

**Committee:** Human Rights Council

**Issue:** The question of Children's rights in the digital age

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**Position:** Chair

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## Introduction

Worldwide 346 million children are not connected to the internet, around 3 out of 5 youth in Africa are offline, contrasting the youth in Europe where it is just 1 out of 25<sup>1</sup>. 1 in 3 internet users is a child, although this is a huge amount there is still not a lot of protection for children online. According to Unicef “governments and the private sector have not kept up with the pace of change, exposing children to new risks and harms and leaving millions of the most disadvantaged children behind.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally Unicef stated that “In a digital world, our dual challenge is how to mitigate the harms while maximizing the benefits of the internet for every child.” Access to the digital world will enable children growing up in poverty to have more opportunities, increased access for information, practice their digital skills for the workplace as well as a platform to share their views and connect with others in the world. With the World Wide Web starting in 1990, the internet is still a fairly new concept, especially for adults. Most parents nowadays haven't got a lot of experience with growing up in a digital age and teaching their kids how to use technology devices is on unfamiliar grounds. Questions that could be considered about children growing up in a digital age are: How do children gain access to the internet in their daily lives? Does this access enable them to have equally sufficient access to

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<sup>1</sup> Children in the Digital World, Unicef, [https://www.unicef.org/sowc2017/?utm\\_campaign=SOWC+English+&utm\\_medium=bitly&utm\\_source=Media](https://www.unicef.org/sowc2017/?utm_campaign=SOWC+English+&utm_medium=bitly&utm_source=Media)

<sup>2</sup> Make the Digital World a Safer World for Children, Unicef, [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_102303.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_102303.html)

information, education, participation and other valued opportunities? Does it compound existing vulnerabilities or introduce new risks and harms to children's well-being? Which initiatives, policies and practices are effective for maximising the benefits and minimising the harm for children in relation to technological progress?

## Definition of Key Terms

### The Digital World

We are inter-connected through digital devices, media or we can say digital marketing services that are available to every one 24/7. It is the world full of ideas, opinions, learning and opportunities. The Internet has made it possible for all of us to connect whenever we consider it necessary.

### GDPR

The General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 is a regulation in EU law on data protection and privacy for all individuals within the European Union and the European Economic Area. It also addresses the export of personal data outside the EU and European Economic Areas (EEA)<sup>3</sup>.

### WHOIS

WHOIS is a protocol for querying the internet databases that store information on users or assignees of internet resources. WHOIS registries typically contain organizational information in addition to domain names, IP address blocks and other autonomous systems. In many ways, WHOIS is like an internet phonebook. It's used for a range of activities, from security research purposes to helping complete domain control validation checks for Certification Authorities. WHOIS stores and delivers information in a human-readable form<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> A critical test for ICANN: ensuring GDPR compliance while preserving access to WHOIS, World Trademark Review, <https://www.worldtrademarkreview.com/enforcement-and-litigation/critical-test-icann-ensuring-gdpr-compliance-while-preserving-access>

<sup>4</sup> A critical test for ICANN: ensuring GDPR compliance while preserving access to WHOIS, World Trademark Review, <https://www.worldtrademarkreview.com/enforcement-and-litigation/critical-test-icann-ensuring-gdpr-compliance-while-preserving-access>

## Domain Name Systems (DNS)

“The Domain Name System is a hierarchical decentralized naming system for computers, services, or other resources connected to the Internet or a private network. It associates various information with domain names assigned to each of the participating entities”<sup>5</sup>.

## Internet Protocol (IP)

The Internet Protocol (IP) is the principal communications protocol in the Internet protocol suite for relaying datagrams across network boundaries. Its routing function enables internetworking, and essentially establishes the Internet.

## General Overview

Ever half a second, every day a child goes online for the first time<sup>6</sup>, experiencing all the opportunities the internet has to offer as well as the risks. The digital world enables children to connect with others anywhere in the world, resulting in empowerment and engagement in their communities. Unfortunately, this also has a downside as the private information of children is at risk, it can be exposed to dangerous matters and cyberbullying. Around 56% of all websites are in English, causing that many children are not able to find content they can understand or of cultural relevance. Additionally, more than 9 in 10 child sexual abuse URLs identified globally are located in the following five countries - Canada, France, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation and the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Giving children the opportunity to go online can bring huge benefits for their futures. For example, it increases access to education, training and jobs, which are especially important for children living in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as this can break the intergenerational cycles of poverty occurring in their community and family. Additionally, the internet gives children access to the news and sources that can help protect their health, safety and rights. According to UNICEF youth (15-24) is the most connected age group<sup>8</sup>. Worldwide, 71% of people online are youth out of the 48% of the total worldwide online population. It is significant that children get the opportunity to use the online connectivity in their favour to better education to have a chance for a brighter future. It allows children to access information on issues that are

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<sup>5</sup> DOMAIN NAMES - CONCEPTS AND FACILITIES, RFC, <https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc1034>

<sup>6</sup> Protect Children and their digital footprint, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/02/1002081>

<sup>7</sup> Make the Digital World a Safer World for Children, Unicef, [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_102303.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_102303.html)

<sup>8</sup> Children in a Digital World, Unicef, [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC\\_2017\\_FNG\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2017_FNG_WEB.pdf)

affecting their communities and can give them a role in helping to solve them. Out of a survey called “The State of the World’s Children”, conducted by UNICEF, results showed that 47% of children in Indonesia used the internet to learn skills which they don’t learn at school, in Burundi this was 35% and in Brazil 34%. On average, 40% of children used the internet to learn things for school and/or health. Other results showed that not all children were taught how to use the internet. In Honduras 69% of young people learned it on their own whilst this was only 19% in the Central African Republic (CAR). Furthermore, did the survey show that young people from low-income countries were 2.5 times more likely to ask for greater access for digital devices which could be linked to lack of access to these devices in LDCs. To solve this problem UNICEF hopes to provide all children with affordable access to online resources. Their plans include: “motivating telecom and technology companies to lower the cost of connectivity; taking the needs of the unconnected into account when developing infrastructure plans; investing in more public hotspots and the creation of more culturally and linguistically appropriate content; and confronting cultural and other barriers that prevent children – especially girls – from going online.”

Although there are significant benefits and opportunities for children that have access to the internet, it also brings risks. The digital world has increased the scale of child sexual abuse and exploitation. Child sex offenders have more easily access to children’s unprotected social media, as well as online forums. Furthermore, offenders can easily avoid getting tracked down, by creating fake accounts and online identities, giving them the opportunity to abuse multiple victims at once. Another issue that frequently comes up when talking about the risks of social media is cyberbullying and blackmailing. Peers can easily share intimate pictures of someone with others without the individuals consent. Bullies can hurt their victims with one click on the button. Additionally, offensive comments and images that have been posted online can’t be easily deleted by the victim<sup>9</sup>.

There are also health risks connected to digital technology, which have brought concern to children’s development. These risks include: obesity, sleep, and behavioural problems. Research has been done on the connection between the amount South Korean adolescents spent online and their weight status. This study was conducted by Dr. Seong-Ik Baek and assistant professor Wi-Young So, which shows that excessive use of technology can lead to a higher chance of becoming obese<sup>10</sup>. It displays that as the amount of time a child spends online increases, the amount of physical inactivity increases as well. Another study<sup>11</sup> carried out by four researchers of the Hershey Medical Centre, revealed that children who used technology before bed time, were more likely to sleep less and have sleep problems. These children were also less likely to eat breakfast and more likely to be tired in the morning. Furthermore, when children were reported to use one form of technology before bed time, they were more likely to use another form of technology as well, such as sending texts in the middle of the night after watching television before bed time. A further example of a possible risk of using technology at a young age is that it can affect

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<sup>9</sup> Growing up in a digital world: Benefits and Risks, Lancet, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(18\)30002-6/fulltext?code=lancet-site](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(18)30002-6/fulltext?code=lancet-site)

<sup>10</sup> Association between Times Spent on the Internet and Weight Status in Korean Adolescents, NCBI, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3481740/>

<sup>11</sup> Bedtime Use of Technology and Associated Sleep Problems in Children, NCBI, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5669315/>

children's social and emotional development<sup>12</sup>. Researchers at Boston University School of Medicine warned that using smartphones to entertain and to keep a child calm, could affect their social-emotional development. The question that was raised was "If these devices become the predominant method to calm and distract young children, will they be able to develop their own internal mechanisms of self-regulation?". Jenny Radesky, one of the researchers in this study urged that parents should invest in "direct human to human interaction" to focus on improving children's social skills. Radesky addressed the concern of mobile phones interfering with the ability to develop empathy and problem-solving skills as well as other social interactions that are learned by communicating in real life with peers.

Initiatives to make the internet a safer place for children that are currently discussed are: training for teachers and parents to teach digital skills and online safety to children. Additionally this can be crucial to teach children how to assess reliable news and information sources, and how to use social media properly and safe<sup>13</sup>. The digital world is growing rapidly and therefore is it important how to teach the new generation how to deal with it. Further solutions that could be considered to tackle cyberbullying and obesity are: creating agreements with tech companies/private sector, such as social media platforms to have strict regulations on cyberbullying, create a national plan to tackle physical inactivity and review the progress made once in every 5 years, reaching out to people about the importance of staying physically active and how technology can have a negative impact on our physical health if we use it excessively<sup>14</sup>.

## Major Parties Involved

### Private Sector/Tech companies

Social media platforms are well-known for connecting people from all over the world. Unfortunately, they are also well-known for the places where cyberbullying occurs. According to BBC, a Children's society survey showed that Social Networks fail to tackle cyber-bullying, risking the mental health of young people<sup>15</sup>. The results in the survey showed that 83% of the participants want social media platforms to do more to stop cyber-bullying. They believed that there was lack of consequences for people who were guilty of cyber-bullying, in contrast to people who bullied in real life. According to Detective Thomas Rich, a NJ police officer and creator of Always Connected (A program

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<sup>12</sup> Tablets and smartphones may affect social and emotional development, scientists speculate, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/feb/01/toddler-brains-research-smartphones-damage-social-development>

<sup>13</sup> Growing up in a digital world: Benefits and Risks, Lancet, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(18\)30002-6/fulltext?code=lancet-site](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(18)30002-6/fulltext?code=lancet-site)

<sup>14</sup> Tackling physical inactivity - a coordinated approach, all-party commission on physical activity, <https://parliamentarycommissiononphysicalactivity.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/apcopa-final.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Social media firms 'failing' to tackle cyber-bullying, BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-43197937>

developed to inform how to use technology in a positive way), social media platforms where cyber-bullying occurs most often are: Facebook, Instagram and Ask.fm<sup>16</sup>. Additionally, the NSPCC reported that children as young as ten had problems including, anxiety, depression and unhappiness, due to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter<sup>17</sup>. Their results showed that a total of 2,061 cases were so serious that these children were considered 'actively suicidal'. A counsellor of the childline stated that the reason children often feel isolated and have mental health problems is because, "the virtual reality conveys the impression that everybody is gloriously attractive, wonderfully funny, liked by like-minded people. By contrast, the experience of the individual child who has nobody in their life that they can trust". In 2016, 8% of the childline's 295,000 counselling sessions were for suicidal thoughts. Almost a third of the sessions were about cyberbullying. Out of the study by the NSPCC, 4 out of 5 children reported about being worried about inappropriate material on their smartphones and iPads. Bringing attention to the fact that social media platforms have to do more about online protection.

## **ICANN (International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers)**

ICANN was established in in the US, California. ICANN is a non-profit organization responsible for coordinating the maintenance of several databases. Your online life is influenced by its decisions. It coordinates domain names and Internet Protocol (IP) addresses. This is called the Domain Name System (DNS). It is a collection of naming systems for computers, services or other resources connected to the internet or private network. The DNS did not give many possibilities for representations for other languages who had another type of script, such as: Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew or Latin alphabet-based characters which are included in French and Spanish. In 2009 ICANN made it possible to implement a wider range of possible language scripts and approved of the International Domain Names in Application (IDNA), a system by which browsers and other applications are able to represent different types of characters, from emojis to Hebrew script<sup>18</sup>. Additionally, ICANN and other major IT companies across the globe met in Montevideo to discuss internet safety. In 2013, the companies came together to discuss the problem of online security, this debate is referred to as the 'Montevideo Statement', with ICANN as the main role in this debate. The organisations "expressed strong concern over the undermining of the trust and confidence of Internet users globally due to recent revelations of pervasive monitoring and surveillance."<sup>19</sup>. A number IT companies and Social Media Providers commenced the 'Global

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<sup>16</sup> Cyberbullying: Which 3 Social Networks Are the Worst?, Lindsey Barton Straus, <https://www.momsteam.com/health-safety/cyberbullying-which-3-social-networks-are-worst>

<sup>17</sup> Social media is making children suicidal: Sites are blamed for shocking rise in number of youngsters contacting Childline for help, Daily Mail, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4986810/Social-media-making-children-suicidal.html>

<sup>18</sup> *The Unicode® Standard: A Technical Introduction*, Unicode, <https://www.unicode.org/standard/principles.html>

<sup>19</sup> 'Montevideo Statement' and 'Global Government Surveillance Reform': Responses to Government Surveillance Activities, NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, <https://ccdcoe.org/montevideo-statement-and-global-government-surveillance-reform-responses-government-surveillance.html>

Government Surveillance Reform'. The reform was implemented "to limit 'government surveillance' of citizens and ensure free expression and privacy."

Although ICANN seems to try and improve internet safety, there are some controversial stories around the organization. Under pressure from domain name registrars citing General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance, ICANN has proposed a plan that would hide critical WHOIS data. This can have big negative consequences on internet safety as WHOIS data can help track down cyber criminals and keep the internet secure. This plan will be implemented to ensure the consumer's privacy. ICANN has created a plan called "The Cookbook", which would censor email addresses, causing that it is more difficult to track down who is managing or controlling a resource on the web. Additionally, ICANN plans on making corporate information harder to access. ICANN's approach will also make it harder, if not impossible to see websites that are connected under the same management<sup>20</sup>

## **GDPR (EU General Data Protection Regulation)**

"The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a broad framework designed to protect EU citizens' privacy. Because most providers of goods or services collect data of some type, the GDPR contains strict requirements for those who control data (data controllers) and those who actually process or publish the data (data processors). The GDPR has potentially severe sanctions and applies not only to those based in the EU that control or process data, but to any party located anywhere who offers its goods and services to data subjects who are located within the EU". The GDPR only applies to personal data, which is linked only to information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person. Under GDPR, personal data may only be processed for certain legitimate and specified purposes. The data controller (the party who determines the purposes and means of a given data processing activity) is responsible for explaining the purpose behind its processing, and must inform the "data subjects" of how it is being used before processing. Any use of the data must also be limited to what is necessary in relation to its purpose (a concept known as "data minimization"). Data processing must be based on one of the specific legal grounds set forth in GDPR<sup>21</sup>.

## **Children's Charities Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS)**

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<sup>20</sup> The GDPR, WHOIS and ICANN: A match made in hell?, The SSL Store, <https://www.thesslstore.com/blog/gdpr-whois-icann-match-made-hell/>

<sup>21</sup> A critical test for ICANN: ensuring GDPR compliance while preserving access to WHOIS, World Trademark Review, <https://www.worldtrademarkreview.com/enforcement-and-litigation/critical-test-icann-ensuring-gdpr-compliance-while-preserving-access>

CHIS is an organisation that strives for internet safety for children. Their organisations consists of experts on child protection, child welfare and child development. Their members have put together a manifesto which hopes to improve cyber security for children. In 2015 they send their manifesto to all political parties in the UK before the general elections, to call for action by the future government to improve safer online place. Their Manifesto includes: That the government should consider creating a new legal right for victims of child sexual abuse to get financial compensation from persons found in unlawful possessions of an image of that abuse. Furthermore, did they suggest that there should be a new body established, connected with an existing one to to ensure internet companies are transparent and accountable in respect of actions aimed at supporting child safety, in particular in relation to potential sexual abuse or content that encourages damaging behaviour. This body should also be given the power to implement legally binding orders requiring internet companies to take necessary and proportionate measures to safeguard children online. CHIS also believes that every UK police force should have a unit with trained officers to deal specifically with sexual and other online offences against children. They want the next government to take the lead in establishing an international body to mediate between industry and law enforcement in relation to illegal online content to ensure it is identified and removed from the internet rapidly. Furthermore, according to the CHIS, the next government should establish a 'high-tech social fund', financed through corporate contributions, to support research into online child protection and the deterrence of online offenders, as well as initiatives to support children who have been the victims of abuse online<sup>22</sup>.

## Timeline of Key Events

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<sup>22</sup> Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety Digital manifesto, CHIS, [https://www.kidscape.org.uk/media/1051/chis\\_digital\\_manifesto\\_web.pdf](https://www.kidscape.org.uk/media/1051/chis_digital_manifesto_web.pdf)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of Event</b>
<b>2016</b>	8% of the childline's 295,000 counselling sessions were for suicidal thoughts. Almost a third of of the sessions were about cyberbullying.
<b>2015</b>	Children's Charities Coalition on internet safety sends in their manifesto to all of UK's political parties before the general elections, urging for action by the future government to improve internet safety
<b>7 October 2013</b>	Montevideo agreement, IT companies across the globe come together to discuss internet safety Ipad got launched
<b>3 April 2010</b>	ICANN implements a wider range of online scripts such as Hebrew and Arabic, approved of the IDNA
<b>2009</b>	
<b>29 June 2007</b>	Iphone gets launched, smartphone usage explodes
<b>14 February 2005</b>	Youtube starts
<b>4 February 2004</b>	Facebook starts, start of a new age of social media
<b>29 August 2003</b>	Skype launches, connecting people all around the world
<b>2000</b>	Broadband is introduced in the UK, providing faster internet access
<b>20 May 1999</b>	Bluetooth technology is introduced

<b>1997</b>	First social media site - Six Degrees
<b>6 August 1991</b>	World Wide Web becomes publicly available
<b>1990</b>	0.05% of people are using the Internet
<b>1 January 1983</b>	Start of the 'modern' Internet

## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

### Global Government Surveillance Reform

This reform was set up after the 'Montevideo Statement'. It calls for better online laws and regulations for governments to create a safer online space. Although, it has not been implemented by most governments, it brings good guidelines on how governments can improve internet safety. It includes:

**Limiting Government Authority to Collect Users' Information.** Governments should respect user's privacy and increase trust in the internet. They should limit surveillance and don't collect too much data or communications.

**Oversight and Accountability Governments.** Governments should collect information under clear legal frameworks. There should be independent reviewing courts and governments should allow important laws by the courts to control internet safety.

**Transparency About Government Demands.** Governments should allow companies to publish the number and nature of government demands for user information. In addition, governments should also promptly disclose this data publicly.

**Respecting the Free Flow of Information.** Governments should permit the transfer of data and should not inhibit access by companies or individuals to lawfully available information that is stored outside of the country. Governments should not require service providers to locate infrastructure within a country's borders or operate locally.

Avoiding Conflicts Among Government. In order to avoid conflicting laws, there should be a robust, principled, and transparent framework to govern lawful requests for data across jurisdictions, such as bilateral agreements and improved mutual legal assistance treaty (MLAT) processes. Where the laws of one jurisdiction conflict with the laws of another, it is incumbent upon governments to work together to resolve the conflict.

Ensuring Security and Privacy Through Strong Encryption. Strong encryption of devices and services protects the sensitive data of our users – including individuals, corporations, and governments. Strong encryption also promotes free expression and the free flow of information around the world. Requiring technology companies to engineer vulnerabilities into their products and services would undermine the security and privacy of our users, as well as the world’s information technology infrastructure. Governments should avoid any action that would require companies to create any security vulnerabilities in their products and services<sup>23</sup>.

## **France Bans Mobile Phones**

Since September, mobile phones are banned at France’s primary, junior and middle schools. They are allowed to bring their phones to school but can’t use them until the end of school, not even during breaks. The ban was implemented by the newly elected president Macron. The ban applies to pupils up to the age of 15. The motive behind this ban is to improve public health, the French education minister Blanquer said “It’s good that children are not too often, or even at all, in front of a screen before the age of seven”. However, the French head teacher’s Union was skeptical that this ban could be successfully enforced. Parent’s organisations believe that this ban would cause a significant logistical problem<sup>24</sup>.

## **Facebook faces sanctions**

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<sup>23</sup> Advocating for Global Government Surveillance Reform, Reform Government Surveillance, <http://www.reformgovernmentsurveillance.com/principles/>

<sup>24</sup> France to ban mobile phones in schools from September, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/11/france-to-ban-mobile-phones-in-schools-from-september>

The EU warns Facebook that if they don't change their terms of service, the company could face serious sanctions. Facebook is currently taking advantage of the amount of data which they receive from their customers and are quite vague about informing people for what they use the information. The EU urges Facebook to change their policy on their use of data. Additionally, they want Facebook to become stricter on what is posted on the social media platform and change their policy on taking down certain posts and pictures. Facebook has been given until the end of 2018 to change their policy<sup>25</sup>.

## Possible Solutions

Key points that need to be taken in consideration when thinking about possible solutions are the areas where improvement is necessary, for example: how can we give children living LDCs give easier access to the digital world, how can we make the online world a safer place and how can we tackle cyberbullying. Furthermore, is it important that we fight health risks such as obesity, sleep problems and mental health problems. To increase internet access in LDCs we can motivate telecom and technology companies to lower the cost of connectivity; taking the needs of the unconnected into account when developing infrastructure plans; investing in more public hotspots and the creation of more culturally and linguistically appropriate content; and confronting cultural and other barriers that prevent children – especially girls – from going online. This can help break the poverty cycle in certain countries and help to give children better access to the news, important information and better education.

To raise awareness and to decrease cyberbullying we can organise training for teachers and parents to teach digital skills and online safety to children. Additionally this can be crucial to teach children how to assess reliable news and information sources, and how to use social media properly and safe<sup>26</sup>. The digital world is growing rapidly and therefore is it important how to teach the new generation how to deal with it. Further solutions that could be considered to tackle cyberbullying and obesity are: creating agreements with tech companies/private sector, such as social media platforms to have strict regulations on cyberbullying, create a national plan to tackle physical inactivity and review the progress made once in every 5 years, reaching out to people about the importance of staying physically active and how technology can have a negative impact on our physical health if we use it excessively.

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<sup>25</sup> EU warns Facebook it faces sanctions over 'misleading' T&Cs, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/sep/20/eu-warns-facebook-faces-sanctions-misleading-terms-conditions-data>

<sup>26</sup> Growing up in a digital world: Benefits and Risks, Lancet, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(18\)30002-6/fulltext?code=lancet-site](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(18)30002-6/fulltext?code=lancet-site)

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