**Concept Note for a General Comment**

**on Children’s Rights in relation to the Digital Environment**

This concept note was expected to produce a coherent capacity building the general comment on children’s rights in the digital environment. Although this content has no explicit focus, under the proposed questions for experts, special ideas and concerns are made to explain to the beneficiary countries. The concept note was prepared by Ayşegül Liman Kaban, Seda Gökçe Turan and Sinan Aşçı who individually hold different specialisms focusing on kids and work for different departments at Bahçeşehir University in Turkey.

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**1. How can children’s views and experiences be expressed and taken into account when formulating policies and practices which affect their access to, and use of, digital technologies?**

Formulating policies and practices based on digital inequalities - for example, children’s access to information and communication technologies and their uses of digital tools for several reasons - is only provided with listening to and understanding children’s perspectives to improve the quality. Under any circumstances, the problems asserted and discussed in many different white papers all around the world are still in the wild: in other words, the current problems which professionals and governments should focus on are still poverty, inequality and exclusion, violence, family problems, racism, hate speech and radicalization, and especially migration. As Mike Ribble defined in his book titled “Digital Citizenship in Schools” published in 2011, there are 9 dimensions of digital citizenship to be taken into consideration: namely, digital access, digital etiquette, digital law, digital communication, digital literacy, digital commerce, digital rights and responsibilities, digital safety and security, digital health and wellness.

Considering the traditional problems being still ongoing and dimensions related to digital citizenship, “growing up in the digital age” has brought such problems in its train to the digital environment. In other words, “growing up in the digital age” stands for “equal opportunities for all the children, children’s rights to participation, nonviolence, children-friendly justice and rights of children in the digital environment.” The basic problem solver is to take action to create a curriculum that can be embedded in any course at various levels, and this curriculum would break down the dimensions of digital citizenship into different categories for the courses to record what has been experienced throughout a child’s experience in order to expand and incorporate them as feedbacks originally leading to their digital citizenships and to be used when the time is ripe. Since the Internet is age blind, the platforms and online services used by any individual should be determined like the user is a child. Otherwise, children are treated like adults in the digital environment, which is difficult to protect children’s needs and interests online. Regarding the business-wise of the Internet, the decisions are mostly taken into operations through algorithms which could try to infer users’ characteristics: however, bias, discrimination, inaccuracy and legality are not easy to evaluate and adjust in relations to children’s rights particularly.

These rights especially based on the digital environment should demonstrate the benefits of collective action to achieve clear positive outcomes by bringing professionals, government officials, academics, parents and kids together; assess progress and develop new plans to accelerate the implementation of commitments taken towards children in the digital environment; to explore what is coming next for a harmonious society. Children and young individuals being selected for participation in this process will attend both preparatory meetings and hold their own divisions to create a constituency of actors, to discuss concrete steps, gaps and recommendations, to explore and come up with innovative solutions and practices, to bring the key issues and initiatives into practice.

**2. How can discrimination (originating offline or online) be effectively addressed, ensure all children have their rights realised in a digital world?**

Discriminatory attitudes may infect any environment even if the reality is defined and approached in details in the regulations. By acknowledging the gravity of such a problem is the first step to build a fair and tolerant society - even in the digital environment. In order to promote public understanding and acceptance of human rights not to be discriminated, there is a need to have statutory obligations to look for and attempt to conciliate the happenings and complaints of discrimination under the laws and regulations. To deal with discriminatory attitudes requires to overcome prejudice with the help of education, community engagement and dialogue, leadership, laws and policies.

Building better relationships and educating community members about legal remedies are not just the responsibility of parents and educators, or human rights organizations as facilitators. Addressing discrimination is everyone’s responsibility in a specific environment: that’s why we all should take that responsibility for addressing discrimination.

Having the courage to speak out against discrimination requires giving children a voice - eg. Children’s Council carried out by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality -, collaborating with scientists, experts, users, academics etc., publishing research to disseminate evidence, sharing knowledge, developing a country-based framework for digital literacy, building consensus in the need for an international governance structure on it.

To foster how to address discrimination and ensure all children a human rights culture, education, political and community leadership, legislative actions are needed to take it a step further for community engagement.

**3. How should the General Comment treat the role of parents and other caregivers?**

Parents are developing a very frightening perspective on digital technology, influenced by some experts and many negative news and comments on the Internet. Such negative judgments about the Internet and information technology push parents and other caregivers to restrict children's access to technology and to impose prohibitions. In this context, parents who are afraid of the Internet and information technology tools are not willing to use these tools themselves. Of course, the advantages of the Internet and information technology tools as well as their disadvantages are normal and expected. The most fundamental question of Technological Determinism Theory is whether technology has a negative impact on human beings or societies, or that people tend to negativity, and that technology only reveals this. Cyberbullying, hate speech, fake news, and many more often defined in recent years, cause many physiological problems such as retinal dryness and posture disorders. In addition, it is known that people who examine the profiles of other people in social media sites for a long time compare with their own lives and show more depression symptoms and have more negative judgments about their bodies. However, it is not possible to say that all of these negative results are due to the effects of the Internet and information technologies tools alone. Therefore, "digital literacy" and "digital citizenship" skills emerge as a requirement not only for children but also for parents. It is also clear that parents with high digital literacy skills will not put a limit on children's use of the Internet and technology in an oppressive or threatening way; In addition, in the present day, where access to the Internet and information technology tools is deemed as a right, it is thought that the parents of digitally literate children will be more sensitive in the use of conscious internet. In order to treat the role of parents and other caregivers; social policy experts, universities and schools should work together. They should organize parent meetings about their children's digital rights.

**4. How should the practices of businesses operating in the digital environment support the realisation of children's rights?**

First of all, these enterprises should organize seminars and training on "Children's Rights" for their children with digital media. Then, the sharing of donation accounts of voluntary associations working on children's rights on companies' websites and the publication of donors may be useful for increasing the participation of other people. In addition, social responsibility projects with non-governmental organisations, public children's rights and digital literacy courses to be organized by companies will be published as modules on the company website.

**5. How can States better realise their obligations to children's rights in relation to the digital environment?**

Social campaigns need to be increased and more people need to take action towards securing national information technologies, communications infrastructure and systems and databases, determining critical infrastructure and creating systems to track, intercept and prevent cyber threats and attacks against them, setting up related centres, and inspecting, running and continuously fortifying these systems. If more people encourage the development, production and use of national cyber defence tools and national solutions in providing national cybersecurity, policymakers might plan, coordinate and implement the education, hiring and advancement of necessary and sufficient amount of expert personnel to agencies and positions of critical importance to national cybersecurity. Government and volunteers from different occupations need to cooperate in the framework of this decision.

Different countries related laws and regulations can be analyzed and if necessary, it can be adopted or education and awareness-raising measures on national cybersecurity can be created with workshops.

**6. Is the realisation of children’s rights in the digital environment necessary to realise children’s rights in other environments?**

There must be benchmarks for online game providers but we do not have any benchmarks for those developers in Turkey. Although digital games have been seen as a tool for entertainment, the importance of gamers’ safety and their right to privacy and freedom of expression needs to be considered too. The benchmarks also must stress the importance of the games industry to be aware of the human rights influence that games can have on children and young people. Internet providers need to supply children rights benchmarks and they need to give practical advice on how to minimise risks for children online because of the illegal or not suitable content.