

# Media Update

6 February 2018

## UNICEF

Press Release

### More than 175,000 children go online for the first time every day, tapping into great opportunities, but facing grave risks

*On Safer Internet Day, UNICEF calls for urgent action to protect children and their digital footprint*

NEW YORK, 6 February 2018 – More than 175,000 children go online for the first time every day – a new child every half second – UNICEF said today. Digital access exposes these children to a wealth of benefits and opportunities, but also to a host of risks and harms, including access to harmful content, sexual exploitation and abuse, cyberbullying, and misuse of their private information, the children’s agency warned.

“Every day, thousands of children are going online for the first time, which opens them up to a flood of dangers we are just coming to appreciate, let alone address,” said Laurence Chandy, UNICEF Director of Data, Research and Policy. “While governments and the private sector have made some progress in formulating policies and approaches to eliminate the most egregious online risks, more effort must be made to fully understand and protect children’s online lives.”

Worldwide 1 in 3 internet users is a child, and yet – as outlined in [The State of the World’s Children 2017: Children in a digital world](#) – too little is done to protect them from the perils of the digital world, to safeguard the trail of information their online activities create, and to increase their access to safe and quality online content.



The report makes clear that the obligation to protect children in the digital world lands on everyone, including governments, families, schools and other institutions. It notes, however, that the private sector – especially in the technology and telecommunication industries – has a significant and unique responsibility to shape the impact of digital technology on children – a responsibility that has not been taken seriously enough. The power and influence of the private sector should be leveraged to advance industry-wide ethical standards on data and privacy, as well as other practices that benefit and protect children online.

UNICEF is calling for renewed urgency and cooperation among governments, civil society, United Nations agencies and other international children's organizations, and, most significantly, the private sector to put children at the center of digital policy by:

1. **Coordinating global, regional and national response.** We must deepen collaboration between policy makers, law enforcement and the technology industry to embed principles of safety in the design of technology, and to work together to find solutions to keep pace with digital technology that can enable and conceal illegal trafficking and other online child sexual abuse.
2. **Safeguarding children's privacy.** We need a much greater commitment by the private sector and government to protect and not misuse children's data and to respect its encryption; the full application of international standards in collecting and using data about children online; and to teach children how to protect themselves from threats to their own privacy.
3. **Empowering children online through more equitable access and digital literacy.** Children must be taught how to keep themselves informed, engaged and safe online, including through greater collaboration between governments and technologists to develop ICT platforms and curricula from primary school through high school; supporting online libraries and expanding the capacity of public libraries to teach digital skills; investing in teacher training in digital technology; teaching children how to recognize and protect themselves from online dangers and misinformation; and making digital citizenship a core component of digital literacy instruction.
4. **Leveraging the unique role of the private sector.** There is an urgent need for the establishment and enforcement of industry wide ethical standards on data and privacy that protect and benefit children online,

including ethical product development and marketing that mitigates risks to children.

5. **Investing in better evidence about access, opportunities and risks for children online.** We need better evidence about children’s access and activities online, so we can leverage this evidence for regulatory frameworks and policies that recognize the distinct needs and rights of children; strengthen coordination and knowledge sharing at the global level to address the challenges of a digital world; deepen collaboration with children’s organizations; and engage more systematically with policymakers and lawmakers.

“In the time it takes to click on a link, a child somewhere begins creating a digital trail which those not necessarily considering the child’s best interest can follow and potentially exploit,” said Chandy. “As younger and younger children join the Internet, the need to have a serious discussion about how to keep them safe online and secure their digital footprint becomes increasingly urgent.”

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### About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. For more information about UNICEF and its work for children visit [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org). Follow UNICEF on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

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