

Innocenti Publication

Child Safety online: Global challenges and strategies

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Key Messages

Child Safety online: Global challenges and strategies discusses the nature and scale of sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people online. It considers the generational divide between parents and children in their knowledge and engagement with the online environment and how this affects experiences and approaches to the Internet and its usage. The report outlines how children and young people across the world use the Internet, including an examination of specific online activities and experiences that have the potential to place them at risk. There is a focus on activities that involve interaction online and offline and an analysis of research findings about where children turn for support when things go wrong.

- The Internet has not created crimes involving sexual abuse and exploitation of children; however, it has enhanced the scale and potential of some old and familiar ones. With its multiple benefits also come opportunities for misconduct.
- Issues in the report are globally relevant, despite that at this time their evidence is mostly related to industrialized and middle-income countries. In the coming years, the most dramatic changes will occur in (i) lower-income countries, where children are more likely to go online from public places where they are at greater risk of encountering inappropriate images and online and offline solicitation, (ii) with the increased use of mobile devices.
- Several factors can further exacerbate potential risks and the likelihood of harm to children in online environments, including a lack of parental awareness and knowledge, difficult economic conditions, and underdeveloped regulatory frameworks. Hence, it seems that the gaps in protection may be greater in low- and middle-income countries, where gaps in overall child protection already exist.
- A multi-tiered approach is necessary to challenge the potential threats to children's well-being and safety in the online environment. A strategic protection framework should have four main objectives: 1) empowering children and promoting their resilience; 2) removing impunity for abusers; 3) reducing the availability of harmful material from the Internet and access to harm; and 4) promoting the recovery and rehabilitation for children who have experienced harm.

- Children and young people are intrinsic to building a safer Internet. The significance of child agency in accessing the creative benefits of the Internet, in exposure to certain forms of risk, and in managing that risk is key to constructing an effective response.
- The challenge for policymakers is to coordinate action by a range of public and private actors on a number of interrelated issues that come under the heading of 'building a safer Internet'. Governments and the private sector need to work together to ensure that protection policies and law enforcement are integrated into promoting the expansion of access and the positive benefits that the Internet brings.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

For further information, please contact:

James Elder
Chief of Communications
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre
Florence, Italy
Mobile +393357582585
Landline +390552033354
jelder@unicef.org

or
Patrizia Faustini
Senior Communication Assistant
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre,
Piazza SS. Annunziata 12, 50122 Florence, Italy
Landline: +39-055-2033 253 fax: +39-055-2033 220
pfaustini@unicef.org