee's considerations of topics relating to children's rights in the digital environment. In the case of Slovakia, civil society reports did not explicitly cite the general comment but raised problems related to non-discrimination and digital inclusion, particularly affecting Roma children. This was picked up in the Committee's Concluding observations with reference to the general comment.⁷⁹ Similarly, the Committee referenced UNICEF's reporting on cyberbullying, online safety and data protection.⁸⁰

Alternative reports are a crucial source of information for the Committee to make precise recommendations, also relating to digital challenges. These examples show that the Committee's recommendations have been shaped by the concerns raised in alternative reports. In cases like Brazil and Norway, where established civil society organisations and NHRIs address rights in the digital environment and specifically draw on the general comment, the Committee picks this up. A lack of alternative reports addressing the digital environment suggests there is a lack of dissemination of the general comment on a national level. In Brazil, the translation and annotated versions have had a significant impact on the national legislative process. Further, such efforts would likely improve its dissemination elsewhere.

Lastly, child-led and child-informed alternative reports reflect children's concerns with the digital environment, such as Save the Children Philippines, where children highlighted the persistent inequalities in internet connectivity and access to devices. Hope and Homes⁸¹ and Save the Children Romania's child-led reports raise concerns about online risks and harms, and concerns with digital literacy, access to information and protection from online harms. Yet children's alternative reports do not reflect knowledge of the general comment, suggesting more needs to be done to raise awareness about the general comment among children.

⁷⁹ Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva (2024).

⁸⁰ UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein (2022).

⁸¹ Hope and Homes for Children (2024).

State Party reports

We next examine how countries recognise and prioritise children's rights in the digital environment through their laws, policies and practices (see also Appendix 2). State Party reports suggest uneven levels of implementation across key areas. While these reports offer only a partial view of national infrastructures and measures, they provide valuable insight into how States understand and frame these issues as child rights concerns, and what they present as examples of progress. The findings should be interpreted critically, alongside alternative reports, national data and civil society evidence. Since State reports respond to the Committee's List of issues, their content should be interpreted in light of the specific information the Committee has requested and the information the Committee considers for its recommendations. Based on the most frequently referenced issues raised in the Concluding observations, we classified States according to their level of realisation of children's rights at a State level (referring to General comment No. 25):

- Access to appropriate information (paras 50-57)
- Protection from harmful content (paras 54-56)
- Privacy and data protection (paras 67-78)
- Protection and safety (from online violence, exploitation and abuse) (legislation and policy) (paras 25, 82)
- Digital literacy (paras 11, 21, 32, 104-105)
- Digital inclusion (paras 4, 9-11)
- Company accountability (prosecutions, ISP obligations and more) (paras 22-25, 67-70, 74-75, 82-84, 87, 96-102, 107-108)

States were then ranked by level of realisation of children's rights in the digital environment, based on the information provided in their State reports (Figure 4):

- 0 = no information reported
- 1 = plan to implement law, policy, mechanism or measure
- 2 = a policy or programme referenced, with no specific measures, mechanism or specifically allocated resources
- 3 = a specific law, policy with specific mechanism referenced and/or specifically allocated resources
- 4 = law and enforcement through resources and/or mechanisms and institutions established

Figure 4: Level of State realisation of children's rights in the digital environment based on the Committee's priority themes

	Access to information	Protection from harmful content	Privacy & data protection	Protection from violence	Digital literacy	Digital inclusion	Accountability & enforcement
Albania	3	4	3	2	2	2	3
Andorra	2	3	3	3	4	3	2
Argentina	2	3	2	3	3	3	2
Armenia	2	2	1	1	2	2	0
Azerbaijan	3	4	2	4	3	3	2
Bhutan	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
Bolivia	2	2	0	2	2	3	0
Brazil	3	4	4	4	3	3	2
Bulgaria	2	3	3	3	2	1	3
Cambodia	1	2	1	2	2	1	0
Canada	3	4	3	4	3	3	2
Chile	3	2	2	2	3	3	0
Congo (Rep.)	1	4	1	3	2	2	2
Croatia	3	4	4	3	3	3	1
Cuba	2	1	2	2	2	2	0
Cyprus	3	4	2	3	2	3	0
Czechia	2	3	2	3	3	1	0
Djibouti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dominican Republic	3	3	2	3	4	3	2
Ecuador	3	4	2	4	3	4	3
Egypt	2	4	2	4	2	2	2
Eritrea	2	4	2	4	3	2	3
Estonia	4	4	2	4	4	4	2
Eswatini	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Finland	4	4	4	4	4	4	3
France	3	4	4	4	3	1	4
Georgia	3	4	4	4	3	3	2
Germany	3	4	2	4	4	3	4
Greece	3	3	2	4	3	3	0
Guatemala	2	4	2	4	2	1	1
Honduras	3	2	0	2	2	3	0
Iceland	4	4	3	3	3	4	1
Indonesia	3	4	2	4	3	3	4
Iraq	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ireland	3	1	3	2	4	4	2
Israel	3	4	2	4	3	1	3
Jordan	2	4	2	4	3	3	0
Kiribati	2	1	0	0	1	2	0
Kuwait	3	3	0	3	2	1	0
Kyrgyzstan	2	3	2	2	1	2	1
Liechtenstein	3	2	3	2	3	3	0
Lithuania	3	4	4	4	3	3	3
Luxembourg	2	4	4	4	4	4	4
Madagascar	0	4	1	4	2	1	1
Mali	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mauritius	3	4	4	4	3	2	3
Mexico	3	4	3	4	3	3	3
Namibia	3	3	1	3	3	2	1
New Zealand	3	4	3	4	4	4	2
North Macedonia	4	4	1	3	4	3	0
Norway	4	3	4	3	4	4	3
Oman	2	4	2	4	3	3	2
Paraguay	3	3	2	3	3	2	1
Peru	3	4	2	3	3	3	2
Poland	2	4	2	4	3	3	0
Qatar	3	4	2	3	2	2	1
Romania	2	4	3	4	2	1	4
Russia	1	4	2	4	3	2	4
Saint Kitts & Nevis	3	0	1	0	0	1	0
São Tomé & Príncipe	3	2	0	2	2	3	0
Senegal	3	4	3	3	2	2	0
Slovakia	1	4	2	3	3	3	3
Somalia	2	1	0	1	1	1	0
South Africa	2	4	4	4	3	3	3
South Sudan	3	2	0	2	1	2	0
Sweden	3	4	3	4	4	4	3
Switzerland	2	4	3	4	2	2	2
The Gambia	2	1	0	1	2	1	1
The Netherlands	3	4	3	3	4	3	3
The Philippines	2	4	3	4	2	3	3
The United Kingdom	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Togo	0	0	0	0	1	2	0
Tunisia	3	1	2	1	0	0	1
Türkiye	2	4	3	4	3	3	3
Turkmenistan	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
Ukraine	4	3	2	3	2	2	0
Uzbekistan	3	4	2	4	2	4	4
Viet Nam	2	3	2	3	4	3	2
Zambia	1	3	0	3	2	1	2

The results suggest wide disparities in both regulatory sophistication and infrastructural capacity, reflecting differing stages of digital transformation, governance traditions, governmental resources and child rights integration.

Based on the ranking of countries' integration of children's rights in the digital environment in Figure 4, we grouped States broadly according to their evolution of child rights-based digital governance (Table 1). High-income, highly digitalised States, such as Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, have established mature tech regulatory ecosystems. These combine comprehensive data protection regimes (often GDPR-based), specialised online safety regulators and regulatory frameworks that bind industry actors to child-specific duties of care. Digital inclusion policies and education policies are embedded within broader digital strategies, ensuring that protection and provision are institutionally linked. Their infrastructures feature broadband universality, digital literacy curricula, parental control frameworks and dedicated ombuds institutions.

In middle-income contexts, such as Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Indonesia and Türkiye, regulatory development is more fragmented but increasingly ambitious. Tech regulation is driven by cybersecurity and online harm agendas, often supported by cross-ministerial coordination or participation in global initiatives such as WeProtect and INHOPE. These countries tend to emphasise law enforcement mechanisms, such as cybercrime laws, police cyber units and hotlines, rather than data protection or other forms of regulation. Education and digital literacy programmes, often with international NGO support, compensate for institutional gaps. At the same time, infrastructure development, such as broadband expansion, e-learning platforms and device distribution, is framed as a means of ensuring digital inclusion. These approaches tend to be protection-focused, indicating that they are still evolving toward more holistic frameworks.

In lower-income and conflict/post-conflict settings, such as the Gambia, Eritrea, South Sudan and the Congo, regulation is nascent and largely externally scaffolded through international partnerships with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UNICEF and Interpol (International Criminal Police Organisation). Internet penetration remains low, limiting both exposure to and governance of online risks. In these countries, child rights protection is primarily pursued through awareness campaigns, hotlines, or the adaptation of general cybercrime laws. Digital infrastructure constraints dominate policy attention, making inclusion a significant challenge in its own right. These environments exhibit aspirational but under-resourced systems.

Transitional or hybrid models found in countries like Jordan, Armenia and Viet Nam suggest an emerging shift from reactive enforcement to more strategic governance, including the establishment of digital forensic units, safer internet platforms and early steps toward child-specific policies, legislation and regulation.

Overall, the analysis reveals an uneven global landscape:

- A few States increasingly adopt comprehensive rights-based tech regulation
- A growing middle tier with a primarily protection-focused agenda implemented through law enforcement and educational measures
- A larger set of countries constrained by infrastructure, capacity and governance deficits.

Table 1: Evolution of child rights-based digital governance

Category	Qualitative Interpretation	Country examples
Comprehensive, rights-based regulation	These States display an integrated, institutionalised approach that connects protection, provision and participation within a child rights framework. They have enforceable legislation (often aligned with GDPR), independent regulators, company accountability mechanisms, and digital inclusion policies that reach vulnerable groups. Education systems embed digital literacy, and remedies are accessible through ombudsmen or regulators.	Finland, UK, Germany, Netherlands, France, Ireland, Norway
Substantive and evolving regulation	These States have multiple sectoral laws and active programmes (cybersecurity, online harms, digital inclusion, e-education) but tend to emphasise enforcement and protection over participation or company accountability. Data protection may exist, but it lacks full child-specific integration.	Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Indonesia, Türkiye, Estonia, Canada
Foundational yet fragmented frameworks	These States have established some legislation or national strategy, but lack enforcement mechanisms or coordination across sectors. Policies are typically reactive (cybercrime, online abuse) and not linked to rights-based frameworks. Inclusion and education are progressing, often with the support of external donors.	Jordan, Viet Nam, Armenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary
Nascent protection-focused development	These States exhibit emerging engagement, such as draft policies, cybercrime acts, helplines or awareness campaigns, but with minimal institutionalisation, limited budgets and weak or absent enforcement mechanisms. Child rights in the digital environment are largely addressed via law enforcement or ICT ministries. Internet access and literacy initiatives are expanding, but unevenly and often limited.	Ecuador, Oman, Bhutan, Namibia, Ukraine, Kuwait, Russia, Tunisia, North Macedonia,
Minimal development	These States remain constrained by conflict, limited connectivity and limited resources. Regulation is generic, externally driven or aspirational (draft laws, partnerships with UNICEF/ITU/Interpol). Measures focus on awareness and prevention, but institutional frameworks, enforcement and inclusion remain weak.	Eritrea, the Gambia, South Sudan, Congo, Zambia, Madagascar, Cambodia, Senegal
No development	These low-income States did not report any activities, policies or laws related to the digital environment.	Djibouti, Mali, Eswatini

Conclusions

General comments provide authoritative guidance based on the Committee's jurisprudence and experience in monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC by State Parties.⁸² They are adopted to guide States in implementing the UNCRC's provisions in specific areas, and they need to be taken into account by State Parties.⁸³

Evaluations of the impact of general comments are rarely undertaken. However, since General comment No. 25 marked a pivotal moment for recognising that children's rights apply fully and equally in the digital environment, we decided to examine its take-up in practice.

These findings reveal that the Committee on the Rights of the Child has progressively integrated General comment No. 25 into its monitoring practice of States since 2021. The general comment has provided a coherent framework, shifting the Committee's approach from piecemeal mentions of digital topics to a more consistent approach centred under the umbrella of the right to information and privacy. Over time, references have become more consistent. By 2025, the general comment was cited in all the Committee's Concluding observations, with recommendations moving from general calls for awareness and literacy to more concrete demands for legislation, enforcement and remedies.

At the country level, our analysis reveals that high-income countries with more advanced digital infrastructure and regulatory systems demonstrate that comprehensive and child-centred regulation is achievable when data protection, safety, inclusion and participation are treated as mutually reinforcing dimensions of policy. Middle-income and transitional countries illustrate pathways of progress but also reveal a dominance of a security and protection-driven agenda. In lower-income settings, persistent infrastructural deficits and reliance on international partners underline the urgent need for strengthened digital infrastructure, capacity building in governance and adequately resourced regulators.

The cumulative picture underlines how the transformative potential of General comment No. 25, and children's enjoyment of their rights in the digital environment, regardless of geography, will depend on sustained investment, international solidarity and the systematic use of indicators.

Other reporting entities, such as civil society organisations, NHRIs, UN agencies and child-led initiatives, play a vital role in advancing the agenda set forth by the general comment and ensuring enforceable policy and action in State Parties. We identified alternative reports that explicitly cite the general comment in their advocacy to the

⁸² Khazova (2021).

⁸³ Šahović et al. (2012).

Committee, providing important information and insight on the status of children's rights in the digital environment and related topics, thereby strengthening the normative weight of the general comment in the monitoring system. This explicit advocacy has led to more specific and enforceable recommendations by the Committee, particularly in areas such as corporate accountability, data protection and AI-related harms, underscoring the general comment's value as an advocacy tool for non-state actors and NHRIs.

Evolution of the Committee's approach

Since 2021, the Committee has standardised its approach to the general comment in the review process, moving from a broader concern with harms, privacy and literacy to address the concrete legal, institutional and enforcement requirements needed to realise children's rights in relation to protection from technology-facilitated CSEA, digital inclusion, freedom of expression, AI, advertising and screen use, and aligning with regional tech regulation. By 2024, the Committee increasingly emphasised the implementation of existing laws and mechanisms, scrutinising their effectiveness and paying attention to the digital infrastructure (e.g., connectivity, devices, school systems).

There is also a more precise articulation of company duties and, where relevant, an increasing focus on stronger protection of freedom of expression and access to diverse information in the digital environment. In conclusion, the Committee's approach has become increasingly more granular, but differences exist across countries, with the right to be heard in decision-making processes relating to digital governance and design rarely specifically stated.

The Committee's approach has evolved since the general comment was adopted in 2021 in the following ways:

- **From piecemeal mentions toward a standardised approach for recommendations relating to the general comment:** Beginning in 2021, many Concluding observations adopted a repeated structure under the right to privacy and access to appropriate information to (1) ensure laws respect privacy and protect children from online harms; (2) enhance digital literacy; (3) improve digital inclusion and affordability; and (4) create enforcement mechanisms. This format was consolidated in 2023-25.⁸⁴
- **Increased anchoring in UNCRC articles, with a broadening scope:** After 2022, more explicit references were made to freedom of expression (Article 13), where State censorship on the internet, surveillance or disproportionate restrictions are brought into question with regard to children's rights to

⁸⁴ Examples include: Iceland (2022); the Netherlands (2022); Sweden (2023); Bulgaria (2024); Senegal (2024); Jordan (2023); Namibia (2024); Honduras (2025); Peru (2025); Indonesia (2025).

freedom of expression and to access information from diverse sources,⁸⁵ hence broadening the approach beyond protection to provision and participation.

- **Expanding from digital literacy to equity and access:** In 2021, digital literacy and skills for children, parents and teachers were foregrounded. In addition, from 2022 to 2025 digital inclusion, access and affordability came increasingly into focus.
- **From capacity building to more specific recommendations on regulation and remedy:** Early Concluding observations emphasised States' obligations to protect children from harmful content. From 2023 onward, recommendations increasingly: (1) called for the drafting of specific legislation and the implementation of drafted legislation;⁸⁶ (2) requested operational enforcement, such as requiring ISPs to block or remove harmful content, sanction companies that fail to protect children's rights, and establish complaint and redress mechanisms for children whose rights have been violated;⁸⁷ and (3) called for the allocation of funding to ensure institutional capacity and effective implementation regarding the digital environment.⁸⁸ This shows the Committee increasingly takes into account the necessary mechanisms and enforcement infrastructure to realise the rights of children in the digital environment.
- **Toward inclusion and participation:** While online harms remained central in many Concluding observations until 2025 (such as protection from harmful content and technology-facilitated CSEA),⁸⁹ the Committee has more consistently come to address (1) digital inclusion measures;⁹⁰ (2) the State's obligation to provide access to high-quality, diverse and age-appropriate information sources, including from international sources, that are independent from commercial and political interests;⁹¹ and (3) to ensure information is accessible online in minority languages (such as Indigenous languages).⁹²
- **Increasing alignment with regional tech governance systems:** After 2023, Concluding observations increasingly referenced the EU GDPR and the DSA obligations for EU member states.⁹³ This demonstrates how the general

⁸⁵ See, for example, Viet Nam (2022); Russia (2024); Turkmenistan (2024); Eritrea (2025).

⁸⁶ This includes cybercrime bills or data protection-specific legislation. See, for example, Lithuania (2024); Namibia (2024); Iraq (2025).

⁸⁷ See, for example, France (2023); UK (2023); Namibia (2024); Ecuador (2025).

⁸⁸ See Germany (2022); Ecuador (2025); Estonia (2024).

⁸⁹ See UK (2023); Armenia (2024); Slovakia (2025); Iraq (2025).

⁹⁰ See South Africa (2024); Jordan (2023); Dominican Republic (2023); Namibia (2024); Honduras (2025); Peru (2025); Indonesia (2025); Eritrea (2025).

⁹¹ See, for example, Russia (2024); Cuba (2022); Peru (2025); Eritrea (2025).

⁹² See, for example, Greece (2022); Peru (2025); Georgia (2024).

⁹³ See, for example, Lithuania (2024); Romania (2025).

comment is being operationalised through existing regulatory ecosystems rather than in isolation.

- **Emergence of a broadened agenda:** In 2025, the Concluding observations include more specificity and enforcement logic (mandates, budgets, powers for child protection measures).⁹⁴ Since 2024, several Concluding observations have introduced AI safeguards,⁹⁵ including the prohibition of children's data being used for AI training as well as addressing AI-generated CSAM.⁹⁶ This agenda suggests a more updated understanding of risks and design-level harms.
- **Participation remains underdeveloped:** Participation is beginning to appear (e.g., 'safe and meaningful participation online')⁹⁷ but remains underdeveloped compared with safety, privacy and access. Child participation in digital governance and product design is rarely specifically addressed by the Committee.
- **Adapted expectations:** In countries where connectivity is limited, the Committee has increasingly been including references to States to ensure children's rights in the digital environment. But the expectations are adapted and calibrated toward basic provision of access such as connectivity, access to libraries and affordability.⁹⁸

Suggestions for the Committee

For the List of issues:

- Invite child-led or child-informed submissions systematically, including relating to the digital environment, as these inform the List of issues and Concluding observations.
- Extend the List of issues prior to reporting to balance civil and cultural rights and freedoms alongside protective rights.
- In coming periodic reviews, in order to monitor progress and the impact of legislation and regulation, request data on outcomes, such as specific information and data regarding children's exposure to risk and harm in the digital environment, digital access, access to appropriate and diverse information, to justice and remedy in case of rights violations, as well as

⁹⁴ See Ecuador (2025).

⁹⁵ Estonia (2024); St Kitts and Nevis (2025); Slovakia (2025).

⁹⁶ Brazil (2025).

⁹⁷ See Romania (2025).

⁹⁸ See, for example, Eritrea (2025); The Gambia (2025).

information monitoring how tech companies and service providers have been held to account for child rights violations.

- Integrate intersectional analyses systematically, requiring States to disaggregate data on digital access, safety and participation by gender, age, disability, minority groups, socioeconomic status and more.

For the Concluding observations:

- Require that States have mechanisms for meaningful child participation in digital governance processes, including AI governance and product design.
- Extend recommendations relating to the digital environment to all countries, including low-income countries, as problems of access and digital inclusion are also a matter of priority in these settings to ensure children can enjoy their rights in the digital environment, for which a sound digital infrastructure is needed.
- Embed a standing paragraph in Concluding observations requiring safeguards for automated decision-making, algorithmic profiling and data use in AI systems.
- Encourage States to prohibit the use of children's data for AI training.
- Require child rights impact assessments for digital products and services.
- Incorporate specific follow-up questions on remedy mechanisms, complaint systems and data protection enforcement bodies.
- Highlight resource allocation and international cooperation obligations under the Convention's Article 4 .
- Recognise the right to play, creativity, leisure and participation, aligning with Article 31, in relation to the digital environment.
- In all recommendations relating to the OPSC, explicitly address the requirements set forth by the Optional Protocol regarding the digital environment.

For the broader review process:

- Ensure that the general comment is fully operationalised in periodic reviews, requiring States to report on provision and participation alongside protection by strengthening its scrutiny of company accountability and remedies.
- We urge the Committee and other actors to increase efforts to disseminate the general comment on a national level, for which translation into local languages is key. In particular, we urge the Committee to ensure the general comment is disseminated to children.

Suggestions for reporting parties

Building on developments in child rights-based digital governance and the important gaps and obstacles to implementation at State level, we also offer suggestions for State Parties, NHRIs, international NGOs, civil society organisations and other reporting organisations. Specifically, we recommend developing a set of structural, process and outcome indicators that cover the protection, provision and participation rights of children in relation to the digital environment:⁹⁹

- Structural indicators could track the existence of laws, regulators and policies addressing children's rights in the digital environment.
- Process indicators could assess implementation, coordination and resource allocation.
- Outcome indicators could measure tangible progress in relation to children's enjoyment of their rights, relating, for instance, to access to digital devices and connection, increased safety online, improved privacy when using digital products, improved levels of digital literacy, improved measures for meaningful online participation, as well as outcome indicators to measure children's participation in decision making relating to tech regulation and product design.

These could strengthen the Committee's capacity to monitor and compare progress across these diverse contexts. Indicators would allow for a systematic translation of the obligations set out in General comment No. 25 into measurable benchmarks of implementation, linking legal commitments to institutional performance and child-level outcomes. Such indicators would enable a more consistent and evidence-based assessment of States' realisation of children's rights in the digital environment, illuminating both progress and persistent gaps, and providing a concrete foundation for targeted recommendations and international cooperation.

Through the systematic use of indicators, General comment No. 25 can be transformed into a measurable normative roadmap, ensuring that commitments translate into actionable progress and that every child benefits from a rights-respecting digital environment.

Last words

Across the State Party reviews, patterns of uptake reveal both strengths and limitations of the periodic review system. The general comment has enabled greater coherence and visibility for children's rights in the digital environment. Still, progress depends

⁹⁹ UN OHCHR (2012); Vaghri, Ruggiero and Lansdown (2025).

heavily on civil society engagement, State reporting practices and the Committee's prioritisation. Moreover, children's voices and experiences are still lacking in the State and alternative reporting, and are thus insufficiently reflected in the Committee's recommendations.¹⁰⁰ The review system's constraints limit its capacity to fully mainstream children's rights in the digital environment, including the limited time for review of each country, lack of resourcing, delayed State Party submissions, uneven evidence and reliance on State submissions, which tend to underplay where implementation is failing.

Nonetheless, the general comment has established an authoritative lens through which to analyse and interpret children's rights in the digital environment, catalysing normative change and creating a shared reference point for States, civil society and the Committee. Its long-term impact will depend on broadening attention beyond protection to include participation and provision, ensuring stronger accountability, and embedding children's voices in policymaking and digital governance.

We end by observing that our centre, Digital Futures for Children (DFC), has the express mandate of conducting research that can help advance the realisation of children's rights in relation to the digital environment within the framework of the general comment. The founders of the DFC were also integral to the drafting of the general comment. Although we are not, arguably, independently positioned to comment on any limitations of the general comment, as we see its implementation in practice, there is inevitably much to be learned about how certain priorities, or phrasings, are proving effective among State Parties, civil society and other relevant bodies and, of course, the Committee itself.

This report is the first of two, and in our next report, we will examine the wider take-up of General comment No. 25. This will become, in effect, a contribution towards a theory of change for children's rights in the digital environment. To that end, it will include a proposal for indicators by which progress can be measured.

¹⁰⁰ Research shows that children have a lot to say, not just about their experiences of the digital environment, but also, how the digital environment and digital products could be made better. Yet they are seldom consulted by governments or companies (Livingstone et al., 2024).

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Appendix 1: Concluding observations

State party	Date	CO reference	Reference to GC25 or to CRDE
Albania	17 October 2023	CRC/C/ALB/CO/5	Refers directly to GC25
Andorra	17 October 2023	CRC/C/AND/CO/3-5	Refers directly to GC25
Argentina	18 October 2024	CRC/C/ARG/CO/7	Refers directly to GC25
Armenia	14 October 2024	CRC/C/ARM/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Azerbaijan	22 February 2023	CRC/C/AZE/CO/5-6	Refers to tech-facilitated CSEA, digital skills
Bhutan	21 June 2024	CRC/C/BTN/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Bolivia	6 March 2023	CRC/C/BOL/CO/5-6	No reference
Brazil	5 June 2025	CRC/C/BRA/CO/5-7	Refers directly to GC25
Bulgaria	15 March 2024	CRC/C/BGR/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Cambodia	27 June 2022	CRC/C/KHM/CO/4-6	Refers directly to GC25
Canada	23 June 2022	CRC/C/CAN/CO/5-6	Refers to the OPSC
Chile	22 June 2022	CRC/C/CHL/CO/6-7	Refers to the OPSC
Congo (Rep.)	1 March 2024	CRC/C/COG/CO/5-6	No reference
Croatia	22 June 2022	CRC/C/HRV/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Cuba	16 June 2022	CRC/C/CUB/CO/3-6	Refers directly to GC25
Cyprus	24 June 2022	CRC/C/CYP/CO/5-6	Refers to online hate
Czechia	22 October 2021	CRC/C/CZE/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Djibouti	23 June 2022	CRC/C/DJI/CO/3-5	Refers to GC13 and online violence
Dominican Republic	18 October 2023	CRC/C/DOM/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Ecuador	27 February 2025	CRC/C/ECU/CO/7	Refers directly to GC25
Egypt	30 May 2024	CRC/C/EGY/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Eritrea	5 March 2025	CRC/C/ERI/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Estonia	30 May 2024	CRC/C/EST/CO/5-7	Refers directly to GC25
Eswatini	22 October 2021	CRC/C/SWZ/CO/2-4	Reference to digital education during COVID
Finland	15 November 2023	CRC/C/FIN/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
France	4 December 2023	CRC/C/FRA/CO/6-7	Refers to privacy, access to information online
Georgia	20 May 2024	CRC/C/GEO/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Germany	13 October 2022	CRC/C/DEU/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Greece	28 June 2022	CRC/C/GRC/CO/4-6	Refers directly to GC25
Guatemala	30 May 2024	CRC/C/GTM/CO/7	Refers directly to GC25
Honduras	26 February 2025	CRC/C/HND/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Iceland	23 June 2022	CRC/C/ISL/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Indonesia	5 June 2025	CRC/C/IDN/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Iraq	18 July 2025	CRC/C/IRQ/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Ireland	28 February 2023	CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Israel	16 October 2024	CRC/C/ISR/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Jordan	8 November 2023	CRC/C/JOR/CO/6	Refers directly to GC25
Kiribati	14 September 2022	CRC/C/KIR/CO/2-4	Refers to online violence and sexual exploitation
Kuwait	19 October 2022	CRC/C/KWT/CO/3-6	No reference
Kyrgyzstan	18 October 2023	CRC/C/KGZ/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25

Liechtenstein	17 October 2023	CRC/C/LIE/CO/3-4	Refers to the OPSC
Lithuania	8 February 2024	CRC/C/LTU/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Luxembourg	21 June 2021	CRC/C/LUX/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Madagascar	9 March 2022	CRC/C/MDG/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Mali	30 May 2024	CRC/C/MLI/CO/3-5	Refers to online violence
Mauritius	23 February 2023	CRC/C/MUS/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Mexico	8 October 2024	CRC/C/MEX/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Namibia	30 May 2024	CRC/C/NAM/CO/4-6	Refers directly to GC25
New Zealand	28 February 2023	CRC/C/NZL/CO/6	Refers directly to GC25
North Macedonia	20 October 2022	CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6	Refers to online bullying and violence.
Norway	22 July 2025	CRC/C/NOR/CO/7	Refers directly to GC25
Oman	6 March 2023	CRC/C/OMN/CO/5-6	Refers to internet access, cyberbullying
Paraguay	18 June 2024	CRC/C/PRY/CO/4-6	Refers to the OPSC, online safety
Peru	25 February 2025	CRC/C/PER/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Poland	6 December 2021	CRC/C/POL/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Qatar	11 July 2025	CRC/C/QAT/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Romania	28 July 2025	CRC/C/ROU/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Russia	1 March 2024	CRC/C/RUS/CO/6-7	Refers indirectly to the principles of GC25
Saint Kitts & Nevis	26 February 2025	CRC/C/KNA/CO/2	Refers directly to GC25
São Tomé & Príncipe	23 June 2023	CRC/C/STP/CO/5-6	No reference
Senegal	29 February 2024	CRC/C/SEN/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Slovakia	26 February 2025	CRC/C/SVK/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Somalia	22 June 2022	CRC/C/SOM/CO/1	No reference
South Africa	11 March 2024	CRC/C/ZAF/CO/3-6	Refers directly to GC25
South Sudan	27 October 2022	CRC/C/SSD/CO/1	No reference
Sweden	7 March 2023	CRC/C/SWE/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Switzerland	22 October 2021	CRC/C/CHE/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
The Gambia	28 February 2025	CRC/C/GMB/CO/4-7	Refers to access to information, right to privacy, online safety
The Netherlands	9 March 2022	CRC/C/NLD/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
The Philippines	26 October 2022	CRC/C/PHL/CO/5-6	Refers to the OPSC
The United Kingdom/GBR	22 June 2023	CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7	Refers directly to GC25
Togo	11 October 2023	CRC/C/TGO/CO/5-6	No reference
Tunisia	2 September 2021	CRC/C/TUN/CO/4-6	Refers directly to GC25
Türkiye	21 June 2023	CRC/C/TUR/CO/4-5	Refers directly to GC25
Turkmenistan	9 October 2024	CRC/C/TKM/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Ukraine	27 October 2022	CRC/C/UKR/CO/5-6	No reference
Uzbekistan	27 October 2022	CRC/C/UZB/CO/5	Refers directly to GC25
Viet Nam	21 October 2022	CRC/C/VNM/CO/5-6	Refers directly to GC25
Zambia	27 June 2022	CRC/C/ZMB/CO/5-7	Refers to online violence

Appendix 2: Country case studies

To investigate more closely the impact of the general comment in the UNCRC review process, we analysed four geographically and socioeconomically diverse case studies, which represent differing levels of digital infrastructure, engagement with the general comment specifically and diverse approaches by the Committee.

These cases provide a snapshot of the realisation of children's rights in the digital environment at the time of reporting in relation to law, policy and digital infrastructure. Further developments may have occurred since the reports were submitted, so the cases are presented only as illustrative examples.

Brazil

Brazil's 2024 State report¹⁰¹ and reply to the List of issues¹⁰² presents a picture of active legislative and policy reform in the digital environment. It highlights specific legal instruments such as Law No. 13,441/2017, permitting infiltration of law enforcement online to investigate sexual crimes against children, and Law No. 11,829/2008 strengthening prohibitions on child pornography (para. 10). The General Data Protection Law (Law No. 13,853/2019) restricts the collection and sharing of children's data, prohibiting collection without consent except under protective circumstances, and requiring proportionality in games and online services (para. 39).

Awareness and prevention are also highlighted with examples like the booklet on online violence against adolescents in 2020, which provided teenage girls with guidance on prevention and access to help (paras 54-56), supported by the #girlsforgirls campaign (para. 61). Brazil also underscore its hosting of the WeProtect Global Alliance Summit in 2022 and its conduct of major enforcement operations, such as Luz na Infância (Light in Childhood), which resulted in hundreds of arrests and the seizure of digital material. National forums and partnerships with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime are presented as evidence of mobilising multiple actors to address technology-facilitated CSEA and violence (para. 44).

The replies to the List of issues further demonstrate Brazil's policy evolution. Pending bills include Bill No. 2,628/2022 (measures for digital protection)¹⁰³ and Bill No.

¹⁰¹ Brazil (31 January 2024) CRC/C/BRA/5-7.

¹⁰² Brazil (7 March 2025) CRC/C/BRA/RQ/5-7.

¹⁰³ This Bill was enacted as the Digital Child and Adolescent Statute (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente [ECA] Digital) in September 2025.

2,891/2020 (expanded police infiltration powers). Institutional innovations such as CNMP (Conselho Nacional do Ministério Público [National Council of the Public Prosecutor's Office]) Resolutions 287 and 298 established a national victim protection system and registry of violence cases, while CONANDA's (Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente [Brazilian National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents]) Resolution No. 245/2024 emphasises corporate responsibility in the digital environment. The ANPD (Agência Nacional de Proteção de Dados [National Data Protection Authority]) has prioritised children's data privacy for 2024-25 (paras 34, 103, 125).

Despite these concrete developments, alternative reports stress implementation gaps. Human Rights Watch¹⁰⁴ found Brazilian children's photos scraped into AI datasets, enabling deepfakes, and has therefore called for comprehensive data safeguards and remedies. The organisation also notes the ANPD's preliminary ban on Meta training its AI on Brazil-based users' data and urges a remedy for affected children and future-proofing against non-consensual scraping (later picked up by the Committee). The Alana Institute adds that ANPD capacity is weak due to a lack of staff and an advisory council that is not fully operational, and calls for institutional strengthening, privacy-by-design, child rights impact assessments and independent oversight.¹⁰⁵ The Alana Institute also highlights the risks of digital commercial exploitation, pervasive advertising to minors, profiling and unhealthy food marketing online, calling for prohibitions on children's profiling, transparent business models and alignment with WHO (World Health Organisation) guidance, and points to the general comment paras. 41-42 specifically relating to commercial practices and profiling.

The alternative submissions also underscore online harms and the need for platform regulation.¹⁰⁶ The Alana Institute highlights how weak moderation and platform algorithms amplify violence, extremism and misinformation for children. *Mães pela Diversidade*¹⁰⁷ notes the absence of protections for LGBTQIA+ children and the regulation of cyberbullying and hate speech. *Vertentes*¹⁰⁸ links online toxicity to mental health harms, urging national guidelines. Together, these reports stress the general comment's call for binding platform regulation, non-discrimination and stronger mental health protections online.

Civil society groups also raised concerns about cyberbullying, extremism in schools and LGBTQIA+ children's lack of protection, urging mental health support, deradicalisation and educational inclusion. New policies, such as the Digital Education Law (No. 14.433/2023) and the Media Literacy Strategy (No. 14.533/2023), show progress, but the

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch (2024).

¹⁰⁵ Alana Institute (2024). In line with General comment No. 25, paras 37-39, 70, 92-97.

¹⁰⁶ During the review session, following advocacy efforts by reporting organisations, the Committee engaged Brazil directly on matters relating to the digital environment, which were later reflected in the Concluding observation.

¹⁰⁷ *Mães pela Diversidade* (2025).

¹⁰⁸ *Vertentes* (Ecosistema de saúde mental [Vertentes Mental Health Ecosystem]). (no date).

criminalisation of bullying (Law No. 14.811/2024) risks stigmatising without preventing it.

In its 2025 Concluding observations¹⁰⁹ to Brazil, the Committee moved beyond broad references to online safety to issue highly specific recommendations on children's data protection and platform accountability. It welcomed the preliminary ban on the use of children's personal data to train AI, but urged Brazil to strengthen the legal framework, implement CONANDA Resolution 245/2024, adopt a national policy on children's rights in the digital environment (para. 25(c)) and prohibit children's data use in AI systems while ensuring accountability and remedies, and to expedite draft Law No. 5342/2023 on AI-generated pornographic material (para. 25(d)). These recommendations closely reflect the concerns raised in the alternative reports, including Human Rights Watch's evidence of children's photos being scraped into AI datasets, Alana's call for child rights impact assessments, privacy-by-design, and restrictions on profiling, as well as civil society warnings about the ANPD's limited resourcing.

As State Party reports often reflect,¹¹⁰ Brazil's report emphasised achievements, including new laws and campaigns, but provided less information about implementation deficits, resource allocation, and structural inequalities in access. The general comment highlights that States must both legislate and ensure effective enforcement, equitable access, and remedies (paras. 41, 67-69, 75, 82, 92-97). The Committee's Concluding observations therefore sharpened the focus on children's privacy and data protection as a cornerstone of children's rights in the digital environment, pointing out that without comprehensive safeguards and remedies, Brazil risks undermining the very protections it has legislated.

The alternative reports on Brazil reveal both direct and indirect integration of the general comment, shaping the Committee's focus in its 2025 Concluding observation. The Alana Institute translated and disseminated the general comment, used its paragraph structure (paras 41-43 on advertising; paras 92-97 on company accountability; para. 75 on data protection), and framed recommendations in the general comment's language, such as 'child rights impact assessments', 'privacy-by-design' and prohibitions on profiling and manipulative design. Other organisations, such as Human Rights Watch and Vertentes, drew indirectly on the general comment's principles in their critiques of data scraping, deepfakes, cyberbullying, and mental health harms, echoing the general comment's emphasis on privacy, remedies, and non-discrimination, without directly citing it. This meant that the Committee could anchor its Concluding observations in the general comment's standards with more substantial justification. Notably, the Concluding observations' sharp emphasis on children's data protection, AI-specific prohibitions, remedies and corporate accountability directly mirrors the framing advanced in the alternative reports, showing how civil society's engagement with the general comment both reinforced its normative weight and

¹⁰⁹ Brazil (25 July 2025) CRC/C/BRA/CO/5-7.

¹¹⁰ Lundy (2019).

guided the Committee toward more specific recommendations than in earlier review cycles.

In conclusion, Brazil demonstrates progressive legal and policy advances in line with the general comment; however, the Committee's conclusions emphasise that the realisation of children's rights in the digital environment requires more than laws - it necessitates systematic enforcement and coherent national policies and protections tailored to emerging challenges, such as AI.

France

France's 2022 reply to the List of issues¹¹¹ emphasises its broad legal framework for protecting children in the digital environment. It highlights several new statutes: Act No. 2020-936, extending protection against children's exposure to pornographic content; Act No. 2020-1266, regulating the commercial exploitation of images of children under 16 on online platforms and ensuring labour code protections for child influencers;¹¹² and Act No. 2022-300, strengthening parental controls on internet access. In addition, the Act for a Digital Republic (2016) established a child's 'right to be forgotten', allowing minors to request erasure of personal data held by online services, with recourse to the CNIL (Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés [National Commission for Information Technology and Civil Liberties]) if service providers do not comply. The Act of 30 July 2020 (Act No. 2020-936) on the Protection of Victims of Spousal Abuse extends criminal liability to websites that fail to implement age-assurance or age-verification systems for accessing pornography. To further strengthen children's protection, Article 227-24-1 was added to the Penal Code on 30 November 2021 to punish producers of pornographic content likely to be viewed by minors. Act No. 2021-478 of 21 April 2021 on the Protection of Children against Sexual Felonies and Misdemeanours and Incest criminalises sexual offences against children online. The Act of 24 August 2021 on Strengthening Respect for the Principles of the Republic anticipates the (then) forthcoming European law on digital services (Digital Services Act), which requires video-sharing platforms and social media platforms to 'use their best endeavours to ensure that their content is effectively moderated' (para. 94).

The replies to the List of issues expand on enforcement measures: a protocol on parental controls signed by over 20 public and private actors, monitored by ARCOM (Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique [Regulatory Authority for Audiovisual and Digital Communication]) and ARCEP (Autorité de régulation des communications électroniques, des postes et de la distribution de la presse [French regulatory authority in charge of regulating telecommunications, postal

¹¹¹ France (4 December 2023) CRC/C/FRA/CO/6-7.

¹¹² Child influencers, whose activities are considered a form of work, are now protected under the Labour Code, para. 82. This protects child influencers financially, requiring parents to deposit part of the child's income made through their online business and content production, in the Public Deposit Office until the child reaches age of majority or is emancipated.

services and print media distribution]); the internet-signalement.gouv.fr platform to report unlawful content; cybercrime units within the National Gendarmerie (Le commandement de la gendarmerie dans le cyberspace [ComCyberGend], the Gendarmerie Cyberspace Command); the National Centre for the Analysis of Child Pornography; the Centre for Combating Digital Crime;¹¹³ the Central Office for Combating Violence against the Person (the Central Group for Child Victims);¹¹⁴ the National Cybercrime Prevention Agency of the Central Directorate of the Criminal Investigation Service; specialised investigators embedded in Europol and Interpol operations; and helplines including 119, 3020 and Net écoute, a hotline for the most serious cases of digital violence. Educational responses include a cyberbullying guide to support teachers,¹¹⁵ recognition of the risks of digital violence in schools, as well as new channels for children to seek advice through chat functions.

A joint report (from Alliance VITA, Juristes pour l'enfance and CPDH)¹¹⁶ noted that despite the new laws, enforcement has been weak. ARCOM attempted a process to block major pornographic platforms in December 2021 (Pornhub, XVideos, XNXX, TuKif and xHamster). Still, the process stalled in litigation because no technical solution for age verification was mandated by decree. They point to a contradiction between France's stated ambition to protect children and its laxity in confronting powerful pornography lobbies, which actively engage in lobbying law-making processes. Pornhub, XVideos and XNXX challenged French age-verification requirements in court, arguing that the law lacked clear technical solutions, while regulators like ARCOM struggled to enforce compliance. Critics highlight that this regulatory weakness, combined with the influence of powerful pornography lobbies under investigation for serious offences, undermines the protection of children's rights in digital environments. The joint report calls for strict enforcement of the ban on minors' access to pornography by requiring technical age-verification solutions and empowering ARCOM to impose direct sanctions and fines, and to extend oversight to social networks and internet service providers (ISPs). They also urge stronger moderation obligations for platforms and education programmes to inform parents and children about the risks of pornography.

The COFRADE¹¹⁷ report highlighted risks around the commercial exploitation of children as influencers, noting that families can generate a substantial income while exposing children to loss of privacy, hidden advertising and exhaustion. While the Studer Act¹¹⁸ addressed some of these concerns, lack of resourcing the DREETS (Directions régionales de l'économie, de l'emploi, du travail et des solidarités)¹¹⁹ inspectorates undermine enforcement, and the last application decree was still pending. The COFRADE report

¹¹³ Working with the European Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol).

¹¹⁴ Working transnationally with Europol and Interpol.

¹¹⁵ Annex to Reply to List of issues prior to reporting, Annexe 12, Lutte cyber violence.

¹¹⁶ Alliance VITA et al. (2022).

¹¹⁷ COFRADE (2022).

¹¹⁸ Law no. 2020-1266 of 19 October 2020.

¹¹⁹ A commission of professionals supervised by the regional directorates for the economy, employment, labour and solidarity.

criticises France's extensive use of the files for age-assessment support (AEM), which collect biometric and personal data from unaccompanied children without consent, as a disproportionate violation of privacy rights.¹²⁰ They also highlight breaches of privacy in schools, where insufficiently trained staff and digital systems lead to inappropriate sharing of children's and families' personal information.

Furthermore, the Campus Watch report¹²¹ underscored the scale of cyberbullying in schools, estimating that over six million children were affected, and criticised fragmented, event-based responses. It called for coordinated national action on the school climate, bringing together ministries and other actors to develop a coherent national strategy against school violence and cyberviolence.

The Committee's Concluding observations¹²² identified significant enforcement gaps. On the issue of privacy, while welcoming the right to be forgotten, the Committee urged France to raise awareness among children, monitor its application and implementation of the 2022 parental control law fully respects children's privacy. Regarding access to information, the Committee called for stricter enforcement of Article 227-24 of the Penal Code, which requires sanctions and the blocking of pornographic sites that rely solely on age declarations. It recommended ensuring the availability of age-appropriate information on rights and services. Regarding education, the Committee recommended strengthening teacher training to identify and address bullying and cyberbullying.

With regard to the general comment, France has made great strides toward the realisation of children's rights in the digital environment by passing legislation against online harms and recognising the importance of data protection and privacy (General comment No. 25, paras 54-63, 75). It also shows progress in establishing remedies and reporting mechanisms (paras 67-69). Nonetheless, the Committee and alternative reports reveal gaps in implementation, enforcement and equitable access. France has introduced uniquely progressive laws to prevent children's access to pornography and to strengthen the rights of child influencers. Yet, enforcement is undermined by regulatory gaps, litigation and under-resourcing. Similarly, while children theoretically enjoy a right to erasure, awareness and consistent application are limited.

The general comment requires not only legislative safeguards but also effective enforcement, adequate resources (para. 82), the accountability of companies (paras. 92-97) and the integration of digital literacy into education (paras 41, 43). In a global comparison, France is one of the countries leading the charge in implementing progressive laws in an environment where these are well-supported and comparatively well-resourced. France illustrates a paradox, as it has an advanced legislative framework but uneven protection in practice, with children's rights in the digital environment still

¹²⁰ COFRAGE (2022): With Decree No. 2019-57 of 31 January 2019, France introduced and then perpetuated massive recourse to files for the age assessment support (AEM). The AEM file now adds unaccompanied children, as soon as they arrive and without systematically obtaining their consent, a compulsory passage through the prefectural services for fingerprinting and photographs as well as collecting personal data.

¹²¹ Campus Watch (2023).

¹²² France (4 December 2023) CRC/C/FRA/CO/6-7.

constrained by institutional weaknesses, industry resistance and insufficient attention to the everyday experiences of children in schools and online spaces.

The Philippines

In its 2022 replies to the Committee,¹²³ the Philippines presented a range of legal and institutional measures designed to respond to violence against children in digital environments, with a strong focus on technology-facilitated CSEA. The Safe Spaces Act extends protection into online spaces; the Anti-Child Pornography Act of 2009, Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012 and Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 form part of a cumulative framework, while the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2022 (RA 11862) expanded the policy of anti-trafficking in persons to include accountability of internet and financial intermediaries. The Anti-Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children Bill of 2022¹²⁴ (RA 11930) on technology-facilitated CSEA strengthens penalties and imposes obligations on internet and financial intermediaries. The latter, placing increased responsibility on social media companies, ISPs and financial intermediaries, requires that they block and preserve child sexual abuse materials (CSAM). The law also strengthened the power of law enforcement to conduct online surveillance to facilitate the investigation and prosecution of CSEA cases. The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) adopted a Child Online Safeguarding Policy, mandating technical standards to protect children on free public Wi-Fi networks.

The State Party's reporting¹²⁵ also indicates that institutional mechanisms have multiplied, primarily to address technology-facilitated CSEA. The Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography (IACACP) has been charged with leading awareness-raising campaigns and increasing the knowledge basis through campaigns (#StopChildPornPh), training programmes for duty bearers and studies in partnership with UNICEF.¹²⁶ An inter-agency 'quick action team' including several law enforcement agencies has worked together to monitor and rescue children from establishments that exploit them in online CSEA. The Department of Justice established a Cyber-TIP Monitoring Center to process and analyse reports, and the eProtectKids hotline was launched with INHOPE and ECPAT as a reporting channel for CSAM. Data from the Philippine National Police cited more than 72,000 incidents of child abuse and violence (2018-20), including technology-facilitated sexual violence.

The Committee's Concluding observations (2022) welcomed these policies and actions, including the legislative advances, but underscored persistent concerns about prevalence. It noted that despite new laws, bullying, domestic and sexual violence and technology-facilitated CSEA remain widespread and, in some cases, are drastically increasing. The Committee urged the Philippines to explicitly define and criminalise all

¹²³ Philippines (27 May 2022) CRC/C/PHL/RQ/5-6.

¹²⁴ Center for Reproductive Rights et al. (2022).

¹²⁵ Philippines (27 May 2022) CRC/C/PHL/RQ/5-6.

¹²⁶ De La Salle University et al. (2021); UNICEF Philippines (2020).

offences in line with the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC), to strengthen monitoring of the tourism industry and online environment, and to combat the tolerance of child exploitation. These recommendations reflect the general comment's emphasis on the need for comprehensive, enforceable legislative frameworks (para. 54) and effective regulatory oversight of business enterprises (paras 92-97).

Civil society submissions highlight the importance of recent legal and policy developments relating to technology-facilitated CSEA; however, the alternative reports illustrate the need to address significant digital divides that surfaced during COVID-19.¹²⁷ They highlight the inequities in online education during the pandemic, with the rate of out-of-school youth rising from 16.9% to 25.2% in early 2020. While the Department of Education launched the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan, NGOs report that unequal access to devices, connectivity and parental support undermined equitable participation. Children themselves described deteriorating mental health, social isolation and pressure to help finance their education, sometimes by selling sexual images to fund digital access. These accounts reinforce the general comment's emphasis (paras. 41-43) that the right to education, participation, and expression online must be guaranteed equitably and that barriers of poverty and gender exacerbate digital exclusion.

Alternative reports also emphasise that while RA 11930 and related laws expand the duties of platforms, service providers, and financial intermediaries, enforcement has lagged. Monitoring and accountability mechanisms remain under-resourced, leaving platforms' obligations largely aspirational rather than real. Paragraphs 92-97 from the general comment are clear that business enterprises must be legally bound, monitored and sanctioned when failing to protect children's rights online. Without adequate technical capacity or penalties, the Philippines' framework risks remaining a law on paper rather than a law in practice.

Set against the general comment, the Philippines demonstrates progress in its laws that are increasingly addressing online harms (para. 54), establishing remedies and reporting hotlines (paras 67-69), and recognising the importance of corporate accountability (paras 92-97). On the other hand, the Committee's concerns and civil society evidence reveal serious and persistent deficits in privacy and data safeguards (para. 75), adequate resources (para. 82) and digital inclusion (paras 41-43). Children continue to face systemic barriers to equal participation in online education, alarmingly high levels of exposure to technology-facilitated CSEA and other forms of violence online, the scale of which indicates that, despite improved legislative and judiciary mechanisms, enforcement against platforms and intermediaries remains weak.

The Philippines offers a growing patchwork of laws and institutions to address technology-facilitated CSEA as a priority issue, but how effectively these improve children's right to protection from violence in the digital environment remains to be

¹²⁷ Center for Reproductive Rights et al. (2022); Civil Society Coalition (2022).

seen. Additionally, the analysis reveals that the Committee's approach to addressing the general comment is at times uneven, as its Concluding observations omit reference to the general comment, despite the significant issues that the Philippines faces regarding its full remit, not just those related to the OPSC. This analysis again illustrates the interconnectedness of themes under the general comment, such as online harms more broadly, privacy and data protection issues, as well as accessibility and inclusion.

The Gambia

The Gambia's State Party report, due in 2021 but submitted in 2024,¹²⁸ notes that no effective system exists to monitor information accessible to children online, while noting an intention to address this through the Ministries of Gender, Children and Social Welfare and of Information (para. 51). The Government reports sensitisation and capacity building on child protection and online violence through civil society organisations and government institutions as well as a review of the Children's Act 2005 to include online abuse provisions. The Ministry of Information and Communication Technology was also tasked with developing cybercrime legislation to address forms of technology-facilitated CSEA, resulting in the introduction of the Cybercrime Bill 2023 to Parliament in March 2024.¹²⁹ For response and support services to child victims of technology-facilitated CSEA, the report points to one-stop centres, the Orange Centre and the 199 helpline. This is a picture of incipient policy development rather than a mature system aligned with the general comment's expectations for comprehensive online safety legislation, privacy safeguards, enforcement and remedies (General comment No. 25, paras 54-63, 67-69, 75, 92-97).

The Committee's Concluding observations,¹³⁰ published in February 2025, recognise a positive infrastructure to protect and respond to children's exposure to violence offline and online, some of which the State Party report notes, such as the 199 helpline, the community child protection committees, Tundol Binko/Bajeni Gokh monitoring mechanisms, the Orange Centre, and even a 24-hour court service for tourism-related offences. Although the Committee does not directly reference the general comment in its Concluding observation to the Gambia,¹³¹ it nonetheless raises serious concerns that relate to its remit. Drawing from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted by UNICEF in 2018, the Committee notes that nearly 90% of children in the country experience violence offline as well as online, with girls and children with disabilities at heightened risk, flagging particularly technology-facilitated CSEA and CSEA in travel and tourism as serious concerns. It highlights three structural gaps regarding children's protection from CSEA: (1) insufficient implementation of the Sexual Offences Act 2013

¹²⁸ The Gambia (20 May 2024) CRC/C/GMB/4-7.

¹²⁹ Freedom House (2024).

¹³⁰ The Gambia (28 February) CRC/C/GMB/CO/4-7.

¹³¹ The Committee frames its recommendations to the Gambia relating to children's rights in the digital environment under 'Access to appropriate information and the right to privacy', therefore demonstrating the intent to reference General comment No. 25 but not explicitly doing so.

and Domestic Violence Act 2013 and the absence of a legal framework for technology-facilitated CSEA; (2) lack of data on prevalence (including online and in tourism); and (3) no comprehensive, adequately resourced, policy for prevention and intervention.

Concerning children's broader rights in the digital environment, the Committee urges the Gambia to expedite the Cybercrime Bill and ensure effective enforcement, to study the extent, causes and nature of violence (including online and in tourism) and, on that basis, to adopt a comprehensive strategy to ensure prompt, child-friendly, multisectoral investigations, prosecutions, sanctions and reparations for child victims. On access to information and privacy, it recommends operationalising the Access to Information Act 2021, accelerating the Criminal Offences Bill 2022 and Cybercrime Bill 2023, to 'solidify the legal framework supporting the right to access to information and to protect the privacy of children in the media, including social media.'¹³² Regarding access to appropriate information, it recommends monitoring content accessible to children, scheduling inappropriate TV outside prime time, expanding libraries and ensuring internet access for all children, including in rural and remote areas.

Civil society submissions also raise these same concerns, but with a deeper insight into the shortcomings linked to ensuring children's rights in the digital environment. The Child Protection Alliance raises the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and notes child broadcasting slots on the Gambia Radio & Television Service as good examples, but stresses the absence of national mechanisms enabling children to express themselves on matters that affect them. It recommends more child-centred media programming, training for media and influencers, public awareness of freedom of expression and civic education in schools. On access and privacy, it acknowledges the Access to Information Act 2021 and the national library network. Still, it points to limited online monitoring and instances where child victims' identities were exposed in the media without redress, which highlights weak privacy protection in practice.

The National Human Rights Commission echoes that no online content monitoring is in place. It adds that while the Persons with Disabilities Act 2023 promises accessible information, access remains limited, and school/public libraries are poorly resourced or non-existent, thereby undermining equitable access to information. Regarding response systems, the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Unit within the Ministry of Justice is not well-known, informal, and lacks a formal budget; reporting remains poor, and the helplines (1313/199) require public awareness. Although the Cyber Crimes Bill 2023 would prohibit cyberbullying and child pornography, civil society stresses no dedicated, operational legal framework specifically protecting children from technology-facilitated CSEA (e.g., grooming, live streaming, platform duties). It highlights child sex tourism enforcement gaps, calling for confidential complaint mechanisms in the tourism sector and timely victim response. Earlier ECPAT prompts in 2019 foreshadowed many of today's deficits: full criminalisation of technology-facilitated CSEA (including grooming), updated CSAM definitions consistent with the OPSC,

¹³² The Gambia (28 February) CRC/C/GMB/CO/4-7, para. 21(a).

statistics, coordination, action planning, shelter capacity and funding for frontline agencies.

Our analysis of the Gambia's State Party review has identified that it is beginning to address topics related to rights in the digital environment, through developments such as legal reform and certain service provision. Yet, it is far from ensuring that children's rights are realised in the digital environment. Priority actions, consistent with the Committee's recommendations and civil society inputs, are to enact and enforce a comprehensive online protection framework, institutionalise and fund child-friendly remedies, build monitoring and data systems, expand equitable access (connectivity, libraries, accessibility for children with disabilities), and operationalise accountability in the tourism and digital sectors.



Digital Futures For Children

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