



Safe Connections: Ensuring Child Safety in the Digital Era

11 July 2024, Geneva (Switzerland)

As digitalization accelerates, with over 2 billion children navigating the digital world and an additional billion about to be online, the safety of children remains a paramount concern. As [Giga](#), a UNICEF-ITU initiative, aims to connect every school to the internet, and thereby every child to a world of opportunities, the risks associated with such connectivity cannot be overlooked. [Safe Online](#), a global collaborative fund hosted by UNICEF, with its robust experience in combating digital threats to children joins forces with Giga to address these critical issues through a dedicated event.

The event ***Safe Connections: Ensuring Child Safety in the Digital Era*** will take place on **11 July 2024 from 2pm to 5pm followed by a networking reception from 5pm to 7pm**; on the margins of the Giga Connectivity Forum on 9-10 July 2024.

Objectives

The event seeks to highlight the critical responsibility and need to promote cohesive approaches and integrate child online safety into global efforts to provide internet connectivity to schools and communities. More specifically, it aims to:

- Create a common understanding of existing and emerging digital risks and harms for children in the context of their development, well-being and opportunities connectivity can provide to them
- Showcase practical strategies, policies and solutions to ensure children can benefit from digital environments free from violence; including resources and initiatives Safe Online offers globally to promote child online safety
- Engage key actors, including the Swiss Government, Geneva based community, and international and civil society partners to highlight the importance of child online safety in the digital era
- Foster collaboration and dialogue among stakeholders across sectors, and mobilise collective action towards creating safe digital environments for children

Program

High-level representatives of global leading organizations and key partners will share critical highlights of how children's lives are changing in the digital age along with reflections on partners' commitments and the future ahead of us.

The first panel of international experts will reflect at the **interlinkages between digital connectivity and well-being of children** including the latest data, trends and evidence of risks and harms children may encounter in digital spaces in the context of their development, well-being and opportunities connectivity can provide. Participants will gain an understanding of how children interact on digital platforms, their perceptions of risks, the steps they take to mitigate these and their experiences of digital interactions and opportunities. Global experts will also share highlights about the latest developments in technology that may increase risks for children but also provide avenues to strengthen digital skills development and prevention of harms.

The second panel will focus on **solutions to ensure safe connections for children globally**, and more specifically practical strategies and solutions to maximise the benefits of connectivity in children's lives while ensuring digital spaces are free from risks and violence. Experts from multiple sectors will showcase context-rich information and countries' experiences including strategies, resources and best



practices for robust policy and regulatory frameworks, programs' design, technology tools and industry practices. Critical emphasis will be given to the importance of embedding child safety considerations in the connectivity life-cycle planning and provision, including integrating safety features at the onset of digital tools and platforms, rather than retrofitting safety.

Format

It will bring together policymakers, tech and digital players, connectivity partners, advocates, educators, and funders. Experts will share the latest insights on key trends, safety policies, successful strategies, and future visions for child safety in a world with universally connected schools. Participants will be encouraged to share insights from their respective fields, fostering an environment of collaborative learning and innovation. The sessions will be geared towards understanding the challenges and most importantly identifying needs and practical, actionable solutions. Key points discussed and potential opportunities will be shared with participants after the event to facilitate further engagement.

Venue and registration

The event will take place at the SDG Solution Space ([15 Avenue de Sécheron, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland](#)). Participation is limited to 60 attendees to ensure focused and meaningful discussions. **Please confirm your interest in participating via [this link](#) no later than 20 June 2024.** Spaces are limited and participation will be confirmed on a first come first basis.

For further information or clarification, feel free to contact Vivien Gyuris (vgyuris@unicef.org) or Caroline Makumbe (caroline@safeonline.global).

Background information

One out of three people don't have access to the internet – including more than 1.3 billion children who have no access at home. An estimated half of the world's schools remain offline. Without access to the internet, children miss the chance to learn and flourish in an increasingly digital world. The digital divide further deepens the inequalities faced by the world, and there needs to be quick and effective action to connect the schools and children who remain offline.

The work shouldn't stop with connecting children to the internet. While the internet's increasing global reach is providing valuable opportunities for children to learn, connect and play, it can also increase the risk of unsafe or traumatic experiences including online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA). It can come in many forms and includes child grooming, live streaming of sexual abuse, child sexual abuse material, coercing and blackmailing for sexual purposes; and it's closely interlinked with other forms of violence - e.g. bullying, stalking, harassment, gender-based violence, trafficking, etc. The data is very alarming; every second at least 2 images or videos of children sexually abused are shared online. The impact is long-lasting and profound with severe consequences on the health, development and lives of children, including education attainments.

Most actors including governments, tech companies, professionals and parents are not prepared to respond to this new and fast-evolving crime. The lack of a robust evidence base, adequate regulations and effective coordination across borders and sectors is widespread globally and is jeopardising efforts. There is an urgent need for increased investments globally, harmonized regulations and tech industry adoption of 'safety by design' principles across business processes to prevent harm from occurring in the first place.



About the organisers

[Safe Online](#) is the only global investment vehicle dedicated to keeping children safe in the digital world - working to strengthen systems and catalyze innovative solutions to make the internet a safe place for children to explore, learn and develop. Since 2017, Safe Online has invested nearly US\$100 million in 106 projects with impact in more than 100 countries. We focus on how digital technologies and connectivity intensify existing and facilitate new forms of violence against children. We create cutting edge evidence and access to the latest models and networks, while promoting innovation and tools that are shareable and adaptable to ensure efficiencies.

[Giga](#) is a partnership between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) working to connect every school in the world to the internet and every young person to information, opportunity and choice. Connecting every school in the world to the internet is a massive challenge that requires innovation and cooperation among governments, international organizations, the telecom industry and technology providers. Since 2019, Giga has equipped governments with open-source connectivity solutions and provided technical support in mapping, modeling, financing, and contracting. By the end of 2023, Giga and its partners have mapped over 2.1 million schools in 140 countries and supported increased access to connectivity to more than 13,400 schools, benefiting approximately 6.74 million students.