

Statement  
Informal Consultation on GDC, 13 February 2024

Dear Co-facilitators, dear distinguished participants, good afternoon and warm greetings from Berlin, Germany. I am speaking in my own capacity as a political scientist and child rights researcher, but also as a member of the National Coalition for the realization of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Germany, as a member of the expert group on children's rights in the digital world Germany and as a member of the Dynamic Coalition for Children's Rights in the digital environment at the Internet Governance Forum.

I would like to thank the co-facilitators for this open and inclusive process of commenting and shaping the Global Digital Compact. Here, I would like to emphasise that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges all states to give priority to the best interest of the child, so we should keep this obligation in mind as we plan and discuss how to step up structures and processes to build a digital environment that is open, reliable, inclusive, meaningful and safe for every human in our entire world.

Yesterday several speakers referred to children in their statements and I second their perspectives. But, I would like to add two crucial points for your consideration as you continue to shape the GDC and beyond. The protection of children in digital environments must be accompanied by their provision and participation, as is laid down in the UN-CRC.

In 2021 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child declared in the General Comment No.25 how to realise the rights of the child in digital environments. A key aspect is that children should be involved in any process to shape, design, build, create or establish anything that happens in the online world. And why is this so crucial? In addition to having the right to do so, more than one third of all Internet users are under the age of 18, thus being a child in the sense of the UN-CRC, and it comes up to 50 % in the Global South. Children are the early adopters of new services and applications. While adults ponder on whether or how to use a new application or service, children do so without fear and with a lot of curiosity. They are the first to explore, use and embrace new digital opportunities. This is why we must bear children in mind as we negotiate the GDC.

When we think about bridging the digital divide and bringing a further 2.6 billion people online we can also learn from children. Thinking about the guardrails that keep them safe online or the measures that support children and youth can provide important advice for getting elderly people and other vulnerable groups online. What serves children, serves us too.

These considerations lead me to my conclusion. In order to create an inclusive internet and digital environment for everyone, cooperation among the various human rights sectors and with all different groups of stakeholders is essential. The already existing fora of Internet Governance have created vibrant and meaningful arenas of multi-stakeholder-engagement in the recent years. We must build on this solid foundation with the Global Digital Compact.