**“Study on the solutions to promote digital education for young people and to ensure their protection from online threats” – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

*Contribution of the Communication and Information Sector, UNESCO
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1. **Based on your work, what are the main challenges that young people face in accessing digital education? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

Young people, especially marginalized and vulnerable persons, face multifaceted challenges in accessing digital education. These include:

* Availability and affordability: Limited access to stable internet connectivity and costly devices hinder marginalized youth to access digital education, thereby perpetuating inequalities.
* Digital skills gap: Many marginalized young persons lack essential digital skills needed for online learning, exacerbating disparities in accessing quality education and qualified job opportunities. In addition, lack in critical digital literacy skills risks increased vulnerability to dis- and misinformation, conspiracy theories and cyber threats.
* Unbalanced curricula**:** Another challenge to meaningful access to digital education is an exaggerated focus on “hard” skills, such as using digital technology, without complementing it with “soft” skills, such as Media and Information Literacy (MIL). In advocating for the integration of MIL in policies and curricula, UNESCO seeks to bridge this gap.
* Inclusive design and accessibility: Marginalized youth are more often excluded from digital education opportunities. Youth with disabilities, living in conflict-affected or remote areas, or facing other forms of discrimination are less likely to access digital education. In addition, digital education platforms must be designed in an inclusive way to accommodate diverse needs, including those of individuals with disabilities.
* Cybersecurity concerns: Cybersecurity concerns among youth can limit their access to digital education by making them reluctant to using online platforms, exposing them to cyber threats and compromising their privacy and data protection.
* Lack of youth participation in the policy making processes on digital education. Youth are often seen as passive recipients rather than active agents of digital education. UNESCO promotes the involvement of youth as co-creators, co-owners and co-leaders of digital education policies, in line with its mandate to empower youth as drivers of social change.

Media and information literacy (MIL) is a set of competencies that enable youth to use digital technologies effectively, critically and ethically. It includes skills such as searching and verifying information, analyzing and evaluating messages, and advocating for one's rights while respecting the rights of others. Through its work in this area, UNESCO has found that some digital education programmes do not address the social context of digital technologies, such as their impact on youth's human rights (including privacy) and democratic participation. UNESCO works to ensure that digital education is inclusive and accessible for all youth, regardless of their background or situation, including by integrating MIL into digital education initiatives.

1. **Based on your work, can you share examples of good practices to ensure that digital education is accessible and promoted among young people? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes directed at ensuring young people’s universal access to digital education.**

UNESCO’s Guidelines for the governance of digital platforms

UNESCO aims to ensure that everyone's freedom of expression, access to information and diverse cultural content are fully guaranteed. This is all the more timely in a time when various stakeholders, including Member States, deal with widespread problems such as dis- and misinformation and hate speech online.

UNESCO’s Guidelines for the governance of digital platforms: safeguarding freedom of expression and access to information through a multi-stakeholder approach, published on 6 November 2023, aims ensuring an open, safe, and secure digital environment for both users and non-users of digital platforms.

Aligned with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013), the Guidelines acknowledge the unique status of children, given their developmental stage, limited political voice, and the potential lifelong impact of negative childhood experiences. Accordingly, governments and digital platforms must acknowledge their specific responsibilities toward children within governance systems. Thus, guaranteeing young people’s access to digital education requires prioritizing the respect of their freedom of expression and access to information online by all relevant stakeholders.

The Guidelines include a dedicated section on media and information literacy (MIL), designed to equip users, especially children, with critical thinking skills for online interactions. These programmes extend to various information providers, encompassing educational institutions, research centers, libraries, archives, and museums. Moreover, the Guidelines advocate for MIL programmes to foster cultural diversity, social inclusion, and global citizenship, while advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment. They also emphasize inclusive participation, particularly of groups in situations of vulnerability and marginalization.

Furthermore, UNESCO supports countries around the world not only to make digital education accessible and promoted among youth, but also to ensure that benefits are maximized. UNESCO does this through supporting countries to develop national media and information literacy policies and strategies that includes the integration of media and information literacy in primary and secondary education curricula.

To also reach youth in non-formal and informal settings, UNESCO strengthens the capacity of youth-led organizations to integrate media and information literacy in their operations, policies and strategies, including encouraging the application of human rights and intercultural dialogue for democracy, mutual understanding, inclusion and peace. In addition, UNESCO enables youth to acquire media and information literacy and digital skills in their regular use of digital spaces, and to engage actively as peer-educators and changemakers of MIL.

Open Educational Resources

Open Educational Resources (OER) are learning, teaching and research materials that are freely accessible, openly licensed and can be adapted and redistributed by others. UNESCO has been a pioneer and a global leader in promoting OER since 2002, when it coined the term and defined it as "technology-enabled, open provision of educational resources for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes".

UNESCO's work on OER aims to support universal access to information and knowledge, especially for education and lifelong learning. In 2019, UNESCO’s General Conference adopted the Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (OER) – the first international normative instrument to embrace the field of openly licensed educational materials and technologies in education. The Recommendation provides guidance to Member States on how to implement OER policies and practices in five areas of action: (i) building capacity of stakeholders to create, access, re-use, adapt and redistribute OER; (ii) developing supportive policy; (iii) encouraging inclusive and equitable quality OER; (iv) nurturing the creation of sustainability models for OER, and (v) facilitating international cooperation.

UNESCO leverages OER to support activities related to strengthening universal access to information. OER are part of ‘Open Solutions’, alongside Free and Open-Source software (FOSS), Open Access (OA), Open Data (OD), and crowdsourcing platforms.

UNESCO is committed to ensuring that digital education is accessible and promoted among young people through the use of OER. Some examples of UNESCO's initiatives on OER are:

- The ICT Competency Framework for Teachers, which provides guidelines for teachers on how to use ICTs and OER to enhance their professional development and improve their teaching practices. Example projects include: 1. In Rwanda,aligning the ICT-CFT for visually and hearing-impaired educators using OER; 2. In Burkina Faso, developing a set of self-study and training openly licensed educational resources (OER) in French, Mooré and English in cooperation with an NGO, contributing to the empowerment of teachers to use technology to make learning accessible.

- The Harnessing OER Project, supporting the development of national OER policies and strategies in 10 countries across Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America.

- The OER Dynamic Coalition, launched in 2020 to promote OER as per the UNESCO 2019 Recommendation. Composed of institutions and civil society representatives who support capacity building activities, it is a key partner for ensuring that digital skills development embraces open content, in alignment with the UNSG's Our Common Agenda.

UNESCO recently published *Revised guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning*, drawing lessons from the COVID-19 era. It specifically addresses open and distance learning (ODL) during crises, recognizing its role in overcoming educational barriers. UNESCO and UNICEF’s has cooperated to promote the rights of persons with disabilities through the use of inclusive technologies in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda and initiated by UNESCO Regional office for Eastern Africa.

At the UN Pre-Transforming Education Summit (Pre-TES) and the Transforming Education Summit (TES), UNESCO promoted these standards and guidelines (OER Recommendation, ICT-CFT) among the commitments made under Action Track 4 on digital learning. This is in line with the UNSG’s Our Common Agenda and the Global Digital Compact, addressing shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all.

Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

Media and information literacy aims at enhancing digital skills development and ensure the critical, informed and ethical use of digital technologies. UNESCO has developed two key resources to guide the development of MIL curricula and practices: *The Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula Development Guidelines*, which provide a framework for integrating MIL skills into quality education; and the *Media and information literate citizens: Think Critically, Click Wisely (Second Edition of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy for Educators and Learners)*, which offers practical tips and tools for educators, learners, and stakeholders to foster MIL competencies. UNESCO also promotes MIL through global events such as the Global Media and Information Literacy Week and the Global Media and Information Literacy Youth Hackathon.

1. **Based on your work, can you share examples of good practices to ensure that young people can realize their human rights online in a safe, empowering, and inclusive way?**

Social media can be used as an environment conducive to helping people acquire and improve their media and information literacy skills. Many use social media to access information and digital content, especially youth. With the appropriate guidance, youth can learn how to also apply their media and information literacy competencies in their normal day-to-day use of the Internet and social media, and to engage in peer education in an atmosphere of browsing, playing, connecting, sharing, and socializing.

1. **Based on your work, what are the main gaps and challenges to young people’s protection from online threats in law, policy, and practice and the impacts on young people’s human rights? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

One prominent challenge highlighted by the Guidelines for the governance of digital platforms is the issue of child sexual abuse materials online. To combat this, digital platforms are encouraged to swiftly and decisively remove such content. However, platforms must also ensure that potentially crucial content for criminal investigations and prosecution purposes is preserved securely, rather than deleted.

Moreover, the Guidelines stress the importance of digital platforms refraining from using personal data obtained directly from children or indirectly obtained or inferred about children for profiling purposes.

1. **Based on your work, can you share examples of good practices to ensure that young people are protected from online threats? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes. Can you provide information on any programs or activities your organization has implemented regarding solutions to protect digital education for young people and to ensure their protection from online threats?**

UNESCO works with partners to promote media and information literacy (MIL) as a way to empower young people, women, and other groups to be informed and critical citizens in the digital age. UNESCO has developed two key resources to guide the development of MIL curricula and practices: *The Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula Development Guidelines*, which provide a framework for integrating MIL skills into quality education; and the *Media and information literate citizens: Think Critically, Click Wisely (Second Edition of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy for Educators and Learners)*, which offers practical tips and tools for educators, learners, and stakeholders to foster MIL competencies. UNESCO also leads youth-engaging initiatives such as the Global Media and Information Literacy Week and the Global Media and Information Literacy Youth Hackathon, which aim to raise awareness, enhance online safety, and encourage creative solutions for MIL learning among young people.

1. **Please provide any relevant statistical or disaggregated data based on age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status, or other categories.**