



Toy Industries of Europe Submission

UN General Comment on Children's Rights in Relation to the Digital Environment

14 May 2019

Toy Industries of Europe (TIE) welcomes the decision of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to develop a General Comment on children's rights in relation to the digital environment.

When the UN Convention on Children's Rights (CRC) was signed in 1989, few people could have imagined the extent of the technological changes that would take place in the thirty years to follow. Not least, that the world wide web, invented the same year by Tim Berners-Lee, would become such a prevalent part of children's lives, and that one in three users around the world would be under 18. It is fitting that the GC is being developed on the thirtieth anniversary of these two milestones. We believe the General Comment can act as a positive complement to the CRC, not least in providing principled, evidence-based guidance on the application of the Convention in the digital world.

Below, we have responded to those questions in the concept note on which we feel we are best positioned to provide input on. As the drafting process moves forward, we would be happy to provide input and evidence on specific points that the Committee feels to be useful.

Recognition of a Child's Right to Play

We strongly commend the inclusion of the right to play as part of a key group of rights to be realised in the digital world. Whilst enjoying play should be seen as an end in itself, regular play has also been found to have positive benefits on children's health, well-being and development. Toys, as the tools of play, have an important role in this: they act as springboards for the imagination and make playtime last longer. For children to get the most out of play it is essential that they have a balanced play diet, that is to say they get to enjoy the many different types of play that exist, and play in the digital environment can be an important part of this.

Role of the Toy Sector vis-à-vis Children's Enjoyment of their Rights

Helping to make playtime safe, age-appropriate and fun is at the heart of everything reputable toy companies do. In responding to the demands of children growing up in a digital world, toy makers are constantly looking to new ways that digital technology can enhance play. **When done well, digital technology can positively benefit imagination, creativity and add play value while keeping children safe online.**

When integrating digital technologies into play, reputable companies design experiences with children in mind. This means taking into account children's likely developmental capacities, as well as their understanding of concepts like privacy. We believe that **it is important that the General Comment acknowledges that limited data processing activities, when properly balanced against a child's right to privacy, can facilitate the creation of engaging,**



innovative and digital offerings for children that are safe and appropriate. We would caution against highly prohibitive restrictions on the use of children's data, which can stifle innovation in services designed for children. From experience, we have seen that this can lead to a high drop off from services designed for children, who inevitably find ways of accessing services that have not been made with a young audience in mind, where they risk being exposed to inappropriate content or contacts.

With regard to access to content and services, **the General Comment should recognise that parts of the digital environment will be commercial in nature.** As such, funding models will vary and may be based on one-off payments, subscriptions or the inclusion of commercial communications. From an independent survey of 3600 EU parents in 2016, we understand that the majority of parents appreciate to have choice in this matter, and support the availability of free digital content for children via the inclusion of advertising. All commercial communications in digital content should comply with sectoral advertising standards and respect children's understanding of the world.

How States can Support Children's Enjoyment of Rights

Through the creation of future-proof, principle-based policies for the digital space that encourage innovation in a fast-paced environment, States can facilitate children's enjoyment of their rights in the digital world, including the right to play. **It is important that a wide range of stakeholders are included in the development of such policies,** ranging from children's rights experts and educators through to industry representatives and tech experts.

Finally, **States should support the development of critical media literacy skills for the digital environment,** for example via inclusion on school curricula from the youngest ages of education. States should also encourage the development of adults' digital media literacy skills, especially those who interact with children, and develop programmes that support them to help children get the most out of the digital world.

About TIE

[Toy Industries of Europe \(TIE\)](http://www.toyindustries.eu) represents reputable toy manufactures in the EU. Our members have a longstanding commitment to making sure their toys are safe for children to play with. Play is changing and the digital environment is increasingly a part of children's play time. This means our traditional focus is expanding to ensure that the digital play experiences we create for children are appropriate, safe and secure too. TIE's membership includes 16 direct international companies, seven European national toy association, and seven affiliate members.

Contact Jennifer Pearson: jennifer.pearson@toyindustries.eu for more information