UNICEF

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

QueenMUN 2025

Harmful Content on Social Media Background Guide

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Jiayan Xie, and it is my distinct pleasure to serve as your Director at Queen MUN 2025. As a senior student at Queen Margaret's School, this marks my third and last year in my Model UN journey as a high school student. On behalf of your Co-Director Sofia Becerra, your Chair Clara van Muiswinkel, and your Assistant-Director Clare Boulding, I would like to welcome you all to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

My journey began as a delegate of a General Assembly at VMUN 2022, and even when I hesitated to speak, I still walked out of that room and gained more knowledge about international relationships on a weekend than I did for a year. After that, I ended up earning the Best Delegate award at the QueenMUN 2023 and the Honorable Mention at VMUN 2024. Over the past three years of Model UN, I have expanded my knowledge of diplomacy, improved my public speaking skills, and most importantly, made countless memories that I will cherish forever. I hope that you will be able to have the same rewarding experience at QueenMUN 2025, not only building your diplomatic skills, but also finding joy and making memories along the way.

This year, the topic for UNICEF is the impacts of harmful content on social media. Social media enables rapid information sharing but also facilitates the spread of harmful content, including misinformation, hate speech, and violent material. Addressing this issue requires balancing free expression with the need for regulation to prevent real-world harm while maintaining digital connectivity.

If you have any questions or concerns about the committee, please feel free to reach out to me or the co-director.

Sincerely,
Jiayan Xie
Co-Director of UNICEF
mxie@qms.bc.ca

Delegates,

My name is Clara van Muiswinkel and it is my absolute pleasure to serve as the Secretary General of QueenMUN 2025 as well as the Chair of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. Welcome to UNICEF! This year we will be discussing the polarizing topic harmful content of social media, and the role censorship has in protecting the world's children. During committee session, delegates will have the opportunity to debate, discuss, write, and vote on a solution that will impact countries around the world (hypothetically of course ☺).

During my last year of Model UN, I am so grateful to be on this committee with all of you! MUN has been an amazing part of my life and has taught me so much over the years. It is one of the greatest honours to be the Co-Captain of the QMS Model UN and Debate Club and I am so blessed to serve with my incredible Co-Captain Supriya Parhar. Delegates, thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedules to participate in this conference, I truly hope it is an amazing and insightful experience.

It is understood that for many delegates this is your first time doing Model UN. Please understand that all backgrounds and levels of experience are welcome in UNICEF. To prepare, I encourage you to read the background guide and seek outside material to guide you such as simulations and flow of debate rules. Please don't worry, your dais team will go over everything the day of and you are welcome to email us with any questions.

I am honored to work with your Assistant-Director Clare Boulding, and Co-Directors Jiayan Xie and Sofia Becerra to create this simulation. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you may encounter while preparing. Delegates, best of luck with your preparations and I look forward to seeing you at UNICEF this May.

Kind regards,

Clara van Muiswinkel
Secretary General
Chair of UNICEF
cvan-muiswinkel@qms.bc.ca

Position Papers

Delegates are **strongly recommended** to complete a maximum of 1-page (single-spaced, 12pt. Times New Roman, 1-inch margins) position paper. Position papers should be a summary written in character from the position of their country. Please include citations and a bibliography, in APA format, giving credit to the sources used in the research and preparation of your paper.

The Position Paper should include a brief introduction and a comprehensive breakdown of the country's position on the topics being discussed within the committee. An excellent Position Paper must include a developed introduction and clear definitions of concepts and terms under discussion. The paper must then be broken down under the topic headings your committee will discuss. Each section should include three clear statements of policy on each topic:

1. The country's background and history on the topic
2. Political foreign policy on the topic
3. Any actions the government has taken concerning the topic.

Position paper documents should include your name, your country, your school, and the name of the committee in the top left corner.

Position Papers must be clear, concise, and accurately reflect your country's foreign policy. Good places to begin research include government websites from the country you represent (i.e., http://www.firstgov.gov for the United States) and the UN website database (www.un.org) for previous actions taken on a specific issue. Also, see:

Where to conduct your research (starting suggestions):

General Country Information:

- CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/
- Countries Government Websites

Information on Issues covered by the committee:

- United Nations Digital Library https://digitallibrary.un.org/
- "Dag Hammarskjöld Library Research Guides" http://research.un.org/en

For information specific to your country, we recommend starting with the webpage of your country's Department of Foreign Affairs to evaluate your state's position and potentially find key quotes from political leaders.

Submission of Position Paper

Please note that while position papers are not required, they are strongly recommended. **Delegates who do not complete a position paper will not be considered for awards.** Position papers are due on **May 1st at 11:59pm**. If you are in need of an extension, please contact your dais as soon as possible.

Position Papers should be sent to your director mxie@qms.bc.ca and co-director sbecerrawilson@qms.bc.ca Please include **both** on the email. Please use the email subject: "Last name, First Name- Position paper".

Awards: Best Delegate, Outstanding Delegate, Honorable Mention, Best Research (Position Paper)

Feel free to submit your position papers before the deadline if you want feedback. Late submissions of position papers without a valid extension will not be accepted.

AI Policy

Any use of AI services– including but not limited to Chat GPT, Grammarly (AI), and Gemini– is strictly prohibited while preparing for the conference. Furthermore, absolutely no use is permitted during the conference itself. Any provable use of AI will result in either the disqualification of the delegate or the removal of award considerations at the discretion of your Secretariat. All directors are obligated to scan for AI and are required to report any use. It is important to remember that the research you do prior to the conference date is essential for everyone to enjoy the day. Please respect the effort that has gone into making this day enjoyable for everyone.
Thank you!

The impacts of harmful content on social media

Topic Overview

At Queen MUN 2025, delegates will discuss *the impacts of harmful content on social media.* Delegates in this committee will explore how governments, tech companies, and civil society can collaborate to create safer online spaces while balancing free expression and innovation.

Harmful content on social media refers to digital material—such as **misinformation, hate speech, graphic violence, extremist propaganda, and cyberbullying**—intentionally or unintentionally, spread across platforms with the potential to inflict psychological harm, incite violence, polarize communities, or undermine democratic institutions (Denniss and Lindberg). The proliferation of such content poses a serious threat to public well-being, particularly as social media becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, influencing perceptions, behaviors, and even political decisions. The weaponization of social media to spread disinformation or hate has become a global concern, drawing comparisons to psychological warfare, especially when state or non-state actors exploit digital platforms to manipulate public opinion or destabilize societies. For instance, during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, coordinated misinformation campaigns originating from foreign entities aimed to sow political discord and erode trust in democratic processes—an early yet powerful indicator of how harmful content can transcend the virtual world and significantly affect real-world structures (Georgacopoulos and Mores).

UNICEF was founded in 1946 as the *United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund*. It was created by the **United Nations** to give urgent help to children suffering after World War II, providing food, healthcare, and shelter. Since then, UNICEF has evolved into a global organization committed to ensuring every child's right to survive, thrive, and reach their full potential, regardless of their nationality, background, or the circumstances into which they were born. Unwavering in its mission, UNICEF continues to confront both longstanding and emerging global challenges in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. As UNICEF itself states, "The story of UNICEF is a story of how much good the human family can do when it unites to protect the rights of its youngest and most vulnerable citizens." (UNICEF 60 years for children)

Objective

Changes in the form of technology define language and public culture. The world has had such a rapid growth in innovations in the past century, shifting life for everyone that calls this earth home. One fact that hasn't changed though is that communication and culture are integral parts of human existence, no society can strife without them (Ogar, 2022). Just as a clock is a metaphor for time, media is a metaphor for communication. However sometimes we mistake metaphors for the thing itself, or in this case social media, we often mistake media as the thing that's being

communicated. Our media are our metaphors; our metaphors create the content of our culture. (Postman,2023)

Children under the age of 12 average 5.5 hours of screen time daily. Often consuming so much content that their brains get jumbled trying to decipher what's true and false, and young minds are particularly susceptible. Studies show teens that are online for more than 4 hours daily are twice as likely to experience depression compared to those with less exposure, according to Vision center (Sugue, 2025). Screen exposure varies by region; urban youth have higher opportunities for accessing technology compared to rural youth. In addition, some research suggests that the mental health impact of screen use can vary among different racial or ethnic groups, possibly influenced by how digital platforms are utilized for social support or cultural engagement (Sugue, 2025). The phycological impacts of harmful content go deeper than just "poorer mental health," studies show that interpersonal relationships, the formation of political beliefs, consumer behavior are all shaped by social media and can lead identities to be fragile and broken (Meerson, 2025).

Delegates are encouraged to research how their assigned countries' cultural and religious traditions shape responses to youth mental health crises. For example, does your country have a stigma around mental illness based on spiritual beliefs and cultural norms that prevent suitable support systems for children that have been impacted by harmful content online.

UNICEF emphasizes the need for safer online environments, and support systems for those who are struggling with the effects social media has had on them. At UNICEF, we believe it is a child's right to have access to safe online platforms, allowing for learning, socializing and expression of oneself (UNICEF,2024). UNICEF's mission to protect child rights in the digital age makes this issue urgent and calls all countries to enhance online safety policies, for the sake of our children, for the sake of our future.

Delegates in this committee will explore how governments, tech companies, and civil society can collaborate to create safer online spaces while balancing free expression and innovation.

As the International Journal of Advanced Mass Communication and Journalism states, social media drives the sharing of cultures from generations to nations (Ogar, 2022). Developing countries still notably lack internet access in comparison to developed countries. However, they have more access than ever before to the positive and negative impacts of social media.

In UNICEF, it will be our mission to protect child's rights worldwide and offer solutions that grant access to education tools but block exposure to content that is harmful to both mental health and physical health.

Background/History

In the short time that social media has been around it has impacted hundreds of thousands of people's daily lives and perceptions of the world. UNICEF recognizes the dual-edged nature of

digital technology for children. Over 30 years ago (1989) the United Nations wrote the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** to set out the freedoms and protections that countries must give children and young people under 18 years old. This was the same year the world wide web was invented. This means that the people who wrote the convention had no idea of the change that digital technology would bring to young people's lives (5 rights Foundation). The UN convention on the rights of the child is followed by 196 countries, making it the most ratified agreement in history (UN, 2022). In 2009, the International Telecommunication Union collaborated with UNICEF to expand on this convention and address the concerns raising with the abondance of children online. **The 2009 Industry on Child Online Protection** put guidelines in place for today's children and future generations to use internet-based services and associated technologies safely and securely (UNICEF, ITU). It laid the foundation for many more conventions to be passed by organizations such as UNICEF to safeguard children's rights while enabling them to benefit from digital technologies. While progress has been made since 2009, challenges persist as social media continues to evolve rapidly. The foundational principles established by these guidelines remain relevant as policymakers adapt strategies to address emerging risks such as AI-generated harmful content and algorithmic amplification of dangerous material.

Emergence of sexual exploitation in the early years of social media

The first social media platforms such as SixDegrees, My Space, and Facebook started growing in the late 1990's to early 2000's. Every year a new big social network platform was launched. The more that people consumed content, and profits grew, the more engagement was prioritized over safety. UNICEF saw a big concern in the early years of social media with child predators taking advantage of a child's anonymity to exploit and groom children online. As the years went on it became even easier for child predators to exploit and groom children online. More than 300 million children a year are victims of online sexual abuse and exploitation, according to an estimate of the global scale of the crisis (UNSW media). Another private report claims that at least 1/3 girls have been approached by adults asking for nudes on social media. This no longer becomes just a mental health concern but a safety concern, as pornography mingles its way into apps such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube (Murell, 2024). Children are more at risk than adults might think, which requires accurate information tools and portals to help parents navigate their child's online presence.

In 2010, as social media became more widespread, more children got exposed to harmful content such as self-harm and pro-eating disorder material, particularly on apps like Instagram and Pinterest. It is very dangerous to glamorize such materials because it can influence malleable young minds into believing what they are viewing is *ok,* or even worse, desired. Teenagers who already experience poor mental health are at an elevated risk of the negative impacts of social media, particular cyberbullying related depression, body image, disordered eating and poor sleep (Katella, 2024). Dr Murphey's advisory made in June 2024 called for a surgeon general's warning label on social media platforms, which would require an act of Congress to implement.

Murphey adds that "algorithms are built to promote whatever it believes you are interested in, even if said interest is harmful. For example, if a teen searches for depression or suicide, algorithms will foster more content related to that certain interest. Soon they may begin to think that everyone around them is depressed or thinking about suicide, which is not necessarily good for mental health." (Katella, 2024) In conclusion, social media can give false ideals and normalize behavior that young children should not be exposed to, to keep audiences hooked on their platform.

Effects of Covid 19

The **COVID-19** pandemic changed access to healthcare and decreased mental and physical wellbeing. It also significantly altered teens' relationship with social media (PubMed). When forced to stay inside and not see your friends, social media was the alternative to staying connected and overcoming social isolation caused by physical distancing measures. Without being able to go to school much of the information was learned online. In addition, teens were able to access health information and get the resources they needed. Covid-19 saw a spike in STI's among youth aged 15-25 but a decrease in screening, rapid advances in virtual healthcare services were necessary to allow many youths to access confidential and private virtual care (PubMed, 2023). Overall, the amplification of social media during Covid-19 had some positive impacts on youth, that being said, the amplification of social media during the pandemic changed how people behave, consume and share information on social media permanently (Molla, 2021). Rani Molla's article on how the pandemic changed social media says that pre pandemic the type of content was more cultivated and pushed very ideal standards, but the messiness of the pandemic showed content that was more realistic showing more relatable content. "People suddenly had something they could all talk about" (Molla, 2021). Even though the Pandemic brought people together virtually, social media is not as rewarding as face-to-face interactions, according to Kellan Terry, Brand watch's director of communications. The increase in short form content in platforms like Tik Tok during the pandemic soared and today remains a lot higher than 2019. From 2019 to 2020 the amount of time users visited Tik Tok grew 567% according to Similar Web, an AI powered digital data company to track consumer trends.

Rise of misinformation during the Pandemic

There were also negative consequences of the pandemic in the context of social media. As people turned online to find information to better understand their reality, misinformation

flooded the algorithms. This misinformation not only created unfair competition with information from health authorities but also contributed to intensifying the crisis, reducing mitigation efforts, and affecting the resilience of populations (Mano, 2020). Many studies have been written about the spread of misinformation during the pandemic and the impacts that had on adolescents. Trust in information from social media rather than the government is associated with belief in misinformation and COVID-19 myths (Melki et al.2021). **The Adolescent Cognitive Brain study** found that a minority of adolescents reported more than one hour of daily exposure to COVID-19 related information on social media (9.1%), the internet (4.3%) and television (10.2%) (PubMed, 2022). Social media is the most frequent producer of Covid-19 misinformation and due to the many hours spent on social media, everyone, including children were inevitably exposed to propaganda about the virus. Adolescents are especially at risk because they can't always critically evaluate information to see if it's reliable or not. Due to the lock down and more time spent with parents, adolescents' view on the Pandemic was influenced by their parents. The ACBS found that 61% of parents strived to educate their children on the importance of wearing a mask in the week of the survey (PubMed, 2022). In conclusion, it is possible that the impact of any social media-related misinformation is mitigated by the influence of parent counseling, given that the effect of social media was attenuated when parent counseling, and television media, were considered. Prior studies have found that higher education and trust in information from the government contributed to fewer beliefs in misinformation (Al-Zaman,2021).

In 2021, The UN updated their policies on child rights in relation to the digital environment. **The Child Online Policy Brief,** made by UNICEF, held onto the same goals as past initiatives and holds similarities with goals from other organizations. The main purpose of the Child Online Policy Brief is to promote digital literacy and keep children safe from online harm. It also hopes to spread education and humanitarian aid all over the world through technology. With roughly half of the world's population online, UNICEF works with partners to close the access gap and ensure that every child, no matter where they live, has access to the critical resource that digital technologies can bring (UNICEF). In 2018, UNICEF worked in 134 countries to build national systems to prevent and respond to violence against children, with child online protection gaining importance. Similar to other initiatives UNICEF aims to counter harmful content (Cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, misinformation) through policies, literacy, and corporate accountability.

Delegates are advised to research existing laws, gaps and compliance with international frameworks such as ITU Child Online Protection guidelines.

Current challenges

UNICEF highlights multiple different challenges that must be combated to protect children from violence in the digital environment. Research and policy makers find that there is a lack of understanding of what children are exposed to online and the short- and long-term impacts due to a scarcity of data. Furthermore, some parents neglect or just don't know how to monitor their child's online activity. A lack of assistance for educators, parents/caregivers open doors for kids to be exposed to content, damaging their mental health.

There are a number of challenges in tackling this issue. These include: a scarcity of data available to researchers and policymakers to help better understand what harms children are exposed to online and its short- and long-term impacts;

 company decisions regarding the design and operations of their services such as decisions related to algorithm design and the allocation of resources for content moderation; insufficient regulatory measures; the lack of support for educators and parents/ caregivers in navigating and supporting children's online activities; and inequitable access to high quality digital literacy programs. To find out where countries stand we recommend visiting official UNICEF websites for your country as well as looking at UNICEF policy briefs.

Sexual exploitation

Children frequently have very positive experiences using the internet, which gives them the chance to socialize and learn. However, technology can also raise the possibility of encountering unpleasant situations, such as child sexual abuse and exploitation online. There are many negative impacts on children who have experienced such abuse. For example, Children who had experienced online sexual exploitation and abuse were between 40% and 400% more likely to self-harm and to have thoughts of suicide following their experience (Safe online). In addition, many children do not share what has happened to them to law enforcement or a helpline, and "nearly half of them said it was because they did not know where to go or whom to tell", according to the findings of a research project called **Disrupting Harm** (Safe online). Another challenge of this issue is frontline welfare workers in most of the countries in the scope of the project said they did not know how to support children who have experienced this crime.

Professor Satler, who is the inaugural director of the new Child light East Asia and Pacific hub at UNSW, said the global index aims to provide a universal measure of child sexual abuse and exploitation. He highlights that "We're talking about children who have been sexually abused because they are using technology, services and products that are promoted to them by commercial entities who facilitate this, and we need to focus our attention on the role they play in ensuring child safety online." (UNSW, 2024). Failure to take down this abusive content, especially sexual images of children will just continue with every view, every click, which is deeply damaging. Every second, files containing sexual images of children are reported to the five main watchdog and policing organizations in the world according to **Childlight Global Safety Institute** (UNSW, 2024). Satler says the reason that cases of child sexual exploitation is

still so high is because of "Weak policy decisions, lack of investment in public health and child welfare and reluctance to regulate online environments." (UNSW, 2024).

In the 2021 Child Online Policy Brief, the mass scale of this issue is also brought up. Offenders may exploit the socio-economic vulnerabilities that exist in some communities to sexually abuse children, such as by paying children to perform sexual acts in front of a webcam. Between 2013 and 2017, the **United States-based National Center for Missing & Exploited Children** reported a 700 per cent increase in the number of industry referrals of child sex abuse material online (UNICEF).

In 2019 ECPAT International, INTERPOL and UNICEF Innocenti collaborated and invested 7 million USD on a large-scale research project called **Disrupting Harm.** The project was beneficial in assessing how national protections systems are responding to the crime as well as recommending "ways in which leaders and policymakers can help strengthen online child sexual exploitation and abuse prevention and response approaches to more effectively address this issue" (Safe Online). The project included support to the victims by learning about their capacities and needs through the supervision of frontline welfare workers and justice professionals. Disrupting Harm was implemented in 13 countries in South-East Asia and Eastern and Southern Africa. The 7 million USD commitment was renewed in 2022 after the first phase of the project was serviceable. Overall, many countries followed the recommendations by Disrupting Harm, for example Malaysia criminalized sexual extortion and livestreaming of child sexual abuse, Indonesia developed a National Roadmap on Child Online Protection, and Tanzania integrated insights into education and training materials (Safe online). They also emphasize cooperation among government agencies, civil society, and technology sectors to improve prevention, awareness, and response mechanisms for online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Additionally, these countries focus on raising digital literacy and awareness to empower children and communities to recognize and report online harms.

Rise of social media in developing nations

We recognize that the impacts of harmful content on social media are conversations directed at westernized culture, where the amount of people that have access to technology is more abundant and normalized. However, in our current world, we see a rise of social media use in developing nations. This brings many benefits such as further connectivity to the world, access to education through technology, online support services, and the ability to share their culture. UNICEF works hard to make sure that *every child* is given the right to access technology and utilize its benefits. UNICEF says, "if leveraged correctly, digital technology can be a game changer for children being left behind, connecting them to a world of opportunity and providing them the skills they need to succeed."

The digital divide continues to narrow between wealthy and developing nations, (Poushter, 2018). Even though wealthier nations have a higher % of internet users, they have not increased

their average whilst developing countries have grown from 42% in 2014 to 64% in 2017. At the same time, developed nations flatlined. Currently there are still 2.6 billion people offline, that's around 1/3 of the population, according to the **International Telecommunication Union (**Geneva, 2023). The International Communication Union also observed a decrease in people offline from 2022 to 2023, where it dropped from 2.7 billion to 2.6 billion people offline globally. "This improvement in connectivity is another step in the right direction, and one more step towards leaving no one behind in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals," said ITU Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin. "We won't rest until we live in a world where meaningful connectivity is a lived reality for everyone, everywhere" (Geneva, 2023).

As developing nations gain more access to technology new challenges emerge, particularly in the vulnerability children face when they don't have standard digital literacy skills. In addition, developing nations have fewer interventions or support services to help children impacted by harmful content on social media. Digital literacy struggles to keep up with the spike in technological innovation. Inadequate regulatory frameworks and lower levels of parental and institutional guidance also increase the risks of privacy violations, exploitation, and exposure to inappropriate or misleading information can all impact children in harmful ways. "The need to protect children online will only increase as countries become more connected and technology development accelerates."

There is a massive barrier in research between the effects of social media in developed nations vs developing nations, and a scarcity of data which makes strong crisis response systems challenging. Most large platforms are based in the US where their moderation policies are heavily influenced by western norms, "particularly in the first amendment to free speech,"(Shahid/Vashistha, 2023) Without accurate data to get a wider scope of online activity in a country, policies in moderating content, age verification ext., fall short in protecting a child's right to online safety. **According to the Center for Democracy and Technology,** non-English content faces higher risks of inconsistent moderation of online algorithms, (Elswa,2024). Moreover, this can impend users from speaking freely or accessing information in their native language. There is a huge disparity in countermeasures to misinformation between English and non-English content. Namely, Facebook allocates 87% of its spending on misinformation countermeasures to English content, despite only 9% of its users being English speakers, (Elswa, 2024). Another example is on twitter's *bodyguard* tool, meant to protect users from cyberbullying, hate speech and toxic content, is only available in English, French, Italian, and Portuguese (Shahid/Vashistha, 2023).

In conclusion there are large socio-cultural differences between users in the global south and the west, and further research needs to be done for companies to make accurate and beneficial policies to regulate online activity and algorithmic behavior. Content moderation in the Global South remains under-resourced, culturally misaligned, and reactive, leaving children exposed to preventable harms. Bridging this gap requires decolonial approaches that prioritize local languages, equitable labor practices, and child-centered policies. Without systemic changes, platforms risk perpetuating digital colonialism while failing vulnerable users.

Varying Policies

The regulatory landscape for child online safety varies widely across the globe, with two particularly contrasting approaches seen in the United States and the United Kingdom. These differences reflect broader philosophical divides on digital governance, data privacy, and the role of the state in regulating technology.

The UK has established itself as a global leader in online child protection through a series of legislative measures designed to hold tech companies accountable. Most notably:

The Age-Appropriate Design Code (Children's Code), introduced in 2021, mandates that online services likely to be accessed by children must follow strict standards of data protection and user design. This includes limiting data collection, turning off geolocation by default, avoiding addictive features like autoplay, and ensuring that the "best interests of the child" guide platform design.

The Online Safety Act, passed in 2023, further empowers the communications regulator Ofcom to enforce these standards. The law compels platforms to prevent exposure to harmful or illegal content, enforce age verification, and face penalties for noncompliance.

These regulations mark a shift toward a duty-of-care model, where platforms are legally responsible for the safety of younger users.

In contrast, the United States lacks a unified regulatory framework for children's online experiences. The primary federal law is the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), passed in 1998, which only applies to users under 13 and focuses narrowly on data collection. COPPA does not address content moderation, design ethics, or protections for teenagers.

Attempts to expand national regulation—such as the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) or updates to COPPA—have stalled in Congress due to political gridlock and concerns about overreach. In the absence of federal action:

States like California and Utah have passed their own online child safety laws, often modeled on the UK's approach. However, these efforts face constitutional challenges, especially regarding First Amendment rights and federal preemption.

Self-regulation remains the dominant model, with tech companies encouraged—but not compelled—to implement safety measures.

This approach reflects a strong emphasis on freedom of expression, minimal government intervention, and trust in market solutions. Critics argue it leaves children vulnerable, while defenders caution against stifling innovation and infringing on civil liberties.

Between 2013 and 2017, developing nations experienced dramatic increases in both internet usage and smartphone ownership (Poushter,2017). In 19 emerging economies surveyed, median internet use rose from 42% to 64%, while smartphone ownership jumped from 24% to 42%. This growth has been accompanied by a notable rise in social media use, increasing from approximately 40% in 2015–2016 to 53% in 2017 ("Breadcrumb",2018).

In contrast, social media usage has stabilized in most developed countries. In 17 advanced economies surveyed, median internet use remains at 87%, with little year-over-year change. Smartphone and social media penetration appear to have reached saturation points, especially in North America and Europe. This plateau suggests a new phase where the focus may shift from expanding access to regulating and refining digital platforms. Across both developing and developed contexts, social media usage varies significantly by age, education, gender, and income level. For example, young adults (ages 18–36) are consistently more likely to use social media, sometimes by a margin of over 50 percentage points compared to older adults ("Breadcrumb", 2018).

Also, in some developing nations, men are more likely than women to be online (Lo Bue et al., 2022). However, in advanced economies like Sweden and the United States, women are slightly more active on social platforms.

As digital platforms increasingly shape public opinion, education, and political mobilization, disparities in access could lead to unequal participation in global discourse. These issues intersect with questions of censorship, misinformation, surveillance, and the protection of minors online — all key areas of concern in any comprehensive debate on the future of social media (Koc-Michalska and Lilleker, 2016).

Effect of AI on children

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), extended reality (XR) and neuro-technology offer great opportunities for children and youth (UNICEF). According to the **Harvard Graduate School of Education,** AI has the potential for personalized learning and to help students gain critical skills in this emerging AI society (Anderson,2024). However, there is always another side to AI benefits. Ying Xu, an assistant professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education worries that "children more attached to AI than the people around them" (Anderson, 2024). AI adds new dimensions to human interactions and relationships, including children. The development of the child is a long and complicated process with many factors altering a child's ability to learn, engage and socialize, with emphasis on the importance of children's social interactions with others-- typically with the people around them, like parents, teachers and peers. As we are the first generation to grow up with access to AI as we know it, and we are still uncertain if children can benefit from AI interactions the same way they can with other people. Ying Xu proposes in her podcast hosted by Jill Anderson that moving forward "we

need to help children maintain healthy boundaries with AI by being transparent about AI's nature. It is essential that they understand that they're interacting with a program, not a person. This clarity helps prevent confusion and strengthen their ability to engage with AI more effectively" (Anderson, 2024).

On the contrary, UNICEF's **AI for Children** proclaims that little attention is paid to how AI systems affect children and their rights, and that AI could be dangerous if children can't fully understand the implications of AI. If they don't understand, or are not made aware, then they can't respond to instances of bias or rectify misconceptions in their findings. According to UNICEF analysis, out of 20 national AI strategies, the specific needs of children in this topic were only brought up briefly (UNICEF Innocenti). "While barely a handful registered more than 1,000 words on the key issues of improving quality of life and services for children, protecting their data and privacy, enabling them to obtain strong AI competences, and cultivating them as a workforce" (UNICEF Innocenti). When it comes to child rights, education and health care are usually at the forefront but topics like protection against discrimination, abuse and exploitation or the rights to freedom of expression, association and access to information are usually less explored. "It is increasingly critical that policymakers choose to focus on children's well-being in a world where AI systems help them flourish, instead of allowing them to do little more than determining the course of their education and careers" (UNICEF Innocenti).

The proliferation of fake content makes it hard to know what is real and what is not. It may be wise to doubt the authenticity of content that turns out to be fake, but distrust of online content can carry over to perfectly legitimate content. The ability to verify the source of online content has never been more important: The World Economic Forum has identified AI-powered misinformation as the most serious immediate threat to the global economy. Governments have used AI to control information and stifle Internet freedoms (Shorter, 2024). As the U.S. presidential election approaches, the use of AI, particularly large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT and many others, has made it easy to generate fake content that is increasingly difficult to distinguish from real news sites, stories, photos, and videos (Shorter, 2024).This creates a dilemma for users. People rely on what they see with their own eyes to make important decisions, but in a world where digital photos and videos can be easily manipulated, faked, or created entirely by AI.

Unlike traditional misinformation, AI-generated content can be created at unprecedented speed and scale. Large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Claude, or open-source variants like LLaMA can generate convincing articles, fake headlines, or political talking points that mimic human writing. However, more concerning is the rise of deepfakes — AI-generated videos or audio that make it appear as if a real person said or did something they never did. , (nationwide children, 2025)

These can be weaponized to discredit political candidates, incite violence, or sway public opinion just days before an election — too late for rebuttal. For example, in the 2023 Slovak parliamentary elections, deepfake audio recordings falsely portrayed opposition leader Michal

Šimečka discussing plans to rig the election and raise beer prices. These recordings circulated widely on social media during a legally mandated 48-hour media blackout before the vote, leaving little time for fact-checking or rebuttal. The pro-Russian populist party won a narrow victory, and while the exact impact of the deepfakes is difficult to quantify, the incident raised significant concerns about AI's role in undermining democratic processes ("Incident 573: Deepfake Recordings Allegedly Influence Slovakian Election", 2023). Predators also utilize deep fakes to manipulate children in sending sexually explicit material, engaging in sexual acts, or establishing a relationship built on deceit and manipulation. This can have long term phycological damages on a child's mental health, with having trust issues later as an adult. "As technology evolves, the potential for predators to leverage AI in these harmful ways emphasizes the urgency for parents to be vigilant and proactive in safeguarding their children online"(Child rescue coalition)

Solutions

Developing and developed countries have all made strides in combating this issue, largely through the work of UNICEF but many other organizations as well. All are linked by the same goal, even if the situation varies within countries. **The UN Guiding Principles** on business and Human Rights and the Children's Rights and Business Principles calls for companies of all sizes to take responsibility to protect child's rights and offer remediation to any negative effects they may have on children's rights whether online or offline (UNICEF, 2024). In UNICEF's 2024 policy brief in **Protecting Children from Violence and Exploitation in Relation to the Digital Environment,** corporate accountability is something that nations should focus on. (UNICEF, 2024) To balance risk and opportunity, businesses can also play a central role in delivering digital experiences that positively contribute to child well-being, alongside their responsibility to address negative child rights impacts. Another principle of the policy is that the government should include children in conversations about their needs to when developing legislative measures, ie; policies, programs, services and training on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. Moreover, it also recognizes the vulnerability of children compared to adults as they develop their physical and mental state which is why up-to-date research is crucial to make the most informed decisions about how to tailor protection measures to each developmental change. Furthermore, it acknowledges that children are more vulnerable that adults due to their evolving physical and mental state, which is why up-to date research is essential to making the best decisions about how to customize protective measures to each developmental stage (UNICEF, 2024)

Outside government and corporate institutions, parents and educators have the responsivity to have conversations about how to navigate social media safely and making sure that they have a

place to go if they need help. The best way for educators to navigate this issue is to incorporate *digital literacy* programs into the curriculum. One UNICEF initiative called **Tinkering with Tech** harnesses the power of digital technology to ignite creativity and become "tech explorers" to address real world issues in their communities (UNICEF, 2024). Through this process, students - especially girls - develop skills like problem-solving, creativity, computational thinking, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy while learning mathematical and scientific concepts. In conclusion this simulation should focus on three mains solutions, the first being funding UNICEF's child online protection programs globally, including the integration of digital literacy into school curriculums, the second is corporate and government accountability, with pushing tech companies to localize safety tools, the third is providing support systems either through conversations between child and parents/teachers as well as national helplines. Success can be made through funding and political will.

Several instances of national initiatives include **Indias WebWise** program. "Web Wise reports the vulnerabilities and cyber threats, on the other hand it presents us with insights that can help us to create focused awareness campaigns around safe internet practices." (Spo India, 2017). In 2017, the WebWise program has touched more than 52,000 students in 72 schools, through 170 workshops in 13 cities such as Pune, New Delhi, Aligarh, Shahjahanpur etc.

Another example is in December 2024, **Brazil's National Data Protection Authority** Banned X (formally known as twitter) for the sake of protecting the personal data of children from emerging AI systems. This data and personal child information was being used to "train" their AI such as *Grock,* an AI chatbot built by another Elon Musk-owned company (Han, 2024). In June 2024, powerful AI was being built from personal photos and data of Brazilian children, without their consent or knowledge, according to **Human Rights Watch.** "As lawmakers around the world grapple with regulating AI, they should follow Brazil's lead in proactively establishing data privacy safeguards that would help shape AI into a technology that promotes, not violates, children's rights" (Han, 2024)

Case Study: Australia's stance on harmful social media content

On December 10, 2025, the Australian government is taking a huge leap and will be implementing a social media ban for everyone under 16 years old, targeting platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and X (Campbell/Canberra, 2025).
Naturally, this raises the question: how will such a ban be enforced? While most platforms currently have a self-imposed age limit of 13, enforcement is minimal, and children frequently bypass this by entering a false date of birth (Ritchie, 2024). Instead of punishing young children, the Australian law will instead hold companies accountable, imposing fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars (approximately $31 million USD) for undefined "systemic breaches" if they fail to introduce adequate safeguards. The government acknowledges that children are the future and emphasizes the need to protect them from harm Campbell/Canberra, 2025).

In 2023, the U.S. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) tracked 298 attempted abductions involving 381 children and received 36.2 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation online (NCMEC, 2023).

By implementing this social media ban, its aim is to shield children from physical dangers like online predators and traffickers, psychological dangers, data breaches and much more. Australia recognizes how pivotal this generation of young minds is for the future and is committed to protecting them no matter the cost (UNICEF, 2024).

Case study Germany:

Pictures with your friends at the lake or the cake you baked are all super fun to post about. But how many of us, let alone children, really think before we post? The internet never forgets and that photo you shared can be copied, shared, and misused by strangers, resulting in serious negative consequences. In Germany, concerns about online privacy and children's safety have led to strong regulatory action. Germany has developed some of the world's strictest data protection laws (Der Spiegel, 2023).

Under Germany's Youth Protection Act (JuSchG), social media platforms are required to restrict access to harmful content, ensure users' ages are accurate, and provide parental control features. Children under 13 cannot legally create accounts without parental consent, and platforms can face fines if they fail to comply (Bundeszentrale für Kinder- und Jugendmedienschutz, 2024). Germany also requires platforms to moderate harmful content and reduces risks to minors' mental health and data privacy (European Commission, 2022). Nonetheless, enforcement remains challenging, often children bypass age restrictions, and once content is uploaded, it's almost impossible to control its spread.

Germany recognizes how vulnerable children are in the digital world and continues to push for real age verification systems and greater corporate accountability. Through regulation and education, the country aims to ensure that children grow up in a safer digital environment, one where their privacy, safety, and dignity are protected (UNICEF Germany, 2024).

Bloc Positions

United Nations Countries has been at a massive disagreement when it comes to topics such as internet and social media safety, when we take a look at numbers regarding both of these, in England and Wales, 70% of teens aged 13 to 17 encountered real-life violent content online in the past year("70% of Teens See Real-Life Violence on Social Media, Reveals New Research | Youth Endowment Fund" 2024). In contrast, globally, it's noteworthy that only 36% of global

respondents felt they could accurately identify when someone is lying about their online identity, indicating areas where digital literacy could be improved("Eighty Percent of 18-Year-Olds Believe Young People Are in Danger of Online Sexual Abuse – UNICEF/Ipsos Global Poll" 2016). Here are your bloc positions, where do you feel your country falls on the scale.

Pro Technology

Technology, specifically social media, is a defining aspect of modern culture, enabling quicker and broader communication across the globe. It fosters connections and allows for the dissemination of information that can lead to social movements, cultural growth, and innovation. China has a unique approach to technology, focusing on digital innovation but with strict government control over social media and internet usage. Platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin (TikTok in China) are hugely popular, but are subject to heavy censorship (Generis Legal Intelligence 2024).

Neutral Technology Use

While technology undeniably has an impact on society and culture, the effects are not inherently positive or negative. It largely depends on how individuals and communities choose to interact with these tools. The rapid changes in technology provide both challenges and opportunities, with no clear consensus on whether they should be celebrated or feared. Nations such as Estonia known for their advanced e-government initiatives would agree with these terms. The countries' brilliant leadership in this area is shown through their discussions of privacy and conquering social exclusion (Kaljulaid 2018).

Anti-Technology

The overwhelming presence of screen time, particularly for children and teens, contributes to rising mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. The excessive consumption of media leads to a distorted perception of reality and can be a contributing factor in shaping unhealthy behaviors, unrealistic expectations, and poor mental health outcomes. UN Member States such as Australia and France have started nationwide social media presence bans for teens and in Australia, any youth under 16. This law has both positive and negative consequences, that could also pose challenges related to digital literacy, social connectivity, and access to opportunities (Ritchie 2024). Balancing the benefits and drawbacks of such laws would require careful planning and a broader conversation about the role of technology in the lives of young people.

Guiding questions

These are questions delegates should keep in mind when researching, as well as help steer flow of debate

How can your nation work collaboratively with other nations to ensure the online safety of children?

How does your nation balance freedom of expression with online safety/censorship, what side does your nation lean towards?

How does digital technology help progress developing nations?

How has social media influenced the political landscape of your nation?

How can your nation reduce the threats of AI but also utilize its benefits?

How would your countries enforce censorship laws?

How can your country balance culturally or religiously rooted practices with science-based mental health approaches to create solutions that are both effective and accepted by local communities?

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