Consulting vulnerable children online:

maximising opportunities, challenges and recommended measures

CP4Europe Webinar on

"The participation of vulnerable children in decision-making processes – from theory to practice"

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Construire une Europe
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Children will live as adults in a digital world, therefore it is vital for them and for their future to be included in the digital transition, without discrimination on any ground.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to shift our activities to online, including consulting children online. However, due to the restricted access to internet & devices, online activities could limit the participation of some children, thus aggravating their marginalization.

Actions taken at international level to enhance children's rights in the digital age

1. **The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child**

2. **Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment**

3. **UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has adopted General Comment no. 25 (2021)**

   ✓ **Non-discrimination**

   ✓ **Best interest of the child**

   ✓ **Right to life, survival and development**

   ✓ **Respect for the view of the child**

   ✓ **Age & Evolving capacities**

General trends at global level

➢ **involvement of children in the decision-making process** to give them the right to **express** themselves in relation to their **online experience, their needs and concerns**

➢ **put the interests of children at the center of all public policies**

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Accessing the online environment can support children to realize the full range of their civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights, including their right to be heard in matters affecting them, subject to equip them with the necessary skills and protection.

By securing the needs and rights to education, information and safety and providing the necessary digital competencies, we enable shaping the development of children in vulnerable situation in becoming ACTIVE DIGITAL CITIZENS and thus meaningfully realize their right to be heard.

Maximising the opportunities of consulting vulnerable children online

1. **Addressing globally the rights of the children in vulnerable situations in order to maximize the exercising of the participation right**

   - ✓ right to education – enable distance / mobile learning
   - ✓ access to information – diversity of information & sources / adapted content
   - ✓ freedom of expression - any restriction should be lawful, necessary, proportionate
   - ✓ freedom of thought – protect against manipulative practices that influence kids' thought
   - ✓ freedom of association and peacefully assembly
   - ✓ right to privacy
   - ✓ right to culture, leisure and play – access to qualitative creative, cultural and relaxation activities

2. **Promoting digital literacy**

   - ✓ the use of digital & new technologies – **education centered**: digital literacy in the school curricula
   - ✓ include the **technical or functional** competences to use a wide range of online tools and resources
   - ✓ include skills related to **content creation** and the **critical thinking** of the digital environment, its opportunities and risks
   - ✓ involve schools, communities or organizations providing extracurricular activities or childcare institutions

CHALLENGES OF CONSULTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN ONLINE

General challenges

Affecting all children:
misuse of personal data, cyberaggression, hate speech, cyber-bullying, automated processes, false information, danger of addiction

Specific challenges – considering special needs

Affecting all vulnerable children: financial barriers (lack of access to internet & devices), lack of education, lack of guidance, dominance of English

Child victim: risk: revealing the location of a child to a potential abuser – recommended approach: integrating safety-by-design and privacy-by-design

Children with disabilities - technical barriers:
- ✓ computers lack the necessary accessibility **features**
- ✓ teachers lack the **necessary expertise** and knowledge to support them in use of appropriate technology
- ✓ use of **adaptive technology** had the effect of drawing attention to them, identifying them as having a disability and marking them out as different from their peers

Vulnerable children are seriously **affected physically and psychologically**, their condition should be particularly considered in order to achieve digital inclusion and participation among all children.

AIM: reducing inequalities of opportunity for vulnerable children by taking measures to diminish and prevent discrimination on any grounds

Recommended measures and actions aiming to enhance participation of children in vulnerable situations in the digital age

Recommended measures:

- ✓ allocation of resources
- ✓ legislation and policies that **specifically address special needs of vulnerable children** in the digital age – independent monitoring body - effective remedies in case of breach
- ✓ require to online service providers to ensure that their **services are accessible by children with disabilities**
- ✓ **national** coordination mechanism (state, business, civil society, academia) & **international cooperation**
- ✓ **regulating marketing** addressed and accessible to children
- ✓ development and implementation of a set of principles to be enforced by the industry, the development of an **ethical business conduct**

Recommended actions

- ✓ Kid-friendly **platforms** for online participation (safe, inclusive, co-created by children)
- ✓ Clear **objectives and expected outputs**:
  - ➢ identify the groups and roles of children
  - ➢ designing the activities & methodologies
  - ➢ checking safeguarding needs & technical & administrative (translation, facilitators) arrangements
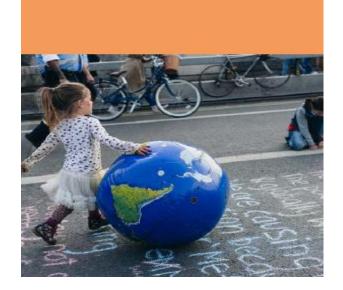- ✓ Promote in **person and hybrid actions**, when possible

- **child friendly platforms & materials**

- **minority languages**

- **diversity of information and reliable resources**

- **adapted language & content**

- **special features for children with disabilities**

- **data protection**

Examples of good practices (raise awareness of the right to participate and the digital age):

- ✓ **Awareness**: organize a drawing competition on the children's right to participate in the digital age

- ✓ **Digital literacy**: workshops for kids on fake news / applications / platforms

- ✓ **Online behavior / combatting cyber-risks**: at school, include children in the action group for combatting cyber-bulling

- ✓ **Online debate competitions:** develop children's capacity to express themselves

- ✓ **Enhance expression, creativity, strategic thinking**: online games adapted to kids' evolving capacity, interactive and play-based tools that stimulate skills such as creativity, teamwork and problem solving

- ✓ **Balance online / offline activities & interactions**

Thank you for your attention

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