

We speak as UN Youth Delegates of Germany. Ever since March 2020, our lives have shifted towards a virtual world. Currently, we do not meet our peers outside. We do not protest in the streets. We do not attend educational institutions in person.

More than ever, young people's realization of human rights depend on their digital literacy and access to digital media. Public and civil participation have become a privilege. It is indeed a privilege that we can speak to you today at this virtual conference.

However, the biographical and socioeconomic background still determines who is granted or denied participation in the virtual public sphere. While young people with disabilities face a new set of access barriers, many young people are discriminated because of external circumstances, for example when education is not a priority for families in precarious or conflict situations.

Youth, especially marginalized youth, is often being actively disregarded, in fact, they are "excluded". Moreover, when youth is excluded from the digital world today, they lack an effective opportunity to realize their basic human rights. We therefore need to promote digital literacy among youth and to ensure their digital access.

When discussing digitalization and human rights, it is also important to include us into the debate, as today. The pandemic has exacerbated the ongoing exclusion, highlighting the urgency to mainstream youth and their right to meaningful participation in the digital age.

The digital divide is nothing less than discrimination against youth who lack access to the virtual world. Realizing human rights means ultimately closing the digital divide.

Thank you.