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Inputs for study on the solutions to promote digital education for young people and to ensure their protection from online threats

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Q1. What are the main challenges that young people in your country face in accessing digital education? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.

Africa

In **Africa**, many countries have experienced growth in digital education, mainly through remote learning programs that were launched during COVID-19. Over 160 million Africans gained internet access between 2019 and 2022. Despite this increase only 5% of people under 25 in **West** and **Central Africa** and only 3% in **Southern** and **Eastern Africa** have access to the internet at home. **Sub-Saharan Africa** faces critical challenges in accessing digital education due to poor digital infrastructures, lack of affordable connectivity, poor skills for digitally enabling industries, and inadequate policy environments. For instance, in **Nigeria**,

approximately 100 million young people do not have basic digital skills to utilize databases, word processing tools and social media; this directly impacts **Nigeria's** digital economy and youth employment rates. On the other hand, **Ghana** has prioritized the liberalization of their telecommunications, with 70% of Ghana's 30 million people being mobile subscribers, enabling youth access to digital resources. War torn states, such as **South Sudan**, have a considerable number of young people who cannot access mobile phone; they must rely on cheap and affordable data bundles to access digital education tools online.

Asia and the Pacific (APA)

Young people across the **APA** region encounter a wide variety of challenges in accessing digital education due to issues from digital scarcity, poor infrastructure and connectivity, to gender and cultural obstructions. In large Asian countries like **India**, government colleges and schools do not have digital classrooms, while rural and low-income families do not have access to laptops, smartphones, or tablets. In smaller nations like the **Philippines**, 53% of the population have internet access challenges. In **Papua New Guinea**, 85% of the population live in rural and hard-to-reach areas without access to digital tools, while 80% of schools do not have access to electricity. Additional systemic issues, such as gender digital divide, impact the accessibility of digital education. For instance, **Pakistan** was reported to have a significant digital gender divide in 2020, with many young women unable to access mobile phones. Meanwhile, UNESCO reports poor ICT development in pedagogy, with countries like **Kyrgyzstan**, **Malaysia**, and the **Philippines** reporting fewer than 5% of teachers have basic digital skills.

Europe and North America

According to a report by the European Commission on digitalization, while most households in the **European Union (EU)** have internet access, there are still disparities based on geography, urban vs. rural, socio-economic status, and educational background. In 2022, 2.4% (450 million) of people in the **EU** could not afford Internet connectivity. In the **USA**, the PEW Research Centre reports 13% of adults with household incomes below \$30,000 a year do not have access to digital technologies. Forbes reports that this divide is the worst for marginalized learners including minority groups, low-income or homeless individuals, English-language learners and individuals with disabilities, with 27% of Indigenous populations and 19% of African Americans having no access to the internet or only to slow dial up options. This echoes research in Canada that found that the country was falling behind in digital equity with challenges related to access, affordability, digital literacy, and cybersecurity with the impact disproportionately felt by Indigenous peoples, people in the 2SLGBTQ+ community, racialized communities, recent immigrants, people with disabilities, seniors, and women. Meanwhile, Vodafone found 20% of teachers in **Europe** had little or no experience in teaching about technology, mainly in nations such as **Turkey**, **Germany**, **Albania**, **Romania**, and the **Netherlands**.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

About 77 million rural inhabitants in **LAC** have no access to high-quality, high-speed internet. However, in some countries such as **Chile**, the **Dominican Republic**, and **Costa Rica**, mobile broadband is more accessible, with over 90 subscriptions per 100 people. The majority of **LAC** countries report around 50 to 77 mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 people — while it is only 20 per 100 people in **Cuba**, **Nicaragua**, and **Guatemala**. In **Brazil**, 4.8 million students do not have access to the internet and there is no free or subsidized access in the most vulnerable regions. In the **Caribbean** there is also the concern of affordable and reliable devices. Youth from **Jamaica** who took part in UNDP's *Ready Set Great* series in 2020, were adamant on the need to address the fact that only 68.2% of the country has access to reliable digital devices.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Despite the fact that some of the countries in the **MENA region** are undergoing promising advancements, significant challenges remain for a large number of young people. In the **Arab States**, UNDP reports that digital connectivity has increased with the online population moving from 28.8% in 2021 to 70.3% in 2022. Yet, during the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF estimated that 37 million learners across the region were not reached, while 40% of students did not have access to digital and remote learning. In **Yemen**, for example, there is nearly an

equal percentage of the population without internet access (47%) as those who do (53%). In other countries such as **Lebanon**, there was an increase in individuals accessing the internet (78% in 2017 increasing to 99% in 2019). However, this does not necessarily correspond with the use of online educational platforms, creating a great disparity between the **Arab States** concerning ICT skills. For example, ESCWA compared skills in “installing a new device”, finding 70% of **United Arab Emirates** participants could successfully do this in comparison to 8.3% in **Iraq** and 7.1% in the **State of Palestine**.

Q2. What steps is the Government taking 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.

Africa

In **Africa**, governments have tried to embed ICT skills into their national strategic planning and policy. **Kenya’s** Vision 2030 launched in 2008 envisioned a great digital highway for Kenyan ICT skills and 5G technology to aid young people accessing decent jobs. **Nigeria’s** ICT for Development Strategic Roadmap was also created to provide comprehensive strategies for leveraging ICT for national development. This has allowed for the harmonization of policies for the improvement of digital access in general, such as **Rwanda’s** work to expand its e-government platform. **Rwanda** has also boosted its smartphone ownership and increased internet affordability through its #ConnectRwanda initiative. From these policies, several EdTech programmes have been adopted to support young people accessing digital tools. In **Cameroon**, the Quick Do Digital Box available in schools and libraries has increased reading opportunities for both teachers and students, at home and in the classroom. In 2022, the **Nigeria** Learning Passport was launched to offer an online, mobile, and offline digital learning platform with Microsoft, enabling continuous access of 15,000 curriculum aligned learning materials for teachers and parents.

Asia and the Pacific (APA)

In **Asia**, the *Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-of-School Children and Youth* adopted at the 28th ASEAN Summit, focused on the developing and sharing of resources and platforms, specifically for education data and the digital transformation of schools. Such declarations have inspired national initiatives such as the **Singaporean** digital literacy tool and the National Digital Explorer 2023, which have provided students aged 10 to 18 with real-world tools for critical thinking. Meanwhile, the Digital Education Learning Initiative **Malaysia** has impacted 10,000 schools, 370,000 teachers and 2.5 million students, by giving schools access to Google Classroom, Microsoft O365 and Apple Teacher Learning Centre. In the **Pacific Islands**, the focus is on streamlining digital policies for digital skills and education. For example, the **Cook Islands** recently released their National Digital Strategy 2024-2023 and their Digital Transformation Project and the eCommerce Accelerated Work plan, within the National ICT Policy 2023-2027. On the other hand, **Australia** has directly targeted the use of digital technologies in schools with the Australian Curriculum: Digital Technologies, offering specific digital curriculum officers for primary and secondary schools.

Europe and North America

The **EU** has implemented the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), which aims to enhance digital literacy and support citizenship for young people. This plan also supports the use of consistent “digital competence” measures for students in schools between nations, giving a European definition. **Estonia, France, Cyprus, Lithuania, Malta, Austria, Albania**, have their own measures. Some nations also have specific digital education strategies that influence their education system, such as **Ireland’s** Harnessing Digital: The Digital Ireland Framework in Ireland (primary to higher education), and **Finland’s** Digivisio 2030 (higher education). In **North America**, the **United States** has initiated programs like the ConnectEd Initiative, with the objective of connecting 99% of American students to high-speed internet in classrooms and libraries. In **Canada**, provincial and territorial governments hold exclusive responsibility over education, so there is no national digital education strategy. The

province of Québec, for instance, released a comprehensive Digital Action Plan for Education and Higher Education in 2018 to support the development of digital literacy, and enhance teaching and learning practices.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

In the **LAC** region, the Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank have announced a set of actions valued at US\$512 million to accelerate learning by enhancing the digital transformation of education systems. This system will impact over 3.5 million students, more than 350,000 teachers, and 12,000 schools will be beneficiaries in 16 countries. For nations like **Colombia**, this aims to build into universal access to the internet, minimizing youth digital literacy gaps and aiding youth employment. It has also led to the development of digital learning platforms providing virtual resources to students and teachers, such as PlanCeibal in **Uruguay**, Lab4U in **Mexico** and **Chile**, WAWA Laptop in **Peru**, Wumbox in **Argentina**, and Moi Aprendizaje in **Ecuador**. Other regional projects exist to further digital infrastructure, such as the Digital Education Capacity Strengthening Initiative led by the **Eastern Caribbean States** with UNICEF and USAID. This makes digital education tools available to children and teachers across the subregion, allowing for national projects such as **St. Lucia's** Digital Content in Education Initiative. In some cases, Caribbean nations, such as **Jamaica** and its ICT Vision 2030, have created strategic plans to articulate key benchmarks including widespread training and education for digital tools.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Since COVID, governments and education stakeholders across **MENA** have been implementing strategies to enable access to digital education for all, especially learners from marginalized populations. **Qatar** ranked first in the world on the DARE Index 2020 for their digital accessibility for disabled persons. **Oman** recently called for universal digital access, stressing that all government departments, public and private firms have free access to digital platforms and services, particularly for disabled and elderly persons. Some of the strategies across the region include the use of donated and/or modernized platforms and subsidized ICT devices with preloaded learning resources for students in refugee camps and conflict-affected communities. A UNICEF initiative in **Algeria** has provided servers and routers to expand the existing distance learning platforms. In **Egypt** a free table system was launched in the 2018/2019 school year to enable students to attend classes and be assessed online.

Q3. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people can realize their human rights online in a safe, empowering, and inclusive way?

Africa

A **pan-African** approach is ensuring human rights are part and parcel of digital learning. The Network of African Data Protection Authorities established in 2016, has brought 19 states together to aid in the preparation of data privacy and protection legislation at the regional and national level, and the establishment of data protection agencies. The group has signed with the Smart Africa Alliance to harmonize data protection regulations across **Africa**. The African Commission on Human and People's Rights adopted the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, protecting youth expression online and aiding data privacy. This is essential to allow young Africans to highlight concerns, claim rights, and demand social justice in the face of digital authoritarianism, as evidenced in countries such as **Ethiopia**, **Sudan**, and **Cameroon**. This allows for online movements to actualize in the physical, such as the #FeesMustFall student movement in **South Africa**, or #EndSARS in **Nigeria**. Meanwhile, the 2022 Resolution on the Protection of Women Against Digital Violence in Africa then sought to combat digital violence against women and girls and facilitate their access to education and digital technologies.

Asia and the Pacific (APA)

In **APA**, the use of innovative digital tools can conflict with human rights. For example, **Taiwan**, the **Republic of Korea** and **Japan** were praised in the first year of COVID for their excellent use of digital services for disease

control. However, some of these countries saw a subsequent rise in digital authoritarianism. Other issues prevailed, such as ZOOM identifying human-rights defenders in **China** that resulted in being barred, by decree of local legislation, from the online platform. There has been a rise in digital surveillance tools in **Myanmar, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Pakistan, Indonesia, and the Philippines**. To counter this, young people have created online democracy alliances such as the #MilkTeaAlliance as evidenced in the student protests in Hong Kong. Positively, many nations such as **Japan and China**, have been developing and updating their data privacy laws. Meanwhile as it relates to AI, in the report Freedom on the Net 2023: The Repressive Power of Artificial Intelligence, **Iran** experienced the worst score decline of all assessed countries. In the Pacific, **Australia and New Zealand** have been developing child data privacy laws, with **New Zealand** seeking input from children, their families and wider community as part of a project on children's privacy. **New Zealand** has also focused on ending digital violence, calling for global transparency on use of algorithms on youth in social media

Europe and North America

In the **European** region, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) entering into force in 2018, includes specific provisions to protect children's data online. Article 8 of the GDPR sets forth conditions for the lawful processing of a child's personal data, requires parental consent for children under the age of 16, and safeguards from digital exploitation. The **EU's** Safer Internet Programme and Better Internet for Kids strategy, focuses on creating a safer online environment for children through a helpline and positive internet content. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive also includes provisions for protecting minors from harmful content online and including youth voices in digital policies through the Structured Dialogue Process. The European Commission has also recognized the rights of young people to a robust digital education in the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027). The plan focuses on fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem and enhancing digital skills and competencies for the digital transformation. In the **USA**, the government has taken social media creators to court for using the data of minors. Moreover, California, Colorado, Utah and Virginia were inspired by the GDPR to introduce statutes to limit businesses' collection of private data. In **Canada**, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act exists for data protection, with Article 16 protecting children from unlawful interference with their privacy, family, and home.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

In **LAC**, there was an increase in use of surveillance technologies in public spaces over the last few years, specifically targeting human-rights defenders and journalists, including young activists. Inspired by the GDPR, **Ecuador** has since released their Organic Law on Personal Data, and **Brazil**, their General Data Protection Law. **Brazil** has also put forward proposals to ban public facial recognition technologies. Civil society in **Latin America** has also responded, with 21 organizations signing a joint agreement to promote transparent and accountable internet platforms, including democratic and symmetrical obligations, moderation, and algorithmic processes. Moreover, UNESCO reports that Digital citizenship is being embedded into public policy in education in Latin America. They cover many issues such as on online ethical behaviour, cyberbullying, grooming, hate speech and discrimination, responsible digital spaces, fake news, algorithms, data use, digital identity, and big data.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Internet freedom is a significant area impacting youth human rights in the **MENA** region. Following the Arab Springs, cyber-crime laws were introduced by many nations to restrict the online communications of journalists and young activists. In some countries, young people have been put in jail for social media posts that were deemed as "anti-governmental" and/or content has been moderated specifically on topics such as LGBTQIA+ websites and news media. On a promising note, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights and Access Now leads a civil society body to eliminate digital surveillance and ensure human rights through civil society action including public campaigns and regional advocacy. Various initiatives like Plan International's She Leads Programme, have also seen an increase in youth-led initiatives in **Lebanon and Jordan** to speak up for girls' and young women's digital rights.

Q4. What are the main gaps and challenges to young people's protection from online threats in law, policy, and practice in your country 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.

Africa

In **Africa**, over half of African nations have taken some steps to raise awareness of online safety and/or establish legal frameworks to address online threats. However, according to the Family Online Safety Institute's Global Resource and Information Directory, these laws are not robust. We know that only 28 **African** nations explicitly incorporate online protection measures into their penal code, have drafted relevant legislation, or included aspects of online safety in their national ICT plans. This means human trafficking for child sexual exploitation and forced labor can occur, such as scams perpetuated to lure **East Africans** to work overseas in Southeast Asia, but rather placing young Africans within cybercrime rings. Students from **Kenya, Burundi and Uganda** were trafficked, believing they would be teachers and office workers. Conversely, digital authoritarianism across the region is harming young people's ability to engage in open political conversation and access world news. While online protests vary - from unsuccessful youth protests against increased taxes on internet data in **Guinea** to the protests in **Sudan and Tunisia** during the Arab Springs that transformed nations - they remain a tool for democratic citizenship. Despite this, taxes on social media in **Uganda and Guinea**, have caused an increase in use of Virtual Private Networks.

Asia and the Pacific

While the **APA** region has seen responses from governments to youth exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying and Internet addictions, national-level responses to this have been inconsistent. For example, the Internet Society reports that of 25 countries, the highest rate of cyberbullying was in **Asia**, with **China** at 70%, **Singapore** at 58%, and **India** at 53%. Yet, the legislations remains poor. On the other hand, **Australia, the Philippines, and Singapore** have passed laws to protect children from cyberbullying. In 2022, the National Crime Records Bureau in India recorded 1,823 cases of cybercrimes against children with a 32% increase from 2021, despite the existence of the 2000 Information Technology Act. The **Philippines** reports considerable the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children incidents through social media exposure. **Australia** has recorded concerns regarding online applications for early childhood education recording the biodata of children under the age of five. Digital monitoring of youth activists - the response to youth-led social movements from **Sri Lanka to Thailand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea** - also remains an issue. The gender digital divide also remains a concern with **Afghanistan** completely excluding of girls and young women from education and digital tools.

Europe and North America

Despite the GDPR aim to enhance privacy, there are inconsistencies at the national level across the **European region**. A 2020 **EU Kids Online** survey indicates while 83% of 9- to 17-year-olds go online daily, digital literacy education does not reach all, which leaves some at high risk. The survey highlighted 40% of young people encounter one or more forms of harmful content online. Rapid changes in algorithmic technologies outstrip current legal frameworks, with a 2019 **EU** report noting 1 in 5 children had experienced risks such as exposure to harmful digital content or cyberbullying. Misinformation is also a concerning issue, with Eurostat Statistics Being Young in Europe Today - Digital World, identifying only 36% of youth in the EU engagement in fact-checking online information. Only in five countries (the **Netherlands, Ireland, Luxembourg, Finland, and Sweden**), did young people assess the truthfulness of internet content at above 50%. The lowest assessments were recorded in **Bulgaria** (24%), **Lithuania** (22%), **Romania** (21%) and **Cyprus** (18%). Cyberbullying and misinformation is also an issue in the **USA**. There is no federal law to address cyberbullying, with Arizona, Colorado, Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Hawai'i having no law or policy in place either.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

Young people across the LAC region continue to use social media as a way of exercising their freedom of expression. Despite this, social media is often monitored. The Datos Protegidos website created during the 2019 **Chile** protests, to report human rights violations and police brutality, was taken down by authorities. Videos on social media of use of excessive force against protestors in **Colombia** and **Cuba** in 2021 were also taken down. Gang recruitment has also increased due to more students being online during COVID, given that 97% of young people in Latin America were not in school in 2021. Positive developments on cyberbullying are seen with **Brazil** introducing Law 14,811/2024, which marked a pivotal shift in the legal landscape by introducing stringent measures against such offenses. The decision to classify bullying and cyberbullying as criminal offenses, punishable by up to 4 years in prison and with no provision for bail, reflects a rigorous approach to deterrence. Cybervictimization remains a concern in the Caribbean, with authorities in **Trinidad and Tobago** recently warning about child grooming online.

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

While policies and laws exist relating to data protection, the **MENA** region is still behind in tracking the legal regulation of cyberspace. In **Yemen** there is no publicly available data on existing policies or laws that address online abuse, cybercrime, or human rights violations. In **Libya**, despite the existing policies and laws concerning human rights online, the data protection frameworks are not sufficient to protect youth from exploitation. Human-rights defenders in **Jordan** have also been concerned with the recently adopted cybercrime law, and its impact on their freedom of expression. The gender digital divide also remains a concern, with 56% of women in the region not considered “internet users”. This has a moderate impact in **Morocco**, where being in a rural community impacts gender accessibility of internet access.

Q5. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people are protected from online threats? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes.

Africa

Across **Africa**, legislation is being strengthened to combat specific online abuses or threats in relation to children and youth. This is important because recent studies such as a **South Africa** UNICEF survey has found 70% of children surveyed used the internet without parental consent, 67% had seen sexual images on an online device, and 25% had people who had added them on social media they had never met. The **Kenyan** Child Act 2022 now provides strong parameters for child protection online from abuse. Meanwhile in **Nigeria**, there are specific areas of legislation focusing on cyberstalking, hacking, phishing, and identity theft and fraud. A variety of actors are also involved in raising awareness of online threats to young people through campaigns, such as UNODC’s ‘Safer Kids Online’ in **Central** and **West Africa** to support reporting on the UNODC website, encourage conversation between youth and caregivers, and promote safe online habits. Civil society organizations such as Child Online Africa and the African Telecommunication Union, have also engaged in a “week of national action” to lobby governments to provide educational material on online threats to schools, and support strong legislation and infrastructure.

Asia and the Pacific (APA)

There are varying degrees of initiatives taken for protection from online threats across the **APA** region. **Japan**, for example, has fairly robust legislation producing national plans for content filtering and blocking, while **India**, **Australia** and **New Zealand** have offices and agencies to address complaints on harmful content. In **India**, there are also attempts to directly target cybercrime impacting children, as evidenced in the Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children scheme. The **Republic of Korea** has also gone a step further and regulated addiction to video games in the Juvenile Protection Act 2014. Vietnam has also tried to directly regulate the gaming industry. From these laws and regulations, **Japan** and **Australia** have integrated education policies for online child resilience and learning. In **Japan**, students are required to take an “Information Moral

Education” course, while in **Australia**, the National Safe Schools Framework is a guide for online student study. In the Pacific Islands, INGOs play a significant role in supporting online awareness campaigns, with Plan International Australia spearheading a youth-led online safety literacy model (SwipeSafe) in the **Solomon Islands**.

Europe and North America

In **Europe**, the Digital Education Action Plan and Lanzarote Convention has been adopted to ensure uniform and effective legal practice for addressing online abuse and various forms of online threats. Additionally, the European Commission will facilitate an EU code for age-appropriated design and request a **European** standard of online verification by 2024. It will also explore how to use the European Digital Identity Wallet for age verification, support the swift reporting of illegal and harmful content, and ensure the single harmonized number “116 111” to aid victims of cyberbullying. The **European** Commission’s Strategy for Better Internet for Children, also aims to protect children and youth by building their awareness of online risks while teaching them digital literacy skills. The Directive on Combating Child Sexual Abuse also aims to reduce the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, requiring member states to take necessary measures to prevent, investigate, and prosecute crimes effectively. In **Canada**, the House of Commons is currently debating an Act to restrict young persons’ online access to sexually explicit material, while NGOs provide educational material on online safety, and watchdogs report on exploitive applications.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

Significant frameworks have been established to protect young people from online threats, reflecting a growing awareness of digital safety. In **Brazil**, the "Marco Civil da Internet" sets a legal foundation for internet rights and includes provisions for the protection of children online. **Argentina** has implemented the "Programa Nacional de Educación Digital y Seguridad en Internet" which focuses on educating children about safe internet use. **Mexico** has the "Ley Olimpia" which, among other things, aims to combat digital violence against women and minors, including cyberbullying and sextortion. Additionally, **Colombia's** government has launched various initiatives under the "En TIC Confío" program, which is designed to promote safe internet use among young people through education and awareness campaigns. Moreover, in the **Caribbean region**, it is worth mentioning the national efforts to combat online threats such as the Jamaica CyberCrime Act (2015), Bahamas Computer Misuse Act, (2003), Belize’s National Cybersecurity Strategy – Towards A Secure Cyberspace 2020–2023 and regionally through the CARICOM Cyber Security and Cybercrime Action Plan (CCSCAP).

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Across the MENA region, governments are recognizing the risks associated with the exposure of personal information and how it jeopardizes youth and children’s safety. Thus, several countries are making important strides e.g. **Egypt** Child Online Protection Strategy and National Cybersecurity Strategy (2017-2021) are supporting the governance of a safer digital environment through collaboration between government entities, the private sector, and civil society. On the other hand, **Jordan’s** Online Child Sexual Exploitation Prevention Unit (UPOCSE) aims to identify and handle cases of online sexual abuse, online crimes, including those affecting children, and promotes digital safety through awareness campaigns. In addition, **the United Arab Emirates** has implemented stringent cyber laws under its Federal Decree-Law No. 5 of 2012 on Combating Cybercrimes, which includes provisions specifically aimed at protecting minors online. **Saudi Arabia** has the "Kafa" program, which is part of the broader Vision 2030 initiative, focusing on digital literacy and safe internet practices among youth.

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